



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,
Firearms and Explosives

Assistant Director

Washington, DC 20226

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June 17, 2009

MEMORANDUM TO: All Special Agents in Charge

FROM: Acting Assistant Director (Field Operations)

SUBJECT: National Firearms Trafficking Enforcement Strategy

ATF's comprehensive strategy to impact firearms related violent crime focuses on denying firearms to criminals, investigating firearms traffickers and armed violent offenders, as well as ensuring compliance by the firearms industry. Our efforts have been successful in protecting the United States and the public we serve. However, at this time, we must place an increased emphasis on firearms trafficking enforcement by utilizing the cadre of assets, capabilities and legal authorities unique to ATF. We will then be able to more effectively and efficiently identify, investigate, disrupt and refer for prosecution those firearms traffickers responsible for arming violent criminals both within and outside the borders of the United States.

Firearms related violence is a primary concern of our Nation, as well as for our neighboring countries. This related violence is the result of individuals who are indifferent to the value of human life and motivated by greed. This behavior is detrimental to those caught in the cross fire as their economy and culture suffer as well as their quality of life. In response to this problem we created this comprehensive national firearms trafficking strategy.

Focused enforcement, through proactive industry compliance operations and criminal investigations, is the key to our strategy. Identifying and disrupting the sources and methods by which violent criminals and prohibited persons acquire illegally trafficked firearms will reduce violent crime. Our regulatory and enforcement missions are interwoven and provide a comprehensive approach to ATF's mission – reducing violent crime, protecting the public and preventing terrorism. These goals can only be achieved by the continued integrated efforts of our Special Agents (SAs), Industry Operations Investigators (IOIs), Intelligence Research Specialists (IRSs) and support personnel. This will allow us to pursue our criminal programs while at the same time ensuring that Federal firearms licensees (FFLs) are operating within established laws and regulations. This capability is further enhanced by external partnerships with other Federal, State, local and international law enforcement entities.

To reduce violent crime, we must concentrate our efforts on the sources of diverted firearms. Part of this strategy will focus on dismantling and shutting down the source of “illegal” firearms, from commercial markets to secondary markets such as gun shows, flea markets and unlicensed dealers. Traffickers rely on others to purchase firearms for violent offenders, drug traffickers and gang members. ATF’s expertise and long history of investigating these types of cases puts us in a position to interdict the illegal purchase of the firearm therefore stopping the firearm(s) from ever entering the criminal market. Dismantling a gun trafficking organization that provides guns to numerous cities and/or criminals will have a major impact on reducing the nation’s overall violent crime rate. Even the interdiction of a firearms trafficker after purchasing two or three firearms has a far-reaching and almost immeasurable effect.

Our collective Agency approach will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our national firearms trafficking enforcement strategy through increased uniformity and accountability, and a mandate that all field divisions actively pursue firearms trafficking enforcement. Many field divisions have effective firearms trafficking strategies underway, including many joint efforts between two or more field divisions, such as “Operation Iron Pipeline” along the entire I-95 corridor from Florida to Massachusetts, “Operation Magnolia Steel” involving the Chicago and New Orleans divisions, and our Southwest Border initiative “Project Gunrunner,” ATF’s largest firearms trafficking enforcement endeavor. The increased focus on firearms trafficking enforcement should be viewed as a plan to more effectively balance our efforts against armed violent offenders and the firearms traffickers who arm them. Intelligence gleaned from investigations and arrests will be used to enhance our firearms trafficking strategy. Success of this initiative will reduce the availability of firearms to the criminal element.

Every field division is affected by illegal firearms trafficking. Some field divisions include source states, some include market states, but tracing statistics consistently indicate that all states are their own greatest source of illegally trafficked firearms. Intelligence data will be analyzed to determine the scope (international, national/interstate, regional/intrastate), and the sources/methods used to facilitate illicit firearms trafficking (unlicensed dealers, straw purchasers, FFL/interstate thefts, residential burglaries, gun shows, internet sales, corrupt licensees, illegal imports/exports) affecting each field division. Firearms Trafficking Coordinators shall be established to assess the illegal trafficking patterns and trends. Major illegal firearms trafficking corridors have been identified and will be worked across Divisional boundaries.

In the upcoming weeks, the comprehensive National Firearms Trafficking Strategy implementation will be distributed to the field divisions. Much of this will be discussed at the Violent Crime and Firearms Trafficking Summit in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact your Deputy Assistant Director (Field Operations).



Mark R. Chait