

ALL ILLEGAL GUNS BEGIN AS LEGAL GUNS

Opponents of gun control keep saying “punish the criminals”, leave the law abiding gun owners alone. But where do criminals get their guns? Although half of the handguns recovered in crime are smuggled in from the USA, the other half originate from Canadian gun owners. Legal guns are misused by their owners and used in domestic homicide, suicide and accidents. We have seen a number of high profile shootings – including Toronto’s 2005 Boxing Day shooting – where the guns have been stolen from so called law abiding gun owners. And handguns are not the only threat – half the police officers killed in recent years have been killed with rifles and shotguns not handguns.

There are three major sources of guns used for criminal purposes:

1. Legal guns misused by their owners - most often the case with domestic homicide, suicide and accidents.

- In January 2010, Stephanie Hoddinott was shot and killed by her former boyfriend with a legally owned handgun. The man later turning the gun on himself.¹
- Joan Hanson, her daughter Jolene and her nine-year-old granddaughter Misty were shot by her estranged husband who then turned the gun on himself with a rifle at her rural home in northern Alberta in July 2009. Financial pressure is believed to have been a motive.²
- In July 2008, a Regina mechanic discovered a legal handgun and 72 rounds of ammunition in the console of a car.³
- A legal handgun owner upset at a bar’s bouncer shot an innocent bystander, John O’Keefe, as he was walking home on Yonge St. in January 2008.⁴
- In 2008, a teenager in Whitby, (ON) contacted police as her distraught stepfather had locked himself in a closet with a rifle and was threatening to commit suicide. Police found 26 firearms inside the house, all of them legally registered.⁵
- A 21 years-old Lewisporte, (NF) man killed his step-mother with his father’s improperly stored shotgun.⁶
- The shooter at Dawson College was a legal gun owner and member of a gun club.⁷
- A man shot his wife before killing himself with a legal shotgun returned to him at the end of a two-year weapon prohibition for domestic assault in 2006, in Hermitage, Newfoundland.⁸
- In 2004, a Toronto Police Officer was shot with a shotgun by a man - the father of a Toronto police officer - who despite a history of depression had access to a legal shotgun.⁹
- A northern Alberta man was convicted of manslaughter for killing his common-law wife, Judy Dickie, by shooting her in the face in 2004. At the trial, the man claimed that he was checking his sawed-off .22 calibre rifle to make sure it was not loaded when it accidentally fired, killing Dickie. The couple had a history of domestic violence, and the man had previously been convicted of assaulting his spouse.¹⁰
- Pauline Mattis, of Toronto, was shot in the face by her husband who then turned the gun on himself. He had access to legal guns in spite of an extensive criminal record.¹¹

2. Legal guns which are diverted to the illegal markets through theft or illegal sale: there is no virtual ban on handguns. There are 500,000 legally owned handguns in Canada.

Legally owned guns are often improperly stored and stolen or sold illegally. Every year, as many as 3,000 firearms are reported stolen in Canada and in the hands of criminals. According to the police, about half the guns used in crime in Toronto are guns at one time legally owned in Canada, many of them stolen in breaks-in.¹² Some examples:

- A handgun stolen to a Canadian owner was linked to four attempted murders including the shooting of a TTC driver that left the man blind and the murder of a 24-year-old youth worker in 2003.¹³
- In 2009, one of 57 guns stolen from a Calgary sporting goods store over the space of 7 months was recovered by police in Toronto.¹⁴
- A North Vancouver man traded a shotgun for a BMW with his suicidal friend and showed him how to use it. His friend later used that gun to commit suicide.¹⁵
- A man found guilty in a triple murder stole a rifle from a nearby farm in July 2007 and killed Bill and Helene Regier at their Mount Carmel's, Ontario, farmhouse.¹⁶
- The gun recovered in the 2005 Boxing Day shooting which killed 15-years old Jane Creba was a handgun stolen to its Canadian owner.
- In 2005 the Toronto Police discovered that it was easy to buy guns over the Internet. The investigation led them to arrest four people who face a total of 276 charges and to seize many firearms.¹⁷
- Between June 20 and August 3, 2005, burglars made off with 84 firearms from Toronto-area homes. More than half, including 43 pistols stolen from Cobourg area, were handguns. One of these was used in a murder in Toronto in 2006.
- In 2005, a Toronto lawyer had 14 handguns stolen from his office⁶ at least one has turned up in crime.¹⁸
- Louise Russo, a mother of three, was shot in April 2004 with a stolen high-power rifle after walking into a Toronto sandwich shop.

3. Smuggled guns originating from the US, typically acquired through theft, straw purchases, or gun shows

- These guns account for as many as 60% of the handguns recovered in crime in Canada.
- In 2008, the Canada Border Services Agency seized 488 firearms at the border including 155 long guns and 328 handguns. This is the only the tip of the iceberg.¹⁹
- The United States has 280 million people with approximately 230 million guns (one third of them are handguns) and very few controls. Every year, 500,000 of these guns are stolen, thus entering into the illegal market.
- Of the 327 handguns recovered in crime by the Toronto Police Service in 2006, 181 were traceable to their original point of sale, and of those, 120 (two thirds) were traced to the United States. In their recent study, Cook et al concluded that the US was a significant source of crime guns.²⁰ A recent study also reported that in 2007, the Tactical Analysis Unit (TAU) reported 5,616 seized firearms; 51% of them were crime guns. Of the 710 crime guns of known source, 324 were domestic and 386 were smuggled. The Ontario Firearms Tracing and Enforcement Program traced 705 crime guns in 2007, 490 (69%) were traced back to the United States and 10.5% were traced to a Canadian source.²¹

Some examples:

- Canada Post's international mail center in Vancouver intercepted 330 guns and gun parts including machine guns, prohibited handguns, replicas and silencers between April 2007 and March 2008.²²
- An Ontario resident told investigators he was paid \$2,000 to smuggle 5 pistols into Canada from Wisconsin. Guns were hidden inside a secret compartment in the gas tank.²³
- In 2007, a minimum of 32 guns were purchased at gun shows where the transactions were not recorded by two American gun runners. Loaded weapons were mailed to Canada in exchange for marijuana.²⁴
- Toronto's 2007 Project Rebel lead to the recovery of a gun with a two-day time to crime. The traces of the firearm led to 10 arrests in Canada and two alleged masterminds in Miami.²⁵

- 45 handguns and revolvers were seized at the border Crossing in Lacolle, Que from a transport truck.²⁶
- A Chicago gunrunner smuggled more than 200 firearms into Canada in 2006 and sold them to a Toronto organised crime ring.²⁷
- The gun used to kill Diana Sandeman in July 2006 as she and her boyfriend were leaving an Etobicoke sportsbar was later traced to Gainesville, Georgia.²⁸
- In 2006, five people linked to Royal Sportsman and Merrica Trading Co were charged with trafficking in firearms and related offences when it was uncovered that the British Columbia Company with a contract to import guns for the movies allegedly sold the weapons to criminal gangs. The B.C. Integrated Gang Task Force seized 505 weapons. 1,255 handguns and 658 additional guns are reported missing and allegedly been sold to gangsters across the country. The type of import license the store held allowed it to legally import guns normally considered illegal in Canada.²⁹
- The gun used to kill a Windsor Police officer in May 2006 was smuggled in from the US.³⁰
- A Winnipeg man attending university in the U.S. was charged after recruited two American classmates to buy guns from stores in the area and smuggle the into Canada in exchange for tablets of ecstasy in 2004. 22 guns in total were smuggled into Winnipeg.³¹

¹ Alliston Herald, "Killer had legal permit to own handgun". January 21, 2010

² CBC, "Alberta man shot himself after killing 3 relatives," July 30, 2009

³ "Police search turns up AK-47" Regina Leader-Post, July 31, 2008.

⁴ CFRB Newstalk, "O'Keefe shot dead with legal handgun", January 14, 2008

⁵ "Guns removed from residence after police stand-off," News Durham Region, Feb 19, 2008.

⁶ CBC News. "Lewisport man fined for improperly storing firearm that killed wife". March 26, 2007.

⁷ CBC News, "Victims of Dawson College "Madman" want tougher gun laws." November 28, 2006.

⁸ CBC News. "Hermitage deaths murder-suicide, police say." August 9, 2006

⁹ Cortoneo, Christina and Porter, Catherine "Officer hit, gunman killed" Toronto Star, January 11, 2004.

¹⁰ Edmonton Journal. "Alberta man gets five years for shooting wife dead". July 16, 2009

¹¹ Huffman, Tracy, "Man died after attempted murder-suicide", Toronto Star, November 27, 2003.

¹² Jenkins, Jonathan, Lamberti, Rob, "50 hot guns hit street", Toronto Sun, September 13, 2005.

¹³ "Lethal Weapon: Police Trace A Single Gun Through Five Serious Crimes" City News, January 29, 2008.

¹⁴ CBC News, June 26 2009, "Gun stolen from Calgary sports store seized in Toronto"

¹⁵ Kelowna.com, "Vancouver man guilty of aiding suicide after trading gun for BMW". December 9, 2009.

¹⁶ London Free Press. "Elderly Farm Couple Slain". July 24, 2007.

¹⁷ Huffman, Tracy, "Buying Guns On Internet Too Easy", Toronto Star, November 10, 2005.

¹⁸ Kohler, Nicholas, "Cache Of Guns Stolen From Lawyer's Office", National Post, October 4, 2005, p. A13

¹⁹ RCMP. "Commissioner of Firearms, 2008 Report," 2009.

²⁰ Cook, Phillip. Cukier, Wendy. Krause, Keith. "The Illicit Firearms Trade in North America". 2009.

²¹ Heemskerk, Tony and Eric Davies (2008) 'A Report on the Illegal Movement of Firearms in British Columbia', November.

²² Canwest News Service, "Border Agents Seized Guns From Mail," Vancouver Province, 13 March 2008.

²³ Associated Press, "Police say suspected gun smuggler captured in Michigan on way to Canada," Canadadeast.com, October 10 2008.

²⁴ Bolan, Kim, "Loaded guns mailed to B.C.," Vancouver Sun, 20 January 2007.

²⁵ Peat, Don, "Tracing 'time to crime' guns Weapon bought in the United States used in Ontario crime just two days later," Toronto Sun, 16 March 2008

²⁶ Harris, Kathleen, "Border Guns for Tourists," Ottawa Sun, 18 May 2008.

²⁷ National Post. "Gunrunner faces 10 years for Toronto 'havoc'". July 22, 2009.

²⁸ CTV.ca "Gun found in Etobicoke shooting traced to U.S." July 11, 2006.

²⁹ Matas, Robert, "Businesses selling guns to gangs, police say," Globe and Mail, 11 December 2006.

³⁰ The Officer Down Memorial Page. Senior Constable John Atkinson. <http://www.odmp.org/canada/officer/778-senior-constable-john-atkinson>

³¹ Winnipeg man guilty in gun pipeline". Winnipeg Free Press. July 15, 2009.