

**PC February 25, 2011**

**Firearms Trafficking**

The Department strategy seeks to prevent arms from reaching the Mexican cartels, and seizing arms from the cartels and their allies. We are working aggressively with our law enforcement partners to develop cases to dismantle arms trafficking organizations in the Southwest border region.

We have increased our efforts to target gun traffickers--

There are presently Seven Active Gunrunner teams ( McAllen Tx, Houston, El Paso ,Los Cruces, Tucson, Phoenix, El Centro (San Diego) and two more will be added in May 2011(Brownsville,Tx, and Sierra Vista Az).

Since 2009, ATF has tripled its Project Gunrunner personnel in Mexico which has increased its capabilities for intelligence sharing and scene response.

Firearms seizures in FY 2010 were up from 1638 in FY 2009 to 2970 in FY 2010, an 81% increase.

There is greater coordination between our federal prosecutors

In February 2011, our South West Border United States Attorneys met with their PGR counterparts to discuss information sharing and coordination of investigations and prosecutions on both sides of the border. They will be meeting at regional level on a regular basis.

**Long Gun Reporting Requirement (in case it is raised)**

The comment period closed on February 15. ATF is now in the process of reviewing and responding to all the comments, which total about 22,000 (though most are redundant form letters). ATF prepares a revised package for OMB/OIRA and new 30 day notice. After that time OMB/OIRA has additional 30 days to make decision.

Bottom-line: The earliest the demand letter could possibly be approved by OMB/OIRA is the end of March or beginning of April, and there is a realistic chance the demand letter wouldn't be approved until the end of April.

**Recent Gun Trafficking Success Stories**

On February 15, 2011, multi-count indictments against 17 defendants in five separate cases of illegally trafficking firearms from the United States to Mexico were unsealed in Arizona.

Operation Too Hot to Handle involved approximately 300 weapons – mostly AK-47-type rifles and automatic pistols -- seized in Arizona, Mexico and in Texas. The weapons had been bought by “straw purchasers” from licensed gun stores in Arizona.

The Beltran-Bermudez indictment charges two undocumented aliens with possessing 222 AK-47 style rifles and five pistols. All these weapons were later seized in Texas.

This Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation led by ATF and ICE involved undercover surveillance and was led by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

On January 25, 2011, an Arizona a multi-agency law enforcement OCDETF task force rounded up and arrested 20 defendants named in the 53-count **ATF** indictment

The **ATF** indictment alleges that from approximately September 2009 to December of 2010, the defendants conspired to purchase hundreds of firearms, including AK-47s, to be illegally exported to Mexico.

In one example, the indictment indicates 7 individuals allegedly spent approximately \$104,251 in cash at various Phoenix area firearms dealers to acquire 140 firearms.

During a routine FFL inspection in Houston, Texas, a large-scale trafficking operation was discovered, in which a high-ranking Los Zetas member recruited and paid straw purchasers up to \$500 per transaction. After purchase, the firearms were transported to Mexico and passed along to a Gulf cartel member. There were 338 firearms illegally purchased from FFLs at a retail value in excess of \$360,000. All of the firearms were purchased in 97 separate transactions. As of 01/21/10, 102 firearms have been recovered: 97 in Mexico, 4 in Guatemala and 1 in the U.S. (in home of one defendant). There have been 63 deaths associated with these guns: 18 law enforcement officers and civilians, and 45 cartel gunmen. Thus far, 16 individuals have been charged with firearms trafficking related charges and 13 have been sentenced.

Operation Big Musky is a recent example of ATF's efforts to deter the outbound smuggling of weapons and coordination with the government of Mexico (GOM). The ATF identified the purchaser as a resident of Minnesota who had purchased in excess of 100 firearms and made numerous Mexico-U.S. border crossings near the dates of firearms purchases. ATF tracked the individual to Laredo, Texas where a CBP stopped the individual and recovered fourteen (14) firearms. As of 01/25/11, 18 individuals have been charged in this investigation. ATF cooperation with GOM officials has led to several prosecutions in Mexico as well as evidence recovery. As of 01/25/11, 18 individuals have been charged in this investigation. ATF cooperation with GOM officials has led to several prosecutions in Mexico as well as evidence recovery.

### **Coordination with Mexico**

Since 2009, ATF has tripled its Project Gunrunner personnel in Mexico which has increased its capabilities for intelligence sharing and scene response. As a result, the Government of Mexico is able to perfect additional cases and prosecute offenders.

As part of ATF's Project Gunrunner contributions within the Merida initiative, ATF continues to train Government of Mexico officials in firearms and explosives identification, firearms tracing

procedures, post blast investigations, crisis negotiations, and the training and use of explosive detection canines.

ATF has partnered with the Government of Mexico to create the Combined Explosives Investigation Team (CEIT). This team is a deployable, bi-national unit composed of Mexican law enforcement officers, ATF Special Agents, and ATF Explosives Enforcement Officers. The team responds to, and investigates, the rapidly increasing number of incidents involving the use or recovery of improvised explosive devices (IED's) and Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED's) in Mexico.

ATF has partnered with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Government of Mexico to form the DC Arms Group. Based in Washington, DC, this group is a multi-agency effort to coordinate strategic efforts of the participating agencies.

### **Additional Statistics**

There are over 4,600 open Project Gunrunner investigations throughout the United States looking into the firearm traffickers that supply firearms to Mexico.

