

Part I.

GUN

RECOVERY DATA

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1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GUNS RECOVERED

Operation Gun Tip may be regarded as one of the largest buy-back/amnesty programs in recent history. Although programs of this kind date back many years, the volume of guns recovered in only seven days is remarkable. To provide perspective, in 1974, Baltimore, Maryland, conducted perhaps one of the largest buy-back programs ever, recovering 13,000 guns over a 90-day period. Their program averaged 144 gun recoveries per day. Operation Gun Tip averaged more than 415 gun recoveries per day.

The large number of guns recovered posed a significant challenge to evidence custodians and firearms examiners who were tasked with taking them into custody and classifying them.

The first step, the process of taking this number of guns into custody, was an enormous undertaking. A police department would not normally process this number of firearms over the span of seven days, and only a small number of departments would reach or exceed that number in a year's time. Even though most of the guns will eventually be destroyed, each one had to be inventoried and tracked in the same manner as would firearms intended for use as evidence in a trial.

The 2,912 guns recovered were divided into nine categories of guns which are described in the following text, charts and graphs. Four of these nine categories used are pistols, revolvers, rifles and shotguns. These categories or classifications fall within the definition of the term "firearm" under Federal law¹. When the term (*firearm*) is used in this report it collectively describes the guns which fall in those four categories. The remaining five categories (*classifications*) are black powder, blank, pellet, replica and toy.

The 1999 Gun Buy-Back program yielded recoveries of 2,912 guns. For this study 2,796 were classified as firearms (*in the categories of pistols, revolvers, rifles and shotguns*) and 116 were classified under the categories of black powder, pellet, replica or toy.

More remarkable was that this many firearms were surrendered in a city where civilian firearms possession is closely regulated and handgun possession is virtually banned. More than 23 years ago, on September 24, 1976 the District of Columbia passed legislation with the intention of "freezing" the population of handguns in an effort to impact firearms-related violence in the city. Despite the restrictions imposed, hundreds of unregistered guns and firearms continue to be recovered each year in the District. In the past five years, the recovery of firearms associated with crimes including unlawful possession, has averaged 2,105 per year, an average daily recovery rate of 6 firearms per day.

In volume, the District's buy-back program represents well more than a year's normal recovery rate for all guns and an increase of approximately 393 in the daily average for recoveries of firearms associated with crimes. If it sustained, that rate of recovery would lead to a crime firearm recovery rate of approximately 37,350 per year.

¹The terms "gun" and "firearm" have different and specific meanings as used in this report. The Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA) sets forth a specific definition for a firearm under Federal law. That definition can be found in the Glossary at the end of this report. Although blank or starter pistols under the GCA are considered firearms because they can be readily converted to fire projectiles, they are not included in the statistical calculations for "firearms" in this report.

Excluded from the GCA's definition of firearm are many types of guns including black powder rifles, antique, replica and pellet guns. One hundred and sixteen of these types of guns were recovered during the buy-back program.
