

# 92 handguns collected in city since fall

## Firearm inventories offer police tool in war on weapons trafficking

By Ian MacLeod, The Ottawa Citizen  
May 29, 2009 6:40 AM

OTTAWA—About 100 illegal handguns have been confiscated by Ottawa police over the past six months, part of a national haul of 8,200 firearms seized since just last fall.

What's more, 43-per-cent of the weapons seized nationally were entered in the Canadian Firearms Registry, which the federal government is once again attempting to kill.

Yet without the registry, about 3,560 of the seized guns would have been more difficult, if not impossible, to locate and confiscate, federal Registrar of Firearms Jeffrey Brandt suggested in an interview Thursday.

"Police knew about the whereabouts of those firearms because of the registry," he said.

The numbers are the first time national gun-seizure statistics have been compiled in Canada and police are wasting no time analysing the data.

Officers from the RCMP's Firearms Investigative and Enforcement Services Directorate, including its tactical analysis unit, convened Thursday in Ottawa to begin the process of mining the information for trends, patterns and investigative leads to shut down firearms traffickers and solve outstanding gun crimes.

Here's some of what they know so far:

- A total of 8,281 guns have been seized or otherwise surrendered to police across the country since November.
- 6,146 were non-restricted firearms, mostly shotguns and rifles. They were typically confiscated because the owner threatened another person, was deemed to be a public safety threat, violent or a court prohibited them from possession a weapon.
- 1,340 were restricted weapons, mostly handguns.
- 795 were prohibited firearms, such as full automatics and short-barrelled handguns such as the little Saturday Night Special, easily hidden in a pocket.

Ottawa police, meanwhile, confiscated 92 handguns.

The most-wanted pistol in the city remains the one fired in the unsolved May 7 ByWard Market bar slaying of Mohamed Jama Ali, a 26-year-old member of the Ottawa street gang Ledbury-Banff Crips.

City police also took in 158 shotguns and 278 rifles. In all, 528 guns have been seized since November.

“This is actually brand new information for us,” Brandt said of the new national tally.

“We didn’t know how many firearms police were seizing,” or what kinds. “That there are so many non-restricted firearms is a big surprise for us.”

By tracking the history and, in some cases, analysing the ballistics of the restricted and prohibited weapons, police hope to uncover new leads on sources of international gun smuggling into Canada. Further, they may match the ballistics of a particular seized gun to an unsolved crime.

The numbers result from a little-known regulation in the federal Firearms Act requiring police departments and other government agencies to report their firearm inventories, including guns seized and surrendered. The regulations came into force Nov. 1.

Initially intended to serve as an auditing and inventory tool for police guns and firearms owned by other “public agents” such as the Coast Guard, prison guards and wildlife conservation officers, the Public Agents Firearms Regulations also created the swelling, national file of seized guns.

Before, information on confiscated weapons was typically not widely shared between individual police departments.

“Law enforcement agencies, they might be neighbouring, and they might not know, for example, that there’s a common source for crime guns in their jurisdictions. With this information we can (now) do that,” said Brandt.

“We can find out now, for example, are there sequential serial numbered firearms that are being seized across the country ... a common source.”

A requirement for police to report their seized weapons within 30 days is expected to offer additional gains.

“If you’re involved in chasing firearms smugglers and importers, generally speaking you’re going to get that information (now) when these guys are still involved in trafficking so your going to get an opportunity to shut them down,” said RCMP Supt. Geoffrey Francis, head of the firearms services directorate.

“If you can get a trafficker after he’s trafficked only 20 or 30 guns, as opposed to 400 or 500 guns, think of the potential criminal violence you’re going to save.”

In the Commons, meanwhile, Conservative MP Candice Hooppner has introduced a private member's bill that would repeal sections of the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act that now require owners of all guns to obtain a certificate. If Bill C-391 becomes law, only owners of restricted or prohibited weapons would be required to register.

Conservatives hope and expect that C-391 finds support among NDP and Liberal MPs who represent rural ridings where the gun registry is unpopular, although private member's bills rarely become law.

Even though the owners of rifles and other long guns would not have to register their weapons under

C-391, they would be required to have a valid firearms licence, and go through a police background check and safety training to purchase or possess firearms and to purchase ammunition.

The existing law requires all gun owners to register their firearms, but the Conservatives have twice extended an "amnesty" on that requirement. The current amnesty, renewed earlier this month, gives firearms owners until May 16, 2010, to register their weapons.

The government has drawn up its own legislation to kill the long-gun registry, although it tabled that legislation in the Senate where it languishes. Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan would not explain why he decided to introduce it in the Senate, where the Liberals hold a majority of seats, rather than in the House.

With assistance from researcher Ken Rubin and files from Canwest News Service