

# 40th PARLIAMENT, 3rd SESSION

## Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

### EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, May 4, 2010**

**Deputy Commissioner William Sweeney (Senior Deputy Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to you and to all the members of the committee.

As the senior deputy commissioner representing the commissioner and all of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to assist with the committee's examination of Bill C-391.

With me today I have Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak, the director general of the Canadian firearms program. He has brought along with him some select members of his staff.

During the course of your hearings you will hear from many witnesses who will present their perspectives on Bill C-391. We respect and appreciate the fact that all who appear before you today and in your coming hearings share a genuine and common interest in safe and secure communities, but there will be differences of opinion respecting how we can achieve this end state.

I hope that our presentation will provide you with factual information on the realities of modern policing and how police officers utilize the elements of the Canadian firearms program, including the long-gun registry, as they go about their day-to-day business of serving the Canadian public.

I would like to leave the committee with the following: the RCMP considers that the registration of all firearms enables individual accountability, promotes safety and life-saving measures, and is a proactive investigative tool in assisting law enforcement.

I will now turn this over to Chief Superintendent Cheliak to speak to the program.

**Chief Superintendent Marty Cheliak (Director General, Canadian Firearms Program, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):**

Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone.

Good day, Mr. Chairman, and to all the committee members.

As a police officer with over 30 years of operational experience, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you and to assist with the committee's examination of Bill C-391.

The Canadian Firearms Centre was created in 1995 by the Government of Canada to oversee and administer the Firearms Act. Since its transfer to the RCMP in 2006, the centre has enhanced its efforts on support to domestic police law enforcement agencies and international organizations by providing information and expertise related to firearms, firearms registration, and the licensing of individuals and businesses under the Firearms Act.

In June 2008, the Canada Firearms Centre and the RCMP's firearms support services directorate were brought together to form an integrated organization called the Canadian firearms program. Today, aligned with the Government of Canada and the RCMP's commitment to safe homes and safe communities, the Canadian firearms program's mandate is to enhance public safety by providing law enforcement with vital operational and technical support. The information and expertise provided by the Canadian firearms program is vital to the prevention and investigation of crimes related to firearms. The program also helps to reduce firearms-related death and injury in Canadian communities by enabling and promoting responsible firearms ownership, use, and storage.

The firearms licensing and registration system has now been in place for over 12 years and is meeting the CFP service delivery standards according to the departmental performance report.

No legislation or regulation will ever prevent all crimes; however, the Canadian firearms program does serve a very real purpose and contributes to police officer safety and the safety of all Canadians. The CFP, as a whole, delivers on numerous public safety fronts that are intended to serve as a basis for risk reduction. For example, the program delivered firearms safety training to about 90,000 Canadians in 2008 alone. The program conducted outreach initiatives and promoted safe storage of firearms, which can help reduce heat-of-the-moment crimes, firearms accidents, particularly involving children, as well as suicide by firearms. The program conducts screening of all new licence applicants. This includes a mandatory 28-day period to ensure individuals applying for a licence do not pose a risk to public safety. In addition, all licence owners are subject to automated continuous eligibility checks.

A "firearms interest to police" report, or FIP, generated anywhere in Canada regarding a licensed individual will automatically be flagged to the chief firearms officer of provincial jurisdiction for appropriate follow-up. This is how the program operates on a national basis to ensure high-risk individuals don't slip through the gaps between provinces. In 2009, approximately 7,000 registration certificates were revoked for public safety concerns.

Registration of firearms allows police to verify numbers and types of firearms subject to seizure. There are common misconceptions that criminals don't register their firearms and that firearms destined for criminal activity would not appear in the registry. In actuality, many firearms recovered by police at crime scenes turn out to be registered and the CFP has assisted in solving a number of crimes by tracing a firearm to a registered owner. In 2009, of the 4,000-plus crime-related firearms traced to an owner by the Canadian firearms program, approximately 1,600 were registered non-restricted firearms, 1,100 were prohibited, and 881 were restricted.

Registration of firearms also provides an accountability mechanism linking responsibility for a firearm to an individual. It encourages owners to safely store firearms, to report lost or stolen firearms, and it discourages illegal sales and transfers of firearms.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, allow me to speak to the value of the CFP to the public and police officer safety and to the prevention of crime.

Without the database of registered long guns, the door may be open to unlimited and unmonitored stockpiling of long guns for individuals and groups. The program continuously monitors firearms registration records for unusual or unexplained accumulations. Pattern recognition software allows for the identification of anomalies or specific situations that should be flagged for chief firearms officers in the provinces and inspected. An example would be if the same individual acquires 10 or more firearms within a 30-day period.

Through the Canadian firearms registry online, CFRO, the Canadian firearms program provides safety information that acts as a tool for risk reduction. This national database is available in real time, assisting investigators in tracing seized and recovered firearms by linking them to registered owners. It is queried, on average, 11,000 times per day by front-line police officers, as an individual tactical decision on their part. An example that clearly illustrates this comes to mind. In one case, family members requested that police remove all of the firearms from their home due to their father's depressed state. A Canadian firearms registry online query by local police indicated that there were 21 additional long guns in the home that the other family members knew nothing about. A warrant was obtained and all firearms were removed by police, preventing a potential firearms tragedy. Without the registry, there would not have been any knowledge of the additional 21 firearms.

The CFRO also enables law enforcement to provide investigational assistance at the municipal, provincial, national, and international levels. In the case of court-ordered prohibition or the execution of search warrants, law enforcement relies on pertinent information provided by the Canadian firearms program to determine what firearms owners have in their possession. Without the database, tracing firearms, both nationally and internationally, would be very difficult and very expensive. Guns connected to criminal activities would be almost untraceable as law enforcement would not have a place to commence an investigation. This current real-time database allows Canadian law enforcement agencies to trace firearms nationally within a matter of minutes. Canada is, at present, able to offer reciprocity in tracing to police partners in the United States of America and other countries as a part of its contribution to global public safety.

In conclusion, the Canadian firearms program, inclusive of the registry, provides useful information to law enforcement agencies, nationally and internationally, making it a global asset in contributing to public and police officer safety.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=4497859&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=3#Int-3140301>