



## **DATA INDICATES GUN SHOWS ARE PRIMARY SOURCE OF VIRGINIA CRIME GUNS**

Between 2002 and 2005, more than 400 firearms sold at Richmond-area gun shows were recovered in connection with criminal activity. More than 300 of these guns were recovered in the Richmond metropolitan area.<sup>1</sup> As disturbing as these numbers are, they certainly understate the scope of the problem. According to Michael Bouchard, Assistant Director/Field Operations of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), "these figures do not take into account firearms that may have been sold at Richmond area gun shows by unlicensed sellers, as these transactions are difficult to track."<sup>2</sup>

Between May 2004 and August 2005, ATF agents, along with State and local law enforcement partners, attended eight gun shows in the Richmond, Virginia area. This effort was conducted through the Project Exile Program, the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative, and the ATF's Violent Crime Impact Team initiative. The goal was to reduce violent crime by preventing the illegal diversion of firearms and to investigate persons who violate Federal firearms laws. To put the investigation in perspective, while more than 5,000 gun shows are held annually in the United States, on average the ATF conducts investigations at only approximately **2%** of these shows.<sup>3</sup>

Preliminary Virginia State Police data shows that enforcement efforts from Richmond-area gun shows during 2004-2005 resulted in the prevention of unlawful sales and the detection of criminal activity. Arrests were made for the following violations of State and Federal laws<sup>4</sup>:

- Making False Statements on ATF Form 4473 (17 violations)
- Felon in Possession of a Firearm (2 violations)
- Straw Purchase of a Firearm (13 violations)
- Possession of Marijuana (5 violations)
- Possession of Cocaine (1 violation)
- Felony Fugitive Apprehension (7 violations)
- Misdemeanor Fugitive Apprehension (5 violations)
- Carrying a Concealed Weapon (5 violations)

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Michael Bouchard, ATF Assistant Director/Field Operations, before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, United States House of Representatives, February 28, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from ATF Director Carl J. Truscott to Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, November 2005



- Grand Larceny—Theft of Firearm (1 violation)

Subsequently, cases were perfected against 25 defendants on various Federal charges. **Of these cases, 19 have been prosecuted, resulting in 19 convictions.** Six cases were still pending prosecution in Federal court as of February 2006.<sup>5</sup>

One of these cases involved the straw purchase of a handgun at the Showplace Gun Show in Richmond, Virginia, on October 17, 2004. The term straw purchase refers to a transaction in which a felon or other prohibited purchaser uses another person, the “straw purchaser,” to execute the paperwork necessary to purchase the firearm. In this case the purchaser admitted to being paid \$100 by an individual to complete the paperwork and buy the handgun. He also admitted to having straw purchased an AK-47 rifle for the same man at the Showplace Gun Show in Richmond on July 10, 2004. Further investigation revealed this man was a ringleader in the “Blue Ridge Crew” street gang and that he was a primary suspect in a murder that had occurred on July 19, 2004 in Richmond. Ultimately, ATF agents determined that the murder weapon used in that slaying was the straw-purchased AK-47 rifle described above. Through this effort, ATF prevented another potential murder weapon from reaching the streets. The investigation also led to a guilty plea to murder by the gang member who was acquiring firearms illegally at Richmond area gun shows. He has been sentenced to serve 40 years in prison.<sup>6</sup>

In assessing ATF’s Virginia’s operations, Assistant Director Bouchard has stated, “we, along with our law enforcement partners, feel very strongly that our operations at Richmond area gun shows have reduced violent crime and made the streets of Virginia and America safer consistent with our agency’s mission.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from ATF Director Carl J. Truscott to Chairman Howard Coble, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, February 2006

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Michael Bouchard, ATF Assistant Director/Field Operations, before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, United States House of Representatives, February 28, 2006

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.