



U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

NATIONAL INTEGRATED BALLISTIC INFORMATION NETWORK

Update— NIBIN Security and System Upgrades

Domain Services Upgrade

NIBIN successfully completed acceptance testing of the Domain Services upgrade in June 2014. Deployment and migration of Region 6 systems is scheduled to begin September 2, 2014. After a two-week validation period to verify functionality, the remaining systems will be migrated by region starting in October 2014 and finishing in December of 2014. Forensic Technology will notify all users with their scheduled migration date to the new Domain with a minimum of 10 days advance notice.

Important Migration Information

- ⇒The upgrade requires you to change your password the first time you log on after the migration
- ⇒The minimum password length is 14 characters

TRAX Versions 2.4 and 3.0 Upgrade

Preparations continue for the upcoming testing and deployment of these TRAX upgrades. NIBIN is expecting to conduct acceptance testing of the TRAX upgrade October 27, 2014 to November 7, 2014. The first deployments to Region 6 should begin in January 2015. NIBIN and Forensic Technology are working closely to prepare for the acceptance testing, ensuring approvals are obtained for deploying the upgrades and coordinating the deployment schedules. NIBIN is committed to keeping our users up to date on the progress of these major projects until they are completed.

Entering Confirmed and Unconfirmed Hits in IBIS

Each IBIS system allows Users to enter two types of hits: confirmed and unconfirmed hits. A hit is defined as the linkage of two different crime investigations, where previously there had been no known connection. *Hits are a linkage between cases, not individual pieces of evidence.* A confirmed hit is classified as a linkage that has been confirmed microscopically by a Firearms Examiners. An unconfirmed hit is a match that has been identified, but not yet examined and confirmed using a comparison microscope. Unconfirmed hits are also know as potential candidates for confirmation, PCC.

Unconfirmed and confirmed hits can be tracked on each MatchPoint. When an unconfirmed hit is found, mark it in the system by clicking the 'Hit' button. Until the unconfirmed hit has been confirmed by a Firearms Examiner, the confirmation date should be left blank. Once the hit has been microscopically compared and confirmed, the confirmation date is added. When a report is generated, the status of the hit (confirmed or unconfirmed) can be identified by the presence or absence of a confirmation date.

If you need further assistance on how to enter unconfirmed and confirmed hits, please refer the User's Manual loaded on the desktop of the MatchPoint.

The screenshot shows a 'Hit Maintenance' window with the following fields and controls:

- Site: dropdown menu
- Case Id: text input field
- Exhibit Number: text input field
- Comment: text input field
- Date: text input field with a dropdown arrow, circled in red
- Buttons: Create, Cancel, Help
- Footer: Modified by: and Date: fields

To enter an unconfirmed hit in IBIS, leave the date field blank.

Backlogs— The Big “What if...”

One of the recurring themes the NIBIN Branch deals with is the question of backlog. Recently, the Branch has been successful in communicating to agencies the value of a NIBIN Program that is managed according to an outcome-based approach. Two keys for that approach, and those that deal directly with the NIBIN site, are comprehensive data collection and timeliness. Making the backlog any sort of priority ahead of those two keys will doom the NIBIN effort to failure.

The biggest argument for the backlog is the, “What if...” question. “What if there is a gun in there that will solve an old homicide?” While we acknowledge that possibility, there is a bigger “What if...” that should take priority.

“What if, in your desire to solve an old homicide, you neglect current cases and another homicide occurs that could have been prevented if so much attention was not diverted to the backlog.” As important as it is to solve old homicides and bring closure to families of victims, it is arguably more important to prioritize getting shooters off the streets before they can shoot again.

When agencies embrace the potential of NIBIN and one of the immediate goals is to deal with the backlog, then it is clear that the agencies have misunderstood the purpose of NIBIN or Branch personnel did not communicate the purpose well enough. While NIBIN can be used to help solve old homicides, the purpose of NIBIN is an investigative tool used to help prevent new homicides from occurring. If we as a branch support prioritizing a backlog prior to ensuring that an agency is able to remain current, we are defeating our very own mission.

It has to be understood that while the lack of funding and staffing are part of the reason for backlogs, other factors are involved too. They include inefficient processes, inappropriate priorities, failing to embrace NIBIN as an investigative tool and, simply put, poor decision-making. If these factors are not examined and dealt with, throwing more personnel at the backlog will make an initial dent but will not prove to be sustainable long term. It is like a married couple coming in for counseling after 17 years of neglect and bad habits. They expect and want a solution in a month without recognizing

that 17 years cannot be fixed in one month. Not only that but new strategies have to be developed so that new and better habits are formed.

The key to making NIBIN a success in a particular area is by first maximizing its investigative potential. By doing this, it can be demonstrated that NIBIN is making an active difference in reducing gun violence and help to support calls for increased funding. This can only be done by addressing processes and procedures to facilitate remaining current with comprehensive data collection and timeliness.

By definition, a “backlogged” case is already too old to be of immediate investigative value. Therefore, that evidence having a higher potential for investigative value has to be prioritized because NIBIN is an investigative tool. While there is a side benefit of being useful in solving old shootings, it is a very ineffective and inefficient way to use NIBIN. Unfortunately, the reason it has failed is because traditionally that is the way it was sold and implemented by ATF.

When dealing with any issues related to the NIBIN Program, it is essential to understand the mission of the Program and measure what we do and what we pursue against that mission. Otherwise we will lose focus and the Program will fail. The mission of the NIBIN Program is to identify, target and prosecute shooters and their sources of crime guns. In other words, the focus of the NIBIN Program is to get active shooters off the streets before they can pull the trigger again, thereby reducing gun violence in a particular area. Making the existing backlog a priority while attempting to remain current in comprehensive data collection and timeliness will cause the initiative to fail.

The agency must first identify the reasons for the existing backlog of cases, modify current practices and procedures to remain current with comprehensive data collection and timeliness, and then develop a long-term strategy for the reduction of the backlog recognizing that while the backlog may help to solve old homicides, it will very rarely be of immediate investigative value to remove current shooters off the streets. The latter has to be the priority, not the former.

Call for Articles

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