

## TEN MYTHS OF THE LONG GUN REGISTRY

Fall 2006

**Myth #1: *The Gun Registry is a valuable tool for the police and they access it 6,500 times per day.***

**False:** The “6,500 hits” figure for the Canadian Firearms Registry On-Line (CFRO) is misleading per the Public Security Ministry’s website of May 17, 2006 (Ques. 18). Whenever police officers access the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) for any reason, such as for a simple address check, an automatic hit is generated with CFRO whether the information is desired or not. This is the case, for example, with the Toronto Police Service (5,000 officers), the Vancouver Police (1,400 officers), Ottawa Police Service (1,050 officers) and the BC RCMP (5,000 officers). Additionally, every legal purchase of a firearm generates three administrative hits to the registry; for the buyer, for the seller and for the firearm. These changes to the computer records are conducted by police agencies and are counted in the totals. Given the seven million firearms registered in the system, legal transfers must account for the majority of “hits.” Clearly, a hit on the Registry does not denote legitimate investigative use.

**Myth #2: *The registry provides police officers information on the presence of firearms when they respond to emergency calls.***

**Maybe.** The Firearms Registry only provides a list of the legal guns, the very guns an officer is least likely to be harmed by. The truth is, very few legally owned guns are used in the commission of crimes. The latest report shows some 7% of firearm homicides were committed with registered firearms in the last 8 years. The elimination of the registry will only eliminate the useless lists of lawful guns. The fact an individual has a firearms licence will still be known to the police. They will know whether a legal firearm is at a particular location by virtue of the fact that an individual has a licence. The abolition of the long-gun registry doesn’t affect that. Even so, it is the illegal firearms that police are usually the most concerned about (93% in the last 8 years). No police officer would rely on the inaccurate registry data to dictate how they approach a domestic or emergency call. They would approach all calls with an appropriate measure of safety.

**Myth #3: *Firearms related deaths have been reduced due to the long gun registry.***

**False:** Reduction in firearms deaths started in the mid 1970s, well prior to the introduction of the registry in 2003 (StatsCan) and mirrors a proportionally greater reduction experienced in the United States, where firearms laws are being loosened. There is no evidence to link the reduction in deaths with the registry and it has far more to do with the aging demographic than anything else.

**Myth #4: *Police investigations are aided by the registry.***

**Doubtful:** Information contained in the registry is incomplete and unreliable. Due to the inaccuracy of the information, it cannot be used as evidence in court and the government has yet to prove that it has been a contributing factor in any investigation. Another factor is the dismal compliance rate (estimated at only 50%) for licensing and registration which further renders the registry useless. Some senior police officers have stated as such: “*The law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them. None of the guns we know to have been used were registered . . . the money could be more effectively used for security against terrorism as well as a host of other public safety initiatives.*” Former Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino, January 2003.

**Myth #5: *The registry protects women in violent domestic situations.***

**False:** Registered long guns were used in (all) homicide only twice in 2003 (Public Security Ministry website), and a total of 9 times from 1997-2004 (Library of Parliament). The registry of 7,000,000 firearms did not prevent these deaths. Given the extraordinarily low rate of misuse of some 7,000,000 registered firearms, it is unreasonable to believe that maintaining a registry of long guns could have any effect on spousal homicide rates. Moreover, the vast majority of violent domestic assaults are preceded by a lengthy, police recorded history, effectively denying abusers a firearms licence. This should address their access to legally acquired guns.

On an average day, women's shelters referred 221 women and 112 children elsewhere due to lack of funding. Clearly, there are better uses for the money than registering duck guns.

**Myth #6: *The registry helps track stolen guns and forces firearms owners to be more responsible in storing their firearms. Over 50% of firearms used in crime are stolen from gun owners***

**False:** Past Department of Justice studies found that among homicides where details were available, 84% of the firearms used in the commission of the crimes are unregistered and 74.9% are illegal guns smuggled into Canada, not the 50% some claim. Recently, Canada's National Weapons Enforcement Support Team reported that 94% of crime guns were illegally imported into Canada. Vancouver Police report 97% of seized firearms are smuggled. Other government sources show between 9 and 16% of crime firearms originate in Canada. That figure is speculative as the vast majority of firearms used in crime are never recovered and most recovered guns cannot be identified as the serial numbers are removed.

**Myth #7: *The information on the registry database is secure and cannot be accessed by the criminal element.***

**False:** There were 306 illegal breaches of the national police database documented between 1995 and 2003, 121 of which are still unsolved. Many police investigators have publicly voiced their concerns that the gun registry has been breached and become a "shopping list" for thieves.

**Myth #8: *The money has already been spent to set up the registry. It is foolish to dismantle it now.***

**False:** The gun registry is by no means complete. Only 7 million of the 16.5 million guns that are in Canada (according to government import and export records) are registered. More than 300,000 owners of previously registered handguns still don't have a firearms licence, more than 400,000 firearm licence holders still haven't registered a gun and more than 300,000 owners of a registered handgun still have to re-register 548,254 handguns (Canadian Firearms Registry). Based upon precedent, it will cost another billion dollars to complete the registry.

**Myth #9: *Rifles and shotguns are the weapon of choice for criminals and are the most used firearms in crime.***

**False:** Where firearms were used in a violent crime, 71.2% involved handguns (but it is estimated that over 1/3 involve replicas or air guns), only 9% involved rifles or shotguns (of which 2.1% were registered) and 6.5% involved sawed off-rifles or shotguns (already prohibited).

**Myth #10: *The recent deaths of 6 RCMP officers at the hands of criminals with rifles proves the need for the long gun registry.***

**False:** The registry's monumental failure to prevent the tragic deaths of these police officers underscores the folly of registering the firearms of the law abiding. All the criminals who committed these crimes were in illegal possession of unregistered guns, despite the presence of the registry. **These events prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the ineffective uselessness of the long gun registry in protecting our society.**