

NRP chief supports gun registry

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Ask Wendy Southall about Canada's controversial long-gun registry, and the Niagara Regional Police chief will reply with a single figure: 12,000. That is the number of times officers from coast to coast check the registry for information.

"If an officer is going to a call for a domestic dispute, they are going to want to know if there is a firearm on the premises," Southall said Friday. "It's a matter of public safety and the safety of our officers."

The Conservative government in Ottawa is moving to abolish the long-gun registry. St. Catharines MP Rick Dykstra said there are many problems with the registry, including skyrocketing cost overruns up to a \$1 billion and that it contains inaccurate and incomplete information.

"It just doesn't work," Dykstra said, noting that criminals who use guns aren't about to register them with the government. "Let's be clear. Gun owners will still have to have a licence and follow the proper storage and safe-use regulations. But the registry has to go."

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has pledged to fight the government's proposed bill to scrap the registry. He has suggested changes to the system to make it less expensive and easier on gun owners. He has also said he will whip his party's vote when the bill comes before the House to prevent dissenting Liberals from siding with the government on the issue.

Southall, who is part of a Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police committee examining the issue, said police want to see the registry remain in place.

She said 40% of the guns traced by police during investigations are identified through the registry.

There are many situations, she said, in which police in Canada respond to a call where someone has a gun that is properly licensed and stored that could nonetheless present a threat to the public or police.

Southall said if there are administrative issues with the registry, politicians in Ottawa need to fix them. But doing away with the registry entirely is not something she wants to see.

The chiefs' association is expected to release a full policy statement on the long-gun registry in the summer before the issue comes to a vote in the House of Commons.