



## Fact Sheet

Public Affairs Division - Washington DC



Contact: Public Affairs Division  
@ATFHQ on Twitter  
facebook.com/HQATF

February 2015  
www.atf.gov

### **NATIONAL TRACING CENTER (NTC)**

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) National Tracing Center (NTC) is the country's only crime gun tracing facility. As such, the NTC provides critical information that helps domestic and international law enforcement agencies solve firearms crimes, detect firearms trafficking, and track the intrastate, interstate, and international movement of crime guns.

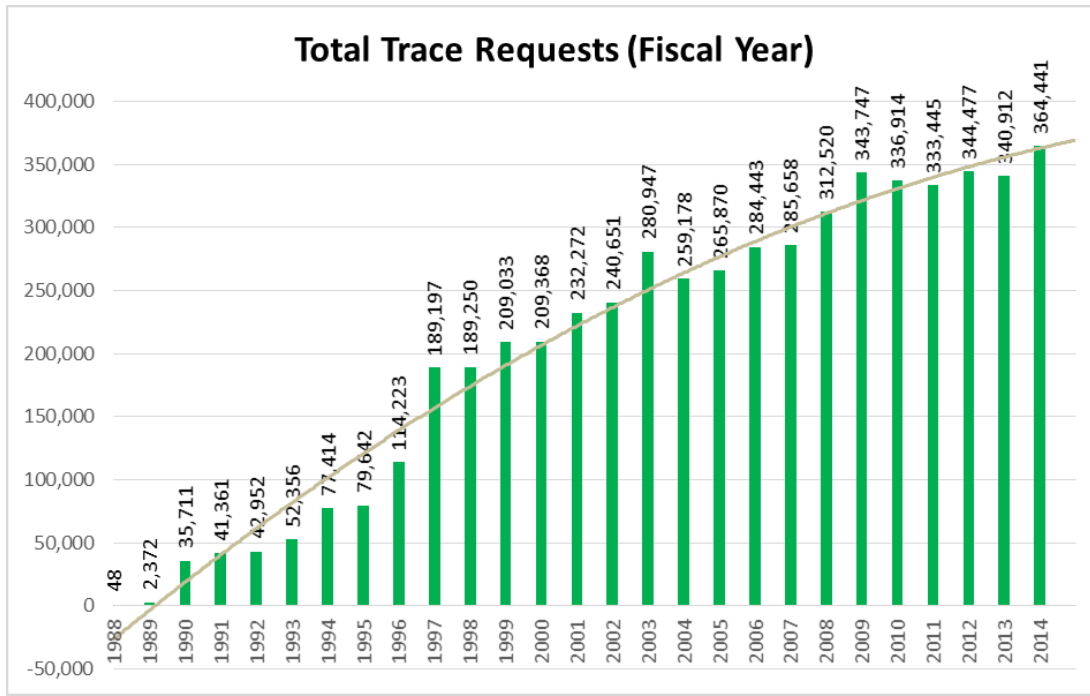
Pursuant to the Gun Control Act of 1968, ATF is the sole federal agency that is authorized to administer firearms tracing. The NTC is authorized to trace a firearm for a law enforcement agency involved in a bona fide criminal investigation. Several programs within the NTC receive, manage, and disseminate firearms information in conjunction with firearms tracing to support the international law enforcement community in the effort to combat violent crime and firearms trafficking.

NTC's mission is to accurately and efficiently conduct firearms tracing and related programs to provide investigative leads for federal, state, local and foreign law enforcement agencies.

The NTC processed more than 360,000 trace requests in fiscal year 2014. The goal of the NTC is to complete traces classified as "Urgent" in less than 24 hours. Traces classified as "Routine" are completed within five days on average. The law enforcement agency submitting the trace request determines the trace classification.

Firearms tracing begins when a law enforcement agency discovers a firearm at a crime scene and seeks to learn the origin or background of that firearm in order to develop investigative leads. Tracing is a systematic process of tracking the movement of a firearm from its manufacture or from its introduction into U.S. commerce by the importer through the distribution chain, i.e., wholesaler/retailer to identify an unlicensed purchaser. That information can help to link a suspect to a firearm in a criminal investigation and identify potential traffickers. Firearms tracing can detect in-state, interstate and international patterns in the sources and types of crime guns. ATF processes crime-gun trace requests for thousands of domestic and international law enforcement agencies each year. ATF traces U.S.-sourced firearms recovered in foreign countries for law enforcement agencies in those countries.

In fiscal years 1988 through 2014 the NTC conducted traces as outlined on the graph below:



#### **eTrace 4.0:**

This web-based, bi-lingual (English and Spanish) firearms tracing system is available to accredited domestic and international law enforcement agencies to assist in the tracing of U.S.-sourced firearms. eTrace is a paperless firearms trace request submission system and an interactive firearms trace analysis tool that provides an electronic exchange of crime gun incident-based data in a secure web-based environment. Through eTrace, law enforcement agencies can electronically submit firearms trace requests, monitor the progress of traces, retrieve completed trace results, and query firearms trace-related data. eTrace includes analytical and download capabilities for ATF's firearms trace information, including selective field searches and statistical reporting.

eTrace has registered more than 5,600 law enforcement agencies, including agencies in 41 foreign countries. The eTrace system currently has more than 36,000 individual law enforcement user accounts. International tracing supports joint law enforcement projects through programs such as the Southwest Border Initiative and the Caribbean Community Initiative.

#### **Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) Theft/Loss Program:**

FFLs are required by law to report to ATF the theft or loss of firearms inventory within 48 hours of discovery.

The NTC receives these reports from FFLs. The NTC is able to develop investigative leads when any of these firearms is subsequently recovered and traced by law enforcement. Each year, thousands of firearms are reported as lost or stolen.

**Interstate Theft Program:**

The NTC maintains the Interstate Theft Program. The NTC manages reports of theft or loss of firearms from interstate shipments by interstate carriers. Interstate carriers can make such reports on a voluntary basis (it is not a mandatory legal requirement). The NTC provides a standard form and process by which the shipper, carrier, and/or consignee can report such losses. Under the program, hundreds of reports of thefts and losses from interstate shipments are received, managed, and disseminated to ATF offices around the country for investigation each year. Further, the NTC is able to develop investigative leads when a firearm reported stolen or lost is recovered and traced by law enforcement.

**Obliterated Serial Number Program:**

ATF provides serialization and other firearms identification forensics expertise to assist in the positive identification of firearms when serial numbers have been partially obliterated or have been partially restored. ATF's Obliterated Serial Number Program allows law enforcement agencies to identify recovered firearms whose origins have been masked by serial number destruction or alteration. ATF uses the recovery information to identify firearms trafficking patterns and related crimes.

**Out-of-Business Records:**

Federal firearms licensees (FFLs) that discontinue business are required by law to send all firearms transaction records to the NTC. Out-of-business records are integral in the firearms tracing process. The NTC receives an average of 1.2 million out-of-business records per month. Since 1968, ATF has received several hundred million such records. ATF's Out-of-Business Records repository is the only one of its kind in the world.

**Records Search Requests:**

ATF utilizes out-of-business FFL records to assist in the investigation of firearm thefts when incomplete identifying information is available. ATF receives thousands of such requests each year from law enforcement jurisdictions where an individual firearm owner has no record of the firearms identifiers and the FFL from whom the owner purchased the firearm is no longer in business. These records have proved pivotal in other criminal investigations.

**Multiple Sales Programs:**

FFLs are required by statute to report to ATF the sale of two or more handguns to the same purchaser within five consecutive business days. These reports, when cross-referenced with crime gun trace information, serve as an important indicator in the detection of illegal firearms trafficking. They can also allow successful tracing of older firearms that have re-entered the retail market.

The NTC is located in Martinsburg, W.Va., approximately 90 miles from Washington, D.C. The facility houses ATF's Firearms Technology Branch (which includes ATF's Firearms Reference Library), the Federal Firearms Licensing Center, the

Federal Explosives Licensing Center, the National Firearms Act Branch, the Imports Branch, the Brady Operations Branch, and the Violent Crime Analysis Branch.

**Access 2000 Program:**

The NTC oversees the Access 2000 (A2K) program, which is software or software and hardware, provided to industry members free of charge enabling the NTC to determine the disposition of a firearm being traced via a serial number query. The data remains the property of the FFL and is not housed at ATF. This program provides the NTC 24 hours per day/seven days per week access to transaction records and can reduce cost for the industry by automating the trace process. The NTC is limited to accessing the transaction data associated only with the specific firearm that is being traced for a law enforcement agency engaged in a criminal investigation.

**Demand Letter Program:**

The NTC is responsible for issuing various demand letters, which ensures that it collects FFL data vital to the success of the firearms tracing process.

Demand letter 1 is issued to FFLs who do not comply with their statutory responsibility to respond within 24 hours to firearm trace requests. The FFLs who receive Demand letter 1 are required to send ATF their acquisition and disposition records for the past three years, and continue to send the records on a monthly basis until told otherwise. The information submitted allows ATF to trace firearms if the FFL continues to be uncooperative with requests.

Demand letter 2 is sent to FFLs who had 10 or more guns traced to them the previous calendar year with a “time-to-crime” of three years or less. The affected FFLs are required to submit limited information regarding “used” guns acquired the previous year, including the manufacturer/importer, model, caliber or gauge and serial number along with the acquisition date. No names of owners are submitted. The FFL is required to submit this information quarterly, and until informed otherwise. The used gun information received as a result of Demand letter 2 enables ATF to trace any used guns sold by the FFLs under demand. Without this information, ATF would not be able to link the secondary market firearm to the dealer.

Demand letter 3 is issued monthly to assist ATF in its efforts to investigate and combat the illegal movement of firearms along and across the Southwest border. ATF requires licensed dealers and pawnbrokers in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas to submit record information on multiple sales of certain rifles defined as semi-automatic rifles capable of accepting a detachable magazine and with a caliber greater than .22 (including .223/5.56 caliber).

###