

Translation of the Canadian Press article by Stephanie Marin “**L’Institut de santé publique du Québec défend le registre des armes à feu**” published in Métro Montréal, May 26, 2010

It is the turn of the National Public Health Institute of Quebec to rally to the defense of the firearms’ registry. According to a recently completed study, there have been three hundred fewer deaths per year since the introduction of legislation that created the registry ten years ago.

Since the Conservative government has been focusing on crime in assessing the registry, the Institute felt it was better to shift the perspective of the debate to public health instead.

As a result of the report, two members of the institute, Dr. Pierre Maurice, expert on security and trauma prevention, and Etienne Blais, a criminologist specializing in firearm injury prevention, both wanted to be heard this Wednesday at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. This committee is reviewing a Conservative bill that seeks to abolish the long gun registry.

According to their study, since the Firearms Act came into force in 1998, we have witnessed an average decrease of 250 suicides and 50 homicides by firearms in Canada each year.

According to the researchers, no substitution effect has been observed, that is to say, there have not been more suicides and homicides committed by other means. "It is more difficult to cut your veins than using a firearm", said Etienne Blais.

The researchers evaluated the effect of the statute as a whole and not only the effectiveness of the registry.

"It's as if a Canadian company came up with a drug to save 300 lives a year. It's composed of 2 ingredients: licensing and registration. It seems risky to change the composition of this drug by removing one of its important components", explained Maurice.

Responding to the Conservatives oft repeated argument about the exorbitant costs of maintaining the registry, Dr. Maurice said that over 400 million dollars have been saved annually in connection with the reduction in deaths.

According to the doctor, access to firearms is a risk factor for suicides and homicides. He also went on to clarify that it is personal issues, marital and mental disorders that are responsible for these deaths, not criminal acts.

"Approximately 75% of deaths involving firearms are suicides", added Etienne Blais.

"With the registry, police can identify people who may use firearms against themselves and against members of their households", he said, adding that the registry allows for continual verification even after the obtaining of a possession permit.

These verifications will also reveal if the person who purchases a firearm has been convicted of a crime since the acquisition of a permit, or if there's been a marital separation or loss of employment. He also stated that it's the registry, not the system of licensing, that lets you know if someone has purchased more than ten guns in one month.

Opposition members participating on the committee and in favor of maintaining the registry seemed to rejoice in the presence of their allies who provided proof that they are calling "scientific".

For the Conservatives, who want the abolition of the registry, one of their main arguments has been the lack of evidence that the registry has saved even one life.

On Wednesday, Candice Hoepfner, the Conservative MP who introduced the private member's bill to abolish the registry of shotguns and rifles, refused to comment because she was not present at the hearing when the study was presented. She promised to do so later.

A debate between police also broke out on the committee.

To counter the opposition parties who support the country's majority of police chiefs and many police associations, the Conservatives want to show that support for the registry is not as broad as it appears.

Murray Grismer, a police officer from Saskatchewan testifying as an individual and supported by Conservative MP Shelly Glover, said that many police officers have been gagged by their superiors and don't dare to express aloud their opposition to the registry for fear of reprisals.

Toronto Police Chief, William Blair, president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, has categorically denied having imposed a gag order on his officers.

One Liberal MP noted in passing that Murray Grismer has also acted as a spokesman in ads for the NRA, the National Rifle Association, a U.S. lobbying group in support of firearm owners.