

Firearms registry defended following gun seizure

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Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair used the seizure of a huge haul of restricted weapons to speak in defence of the beleaguered federal gun registry. "We believe that the gun registry provides police services across this country with the information they need, first of all to help us keep communities safe, and also to keep police officers safe," he told a Wednesday news conference. On Tuesday, officers from the Guns and Gangs Task force went to a home where it was believed a person had 25 firearms registered under the former Restricted Weapons Registry System. The officers instead found 58 firearms and 6,000 rounds of ammunition, including: one machine gun, one submachine gun, 17 handguns, 35 rifles, four shotguns. The earlier registration system, replaced in 1998 by the Canadian Firearms Information System, "provided our investigators with information on where these firearms were likely to be held," Blair said at a Wednesday news conference. The owner of those weapons is currently unlicensed to possess any firearms. "In order to be a legal gun owner, you must possess a valid license, and your weapons must be properly registered. You also have a legal responsibility to ensure that they are stored safely, securely against theft, and that they are used only in a safe and responsible manner," Blair said. The chief then noted that a private member's bill, Bill C-391, is "intended to gut the gun registry, and to make it impossible for law enforcement officials to have access to the information, the same type of information, that enabled us to seize these weapons -- and frankly, make our cities safer." Blair said the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, of which he is currently president, said it supports the registry. It helps keep communities safe, along with the police officers who work in them, he said. "I think (the registry's) value is before you today," he said, referring to the seized weapons put on display.