

## Licensing all gun owners, registering all firearms

Licensing all firearm owners and registering all firearms are important measures to keep Canada safe. As of September 2010, there were 1.8 million licensed firearm owners and 6.87 million firearms registered as “non-restricted firearms”<sup>1</sup> in Canada, including rifles and shotguns, as well as powerful semi-automatics such as the Ruger Mini 14 used to kill 14 at the Montreal Massacre and sniper rifles. Non-restricted firearms account for 90% of all registered firearms.

The current legislation requires that:

- 1- Gun owners obtain a renewable license. Steps involved in doing so include: screening for risk factors, the acquisition of references, and spousal notification. Licensing firearm owners is critical in order to reduce the chances guns will be obtained by those who are a threat to themselves and others.
- 2- Gun owners currently register all firearms to their name. This one-time only procedure consists of a simple form that individuals are required to fill out when purchasing or transferring firearms. Most of the time, registration is processed electronically by the merchant. Fees associated with this procedure have been waived.
- 3- Firearms must be safely stored.

### Facts: Gun Control Works

- Most firearm-related deaths in Canada are caused by rifles or shotguns, which are classified as “non-restricted firearms”. All guns are lethal, and any gun in the wrong hands is dangerous; we need controls on ALL guns.
- Gun control works: firearm death and injury have declined with stronger laws.
- While there are more guns in rural areas and the west, as well as more opposition to gun control, there are also higher rates of firearms death and injury, often involving rifles and shotguns.
- Police, public safety, and crime prevention groups, as well as women’s organizations, and others support the existing law, and maintain that it contributes to public safety.
- Police from coast to coast access the firearms registry over 14,000 times per day, both during investigations and in order to take preventative action.<sup>2</sup>
- Building Canada’s licensing and registration system was more expensive than expected, but an independent cost-benefit analysis of Conservative legislation to kill the federal long-gun registry obtained through Freedom of Information Request “*has found the public savings could amount to just over \$1.5-million annually*”<sup>3</sup>. The cost of the long gun registry is far less than the cost of firearms-related death (\$400 million). It is an investment rather than expenditure, it is crucial for police, and reduces the number of firearms related deaths,
- On August 31, 2010 the RCMP released its evaluation of the Canadian Firearms Program. The report clarifies that the registry is effective, efficient, cost-efficient and most importantly, it saves lives.

Since 2006, the Conservative government has vowed to end the requirement to register “non-restricted” firearms, and have proposed several Bills to that effect (Government Bills C-21, C-24, S-5, Private Member’s Bills C-301 and C-391). Public safety experts have opposed these bills. In May 2010, numerous experts testified in favour of maintaining the long-gun registry, amongst these were the RCMP, the Canadian Association of Police Boards, Canadian Police Association, Canadian Association of Chief of Police, the Attorney General of Ontario and Quebec, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, Canadian Paediatric Society, the Institut National de Santé du Québec - which undertook a specific study on the impact of Canada’s gun control law that estimates 2,100 lives were saved since the implementation of the Firearms Act, the Canadian Labour Congress-, PSAC, the YWCA of Canada, the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, victims, the Coalition for Gun Control and others. As well, the Auditor General of Canada reported the findings of the last audit on the program, which stated that annual costs had decreased significantly, and that there have been large improvements within the system.

In June 2000, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that gun control was under Federal legislative authority, and emphasized the importance of registering all firearms<sup>4</sup>: They concluded that:

*“The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. (...) These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament’s goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.”*

## Why license all gun owners and register all firearms?

Rifles and shotguns are often recovered in crime, and are the firearms most often used in domestic violence, in suicide and in the murders of police officers, particularly in rural areas.

- 1- **Screening and licensing firearm owners reduces the risks that dangerous people will have access to weapons, and registration is essential to enforcing licensing.** The licensing system reduces the chances that those who are a threat to themselves or others will get access to firearms.
- 2- **Registering all firearms assists police in removing guns from dangerous people, and in enforcing prohibition orders.** For example, the registry allowed Montreal Police to remove firearms from a potential copycat shortly after the Dawson College shooting.<sup>5</sup>
- 3- **Firearm registration promotes accountability.** The registration of automobiles encourages drivers to conduct themselves responsibly, and allows police to enforce the law and crack down on car theft. The same principles apply to firearms. With information now available concerning which guns are owned by whom, existing safe storage regulations are easier to enforce.

Too often, guns from Canadian gun owners end up in the wrong hands. While there are currently safe storage requirements defined by law, many gun owners do not store their guns in accordance with the law. There are many examples:

- RCMP officer Constable Stronquill was shot and killed in Manitoba with a rifle stolen from a car in Alberta.
- A stolen gun was involved in the Boxing Day shooting in Toronto which killed 15 year old Jane Creba and injured 7 others.
- Melissa Pajkowski was killed by her former boyfriend who stole a gun from his parent's extensive gun collection. He had a history of depression and suicide attempts.
- Fourteen year old Jasmine Vanscoy of St. Catharines was killed by an acquaintance who stole a handgun from his father. The gun had been stolen in a break in near Toronto.

When guns are traced back to their original owners, it is essential that police determine the circumstances which led their misuse, and lay charges where appropriate. Owning firearms is a huge responsibility, and failure to comply with the law puts communities at risk.

- 4- **The gun registry enables police to trace guns back to their original owners.** The registry is therefore a useful tool for assisting in police investigations. It allows police to prove legal ownership of firearms, and provides valuable information for prosecuting gun theft and illegal possession charges. Two men were identified and convicted as accessories to the murder of 4 RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, in part because a registered gun was left at the scene of the crime.
- 5- **Canada's gun control law helps curb the illegal gun trade** by ensuring that firearms are sold only to licensed individuals. Most illegal firearms begin as legal firearms, and registration helps prevent diversion from legal to illegal markets. Under the old system, an individual could buy an unlimited number of rifles and shotguns over a five-year period, with little accountability. By ensuring that all firearms can be traced back to their original owner, the registration and licensing system will help reduce the number of legal firearms being diverted to the illegal market.

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<sup>1</sup> RCMP. Canadian Firearms Program. "Facts and Figures (July - September 2010)" <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Galloway, "Cost of long-gun registry a fraction of what Tories claim, report shows," The Globe and Mail, November 21, 2010, available on-line at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cost-of-long-gun-registry-a-fraction-of-what-tories-claim-report-shows/article1807833/>

<sup>4</sup> Reference re *Firearms Act* (Can.), [2000] 1 S.C.R. 783

<sup>5</sup> Yvan Delorme, Chief of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM), "The SPVM supports the Coalition for Gun Control and is in favour of maintaining the Canadian Firearms Registry, Director's Message," 3 November 2009, available on-line at: [http://www.spvm.qc.ca/en/profil/4\\_3\\_6\\_mot-directeur.asp](http://www.spvm.qc.ca/en/profil/4_3_6_mot-directeur.asp)