

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/10/05/gun-registry-fees-government.html?ref=rss>

Ottawa giving up millions in gun registry fees

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Alison Crawford, [CBC News](#)

The Conservative government is relinquishing millions of dollars in gun registry and licensing fees at a time of record federal budget deficits.

Documents obtained by CBC News under access to information show the federal government's decision to waive fees for people licensing their firearms will cost more than \$15 million this year alone. Should the fee waiver be extended for another three years, internal forecasts predict an additional \$60 million in "projected lost revenue." The Conservatives started granting amnesty to gun owners in 2006 — neither forcing new owners to register rifles and other long guns, nor collecting fees from those who already had. It also waived fees for licence renewals. The amnesty has been extended twice more since then.

Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan didn't dispute the amounts cited in the documents, but he insisted no money is being lost.

"Federal budgets have committed funding to offset the cost of this waiver to the RCMP," he said in a statement emailed to the CBC.

The statement also said that statistics compiled by the Canadian Firearms Centre, "indicate that compliance with the requirement for Canadians to register as a firearms owner has increased throughout the extended waiver period."

A spokesperson for Van Loan, responding to requests for more detailed information, said that between 2006 and 2008, the renewal rate of possession-only licences increased to 65 per cent from 50 per cent.

Those numbers, however, appear to be at odds with statistics produced by public servants at the Department of Public Safety, which show a downward trend in licence renewals.

In February 2008, Lyndon Murdock, the director of firearms and operational policing policy at Public Safety, emailed his director general Mark Potter. The message said, "Data does not tell compelling story re: effectiveness of measures vis-a-vis promotion of compliance."

The department refused CBC's requests to speak with Murdock.

That's not the only discrepancy.

Scott McDougall, the director of strategic policy and planning at the Canadian Firearms Centre, also wrote an internal memo in February 2008 stating that 95,000 people had not renewed their firearms licences but still appeared to have guns in their possession.

Lot of confusion

Last week when CBC asked for more up-to-date information, the RCMP reported that 138,000 have let their possession-only licences expire. Of those, 70,000 are people who moved and never provided the centre with a new address. The Mounties say 1.9 million Canadians own guns.

Toronto Police chief Bill Blair said that among gun owners, there is "a great deal of confusion about a number of amnesties that have been announced by the federal government."

Blair, who also heads up the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, pointed to Project Safe City in Toronto, where officers physically show up to check in on known gun owners.

"We have been going to people's homes where we know that they were previously in possession of firearms that were registered that they failed to re-register and we're finding not only those weapons but additional weapons that people have acquired as well and failed to register," Blair said. "And so I think the amnesties have even caused some confusion among gun owners."

The Liberal Party's public safety critic Mark Holland agreed.

"If people are told that there is no consequence for not licensing their weapon, it's no surprise that they don't. And these facts bear that out. When they're told that there's no impact for them to ignore it, then they're going to ignore it."

As for the fee waivers, Blair said the lost revenue "just adds to the burden that Canadians are going to have to pay eventually to get this caught up when we restore the requirement that these weapons get properly registered. And we're very hopeful that that will take place."

Very nice solution

The University of Lethbridge political science professor Peter McCormick said that's unlikely to happen any time soon. By extending the amnesty year after year, he said, the Conservatives are deftly handling a hot-button issue.

McCormick said the strategy allows the government to pacify rural and western voters who oppose the registry as well as urban Canadians who support it.

"Elegant is too nice a word, but this is actually for the government a very nice solution," he said.

"You can keep saying to the westerners, we're amnestying, we're doing what we can. And everyone goes off saying, yeah, yeah and they're nodding their heads and they're happy. Not a bad package for the government."

The balancing act may cost millions, but the political payback is worth it, McCormick added.

"Amnestying fees is not the same thing as abolishing the registry. It's hard for the Opposition to get traction on it. And sure, it costs, what, \$10, \$15 million dollars a year in forgone revenue for the government, but we're talking \$50 billion deficits these days. What's \$15 million among friends? For the government, I think it's quite a bargain."