

ALL ILLEGAL GUNS BEGIN AS LEGAL GUNS

Opponents of gun control keep saying that we should “punish the criminals”, and leave law abiding gun owners alone. But where do criminals get their guns? Although half of the handguns recovered in crime are smuggled into the country from the U.S., the other half originate from Canadian gun owners. Legal guns are misused by their owners, and used in domestic homicide, suicides, and accidents. We have seen a number of high profile shootings – including Toronto’s 2005 Boxing Day shooting – where the guns used have been stolen from so called law abiding gun owners. Further, handguns are not the only threat – the majority of 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 – as is most often the case with domestic homicide, suicide and accidents.

- In Alberta in December 2011, two men and a woman were shot to death, and another woman seriously wounded, reportedly by the one of the victims’ estranged boyfriend, who then shot himself with a legally registered gun he used for sport shooting.¹
- A five-year-old boy in Manitoba accidentally shot his four-year-old sister, after finding his parents’ firearm, which did not have trigger locks and was normally stored in an unlocked closet.²
- In January 2010, Stephanie Hoddinott was shot and killed by her former boyfriend with a legally owned handgun. The man later turned the gun on himself.³
- Joan Hanson, her daughter Jolene, and her nine-year-old granddaughter Misty were shot with a rifle by her estranged husband - who later turned the gun on himself - at her rural home in northern Alberta in July 2009. Financial pressure is believed to have been a motive.⁴
- A legal handgun owner upset at a bar’s bouncer shot an innocent bystander, John O’Keefe, as he was walking home on Toronto’s Yonge St. in January 2008.⁵
- In 2008, a teenager in Whitby, Ontario, 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.⁶
- A 21 year-old Lewisport, Newfoundland, man killed his step-mother with his father’s improperly stored shotgun.⁷
- Anastasia de Sousa was shot at Montreal’s Dawson College by a legal gun owner and member of a gun club.⁸
- 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.⁹
- In 2004, a Toronto Police Officer was shot with a shotgun by a man – the father of another Toronto police officer – who, despite a history of depression, had access to a legal shotgun.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- 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.¹²

2. Legal guns which are diverted to illegal markets through theft or illegal sale. 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, by definition ending up in the hands of criminals. According to the police, about half the guns used in crime in Toronto are guns that were at one time legally owned, many of them stolen in breaks-in.¹³ Some examples:

- In January 2012, the gun registry helped the Greater Sudbury Police pinpoint a gun that had been in the hands of a distraught man who was driving in the Levack area with his firearm. He was arrested later in relation to the incident, but the gun wasn't immediately found. It was only after checking the gun registry that officers were able to determine what they were looking for.¹⁴

- In March 2011, a licenced gun dealer from Sainte-Béatrix, Quebec was criminally charged for illegally selling 63 guns – including long-guns – to Montreal street gangs. Police began their investigation after three guns that previously belonged to this individual were used in gang crimes¹⁵
- A Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario man was charged with careless storage of a firearm after two guns were stolen from his residence during a break-in. The guns had been improperly stored and were missing trigger locks.¹⁶
- In December 2010, Sarnia Police apprehend a man suspected in the theft of three guns after an individual tried to register them.¹⁷
- In June 2010, a current and a former employee of a Calgary shooting range were charged with trafficking guns after police recovered 16 firearms. Six weeks prior to the arrest, the shooting range reported to police that two firearms were missing.¹⁸
- In Toronto, an Uzi sub-machine gun, 50 handguns and two shotguns were stolen from safes in the apartment of a gun collector in February 2010.¹⁹
- 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.²⁰
- 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.²¹
- In February 2008, an individual carrying an AK47 held staff at gun point and took 15 handguns from Italian Sporting Goods in British Columbia.²²
- 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, Ontario farmhouse.²³
- In 2005, 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.²⁴
- 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 office, at least one of which has since turned up in a crime.²⁵
- The recovery of a semi-automatic handgun used in a gang-related shooting in Regina led to an investigation of a Burnaby, British Columbia firearms dealer, with 539 firearms being seized and records indicating a further 1913 were unaccounted for, of which 1255 were handguns. Of those seized, 136 were legally imported CZ semi-automatic pistols, whose serial numbers had been removed in a way indicating a high degree of technical skill.²⁶
- Louise Russo, a mother of three, is now disabled after having been shot in April 2004 with a stolen high-power rifle after walking into a Toronto sandwich shop.
- A handgun stolen from a Canadian owner was linked to four attempted murders, including the shooting of a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) driver that left the man blind and the murder of a 24-year-old youth worker in 2003.²⁷

3. Smuggled guns originating from the US, typically acquired through theft, straw purchases,²⁸ or gun shows²⁹

- 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 only the tip of the iceberg.³⁰
- 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. The study concluded that the US was a significant source of crime guns.³¹ 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%) of which were traced back to the United States, and 10.5% were traced to a Canadian source.³²
- The United States has nearly 313 million people, approximately 270 million guns³³ (one-third of them handguns), and very few controls. Every year, about half a million of these guns are stolen, thus entering into the illegal market, and the Canadian black market as well, as either Americans or Canadians bring them across the border.

- Some examples of how this all ends up in street crime include:
 - An Ontario man received a 10-year firearms prohibition after attempting to sell 18 identical newly imported, legally registered firearms on the Internet, with the Canadian Firearms Registry Online used to locate the man. The investigation also led to the seizure of a shipment of 30 more firearms to this individual.³⁴
 - Two residents of Ontario and B.C. were each charged with illegally importing hundreds of American guns in exchange for drugs. A New Brunswick man bought over 60 guns from Maine with local help, smuggled them into Canada, and sold them to criminals; some turned up in violent crimes.³⁵
 - A joint US/Ontario law enforcement project in 2006 identified 85 handguns as having been purchased in Kentucky and Ohio for importation into Canada to be distributed to criminals, with a large portion of them already figuring into violent crimes in Ontario, including a jewelry store robbery in London where shots were fired at police.³⁶
 - 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 2008.³⁷
 - 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 of a vehicle.³⁸
 - In 2007, two American gun runners purchased a minimum of 32 guns at gun shows, where the transactions were not recorded. Loaded weapons were mailed to Canada in exchange for marijuana.³⁹
 - Toronto's 2007 Project Rebel led 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 to the identification of two alleged masterminds in Miami.⁴⁰
 - 45 handguns and revolvers were seized at the border crossing in Lacolle, Quebec from a transport truck.⁴¹
 - A Chicago gunrunner smuggled more than 200 firearms into Canada in 2006, and sold them to a Toronto organised crime ring.⁴²
 - The gun used to kill Diana Sandeman in July 2006 as she and her boyfriend were leaving an Etobicoke sports bar was later traced to Gainesville, Georgia.⁴³
 - 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 use in movie productions 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 firearms normally considered illegal in Canada.⁴⁴
 - The gun used to kill a Windsor Police officer in May 2006 was smuggled in from the US.
 - A Winnipeg man attending university in the U.S. was charged after recruiting two American classmates to buy guns from stores in the area and smuggle them into Canada in exchange for tablets of ecstasy in 2004. 22 guns in total were smuggled into Winnipeg.⁴⁵

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³ Alliston Herald, "Killer had legal permit to own handgun". January 21, 2010

⁴ CBC, "Alberta man shot himself after killing 3 relatives," July 30, 2009

⁵ CFRB Newstalk, "O'Keefe shot dead with legal handgun", January 14, 2008

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