

Crime – Ballistics

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Fighting More Gun Crime with Ballistics Testing

December 17, 1999

New Administration Initiative on Ballistics Testing: The Administration's FY 2001 budget request will provide over \$30 million (an increase of about \$20 million) to fund a groundbreaking National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) that will eventually give every law enforcement agency in the nation access to valuable information on gun criminals. Ballistics testing is a successful crime-fighting tool that enables police to use the unique "fingerprints" of bullets or shell casings left at the scene of a crime to identify violent criminals and illegal gun traffickers – even in the absence of a firearm. Ballistics testing programs at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) have already advanced over 16,000 criminal investigations of gun crimes in over 40 states. This initiative will link these two successful systems for the first time, and triple the number of law enforcement jurisdictions with access to nearly one million ballistics images within a two-year period.

How Ballistics Technology Works: Ballistics testing makes it more difficult for criminals to cover up crimes committed with firearms than ever before. Similar to a fingerprint identification system, ballistics systems maintain databases of the unique markings that are left on every bullet and casing when fired from a gun. Using this technology, an examiner can match bullets to firearms used in crimes across the nation in seconds. Ballistics databases give police the tools they need to use bullets or casings left at the scene of a crime to identify criminals or the illegal gun traffickers who supply the firearms criminals -- even in the absence of a firearm. They also help link criminals found in possession of firearms to crimes they may have committed with the same gun in other jurisdictions on the network. In some cases, criminals identified through ballistics testing have been successfully linked to murders and other violent crimes in several states.

New Universal System: National Integrated Information Network (NIBIN): This initiative creates a groundbreaking partnership between ATF and the FBI to increase access to nearly one million ballistic images to 230 law enforcement agencies across the nation within a two-year period. These two systems combined have helped advance over 16,000 gun crime investigations in over 40 states. ATF will have overall responsibility for crime gun and firearms manufacturers operations, hardware and software development, training and installation. ATF will also maintain the ballistic image repositories and imaging systems, and work with manufacturers on ballistic image databases. FBI will maintain overall responsibility for a high-speed, integrated network that will serve as the communication vehicle for law enforcement.

A Groundbreaking Industry Partnership on Ballistics Technology: Working in partnership with ATF, Glock, a major gun manufacturer, will begin a pilot project to allow the ballistic imaging of every 9mm handgun test fired in the manufacturing process. This will create a record linking the "fingerprint" of the shell casing to a bar code for that firearm. The code will enable the ATF National Tracing Center to quickly trace the cartridge to a firearm, and then help law enforcement to identify the first purchaser. This is the same technique used in a crime gun trace where the firearm has been recovered. Earlier this month, the manufacturer installed the remote

input station for ballistics imaging. ATF expects the company to begin this pilot partnership next month.

Ballistics success stories:

- **New Orleans.** The New Orleans Police Department used ballistics technology to help solve a long-term investigation of a string of violent and brutal murders in the city. Cartridge casings and bullets collected as evidence from crime scenes and from the victims provided data for the IBIS system – which began to produce “hits” between evidence collected from multiple crime scenes. This data was used by the homicide unit to plot the crime scenes, and connected several different firearms used by a violent street gang with a number of drug-related murder and assaults. Ultimately, aided by ballistics technology, 13 members of the “Seventh Ward Soldiers” street gang were indicted, of which 6 were convicted, six pled guilty and one was acquitted.
- **San Francisco.** In June 1997, a victim was shot and killed in a telephone booth. Officers from the Oakland Police Department (OPD) were unable to identify suspects or to develop any leads. Projectiles from the shooting incident were entered into the IBIS unit located at the OPD crime laboratory. The next month, two suspects were arrested in possession of a firearm; since both suspects were felons in violation of their parole, they were incarcerated. In September 1998, the firearm that was taken from the two suspects was test-fired and entered into IBIS, and it was determined that the gun had been used in the June 1997 homicide. The incarcerated suspects confessed to the murder, and identified a third suspect involved in the crime, who was later arrested.

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December 20, 1999

U.S. to Develop a System for 'Fingerprinting' Guns

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD

In a long-sought move that will help identify guns used in crimes when only their shell casings are left at a crime scene, the Clinton administration said yesterday that it was tripling the budget for the development of a unified national database of shell casings and bullets, and that one major handgun maker had agreed to start providing the federal government with information when new guns are test-fired.

"This system is very exciting and has the potential to do for gun crime what fingerprints have done for forensics," Bruce Reed, the White House domestic policy adviser, said.

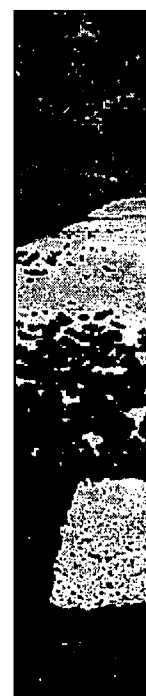
The new system, to be run by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, will work toward creating a virtual fingerprint for newly manufactured handguns by using a computer analysis of the unique markings a gun leaves on shell casings when it is fired, another administration official said.

The gun maker that will cooperate with the government is the United States unit of the Austrian company Glock GmbH.

Paul Januzzo, Glock's general counsel, said, "As long as this is aimed at crime control, not gun control, we will support it."

Giving the firearms agency gun fingerprints "will speed up the gun tracing process incredibly," said Mr. Januzzo, a former prosecutor.

He added that giving the government the information could also help the firearms industry in a complex set of lawsuits filed against it by 28 cities and counties as well as by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and in parallel negotiations between lawyers for the cities and the gun companies. Mr. Reed joined those negotiations last week on behalf of the White House.

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The cities have demanded that the firearms manufacturers develop a serial number that would be harder to obliterate. "If you have a system with gun fingerprints, it is better than serial numbers that can be tampered with," Mr. Januzzo said. "It may also do away with another demand by the people who want to put us out of business, registration of all gun owners, because you already have the gun registered."

The new system relies on the computer analysis of marks made on shell casings, including those caused by firing pins and those pressed on the breach face of the casing during an explosion, as well as another unique signature left when the casing is ejected.

Glock will begin feeding information on all its newly manufactured nine-millimeter handguns into a machine provided by the firearms agency that was developed by a Montreal company, Forensic Technology. Mr. Reed said he hoped that the the agency would eventually get test-fire information on all Glock's guns, as well as those made by other leading manufacturers, including Smith & Wesson and Colt's Manufacturing, which are now monitoring the pilot project in cooperation with the government and Glock.

The new system has another important effect: it will put an end to a long-running feud between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had developed two competing, noncompatible technologies to obtain ballistic information on guns, bullets and shell casings.

The system, to be known as the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network, was developed by representatives of the two federal agencies and the Boston Police Department. Police officials in Boston had found that to obtain complete ballistics information, they had to spend money to acquire technology from both agencies.

To create the new system, Mr. Reed said, the White House will increase the budget for ballistics work from just under \$10 million a year to more than \$30 million, with 230 local and state law enforcement agencies expected to have access to the new system within two years.

The new ballistics identification system and the program to enter test-fire information from Glock are part of a quiet effort by the Clinton administration to develop more effective ways to combat gun crime despite a political impasse in Congress and several state legislatures over new gun control bills.



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