



Denver Crime Gun Intelligence Center:

Locked On Target

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In January 2013, the Denver, Colorado, Police Department (DPD) and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Denver Field Division created a partnership to improve the way in which National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) hits are developed and investigated. The initiative, known as the Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC), is an interagency collaboration within the Denver metropolitan region. It focuses on the collection, management, and analysis of crime gun data from systems such as NIBIN and eTrace. The team quickly grew to include the Aurora, Colorado, Police Department (APD); Lakewood, Colorado, Police Department (LPD); Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI); Second District Attorney's Office (2nd DA); Seventeenth District Attorney's Office (17th DA); Eighteenth District Attorney's Office (18th DA); Colorado Department of Corrections, Division of Adult Parole (DOCDAP); Colorado Attorney General's Office (CAGO); First District Attorney's Office (1st DA); University of Colorado, Denver (UCD); and United States Attorney's Office, District of Colorado (USAO).

The objectives of CGIC are to produce timely and actionable information focusing

the efforts of its partners, including police, prosecutors, and forensics experts, on trigger pullers in the Denver metropolitan area and to prevent additional shootings. The Denver metropolitan area was selected as CGIC's focus because the vast majority of violent crime in Colorado occurs within this region and the shared borders between the cities and towns lend themselves well to collaborative investigations.

Timeliness Not Only Counts—It's Critical to Success

The longer it takes to extract the "story" that each crime gun or spent shell casing holds, the longer a shooter remains free. Under a real-time NIBIN mandate, the Denver CGIC enters all fired cartridge case evidence collected at crime scenes and test-fired cartridge cases from all auto-loading pistols recovered by partner agencies. The intent of the mandate is to complete the NIBIN process—including collection, entry, correlation, and confirmation of hits—within 24 to 72 hours following the collection of the cartridges. The Denver project is proving that NIBIN is highly successful as a front-end lead-generating tool to link previously unknown shootings and identify active shooters currently on the streets.

The following arrest, made on the basis of CGIC real-time NIBIN data, offers an example of the system's practical field application:

After a nightclub shooting left three people injured, one with two gunshot injuries, real-time NIBIN expedited the apprehension of the suspect. Casings entered into NIBIN from the shooting were linked to a similar shooting seven weeks earlier, just five blocks away. Colorado State Parole already had a suspect in the earlier shooting who matched the description of one of the shooters at the nightclub. Enough probable cause was present to establish a parole violation, and the shooter was arrested eight days later. Without real-time NIBIN, the shooter may not have been identified and removed from the community so quickly.

Building and Managing an Effective Team

The DPD and ATF brought together people at various levels from agencies critical to the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of gun-related crime in the Denver metropolitan area. The CGIC manages large teams by separating the two major categories of responsibilities—strategic and tactical.

Strategic—The CGIC Executive Board is policy-oriented and composed of senior managers from each participating agency.

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The executive board meets quarterly to set strategic priorities and operational policies and to review performance. The executive board is also responsible for making improvements, determining expansion needs, and identifying opportunities for funding and grants.

Tactical—The CGIC operations team executes the various day-to-day operations, such as the following:

- the collection, analysis, and dissemination of crime gun intelligence by the ATF and DPD intelligence groups;
- investigations of the criminal use of firearms and application of various investigative techniques by ATF and gang investigation groups from the Denver, Aurora, and Lakewood Police Departments;
- NIBIN data analysis and hit dissemination by the Denver and Aurora PD Ballistics Labs and the CBI Crime Lab;
- crime gun tracing and the identification of crime gun sources by ATF;
- firearms trafficking interdiction by ATF;
- the identification and arrest of armed criminals by the enforcement agencies and Colorado State Parole; and
- the prosecution of offenders by state and federal prosecutors.

Two other team resources contribute significant added value to the CGIC initiative—two ATF Industry Operations Investigators (IOIs) and a NIBIN contractor.

The ATF IOIs assist with the project in a number of ways, including NIBIN test-fire and NIBIN entry, comprehensive crime gun tracing, and analysis of the results. These lead to the identification of straw purchasers and at-risk gun dealers, the analysis of NIBIN hit data and their referral for investigative follow-up, and the referral of at-risk gun dealers for compliance inspections.

The NIBIN contractor facilitates NIBIN entries, assists in crime gun tracing, reviews crime reports related to NIBIN hits, and generates a matrix to indicate if further investigation is warranted.

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The contractor also builds awareness of the initiative and provides training to state and local police on the CGIC initiative and the importance of NIBIN and crime gun tracing for all agencies. The contract employee is also responsible for tracking, documenting, and reporting successes directly to the crime laboratory director. This feedback facilitates teamwork and helps bridge the gap between the forensic work at the crime lab and the criminal investigation on the street.

Sustaining the Team through Formal Agreement

The CGIC partners operate under a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU). It provides direction on the day-to-day supervision and administrative control of personnel assigned to the CGIC, as well as guidance on the policies that must be adhered to. It also addresses the exchange of information between CGIC partners and certain confidentiality requirements. The MOU covers investigative methods and techniques and topics such as the standards of evidence handling, electronic surveillance protocols, de-confliction, jurisdiction and prosecutions, media releases, dispute resolution, liability, duration, and future modifications.

Regional Protocols

The CGIC has defined a number of protocols that are consistently applied within the region participating in the initiative.

Comprehensive Crime Gun Tracing

All crime gun recoveries are properly and uniformly documented, and a trace request is submitted to the ATF National Firearms Tracing Center through eTrace. A trace is initiated within 48 hours for all crime guns recovered by the DPD. Although it is improbable to receive trace results as quickly as NIBIN results, the information can be equally important to investigators.

Firearms tracing can uncover further criminal activity concerning the purchaser, possessor, or the firearms dealer. For example, crime gun tracing expanded a tragic case, which garnered U.S. media attention in March, 2013.

A violent felon, who had just been released from prison, murdered a pizza delivery man with a 9mm pistol. After stealing the victim's delivery uniform, the shooter went to the residence of the Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections pretending to be delivering a pizza. When the director came to the door, the felon shot and killed him. The felon then fled the state of Colorado and evaded law enforcement until he was stopped for a traffic violation in Texas. The offender continued his spree of violence by shooting a sheriff's deputy during the stop. The felon fled the scene, became the focus of a high-speed pursuit, and died following a

shoot-out with law enforcement. The ATF crime gun trace revealed that the 9mm pistol was purchased only 15 days earlier by the shooter's girlfriend. The girlfriend was prosecuted for unlawfully purchasing the 9mm on behalf of her boyfriend and received a sentence of over two years in federal prison.

Comprehensive Collection & Management of Crime Gun Intelligence

All crime gun data generated by NIBIN and eTrace are properly and uniformly collected, examined, and investigated by the CGIC partners. This process ensures that

crime gun data are shared and visible to all CGIC stakeholders.

The following, based on an actual case, is a typical example of how the CGIC collects and manages comprehensive crime gun data to stop armed criminals and those who arm them:

In a suburb of Denver, police stopped a car for traffic violations. The driver, a convicted felon, had a loaded handgun in his waistband and was arrested for unlawful possession of a firearm. The NIBIN check pointed police to the fact that the firearm in question had been used in the commission

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of a murder the week before in a neighboring town. The crime gun trace revealed that the pistol had been purchased one month prior by a woman identified as the girlfriend of the driver. The woman admitted to purchasing and unlawfully diverting firearms to her convicted felon boyfriend and his criminal associates.

What initially appeared to be a routine traffic stop in one city quickly developed into the pursuit of a killer in the next city over and the person who armed him. This incident demonstrates how CGIC partners working to solve their own shootings are dependent upon what other CGIC partners do with the gun and shell casings that they collect.

Crime Gun Forensics

All fired-cartridge case evidence collected from all shooting scenes and all test-fired cartridge cases from specified types of recovered crime guns are documented and processed through NIBIN in a timely manner. NIBIN hits are assigned to a DPD Intelligence Unit detective and an ATF special agent for follow-up. These officers subsequently provide the information to the detectives assigned to the NIBIN-linked cases along with offers of additional investigative assistance. Additional examinations, such as DNA and latent fingerprints, are conducted on a case-by-case basis.

Crime Gun Intelligence Analysis

All general crime gun data collected and generated from eTrace, NIBIN, and other forensic analyses are assessed and leveraged in order to link crimes, guns, and suspects. A valuable output of this effort is the generation and dissemination of Crime Gun Intelligence Center Bulletins, which communicate certain law enforcement actions to be taken, as well as officer safety warnings about subjects who are prone to violence, in case they are encountered by police.

Relentless Investigative Follow-up

All actionable crime gun intelligence generated by the CGIC is disseminated to the CGIC partners and pursued according to the CGIC MOU, which requires the utilization of all available investigative and enforcement resources in conjunction with state and federal prosecutors to arrest, prosecute, and convict violent repeat offenders and other crime gun offenders. For example, prosecutors are leveraging information developed by the CGIC to support career offender charges and enhanced penalties. In at least one case, they leveraged NIBIN hit data to charge the defendant under Colorado's Possession of a Weapon by a Previous Offender statute.

Crime Gun Intelligence Targeting

This is the ultimate outcome of the CGIC—enabling the identification of active

introducing the

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violent offenders, gun crime trends, gun crime hotspots (high density), at-risk gun shops, and illicit sources of crime guns. For example, serial shooters often escalate their level of violence over time. Patterns of gradual escalation are readily identifiable through the NIBIN links, indicating that the same gun was used in a series of crimes. For example, in one 2011 case, a known gang member fired several rounds from a handgun outside a bar after a dispute with another patron. Approximately two months later, the same man fired shots inside a different bar under similar circumstances. A month later, he murdered a rival gang member in the parking lot of a third nightclub. With the NIBIN link between cases as evidence, the judge ruled that all three incidents would be charged under one case. This ruling was critical to the prosecution as it defeated the defendant's ability to claim self-defense. The gang member received a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Performance Measurement/Continuous Improvement

The determinant of success for CGIC is being measured by the decrease in the number of shooting incidents, more effective deployment of resources, and increases in the number of prosecutions for crimes involving gun violence.

From its inception in January 2013, the CGIC has been in a development mode and has continued to evolve. CGIC executives continue to embrace technological advances and have adopted a progressive approach to combating gun violence. As an example, starting in the fall of 2014, ATF is funding a three-square-mile ShotSpotter acoustic gunshot detection system deployment in Denver for a 12-month period to see if this will work well with the existing technologies and enhance the CGIC's effectiveness.

A statistical analysis of success would be premature, as the CGIC has been operational only since January 2013. However, the Denver CGIC team has linked 40 shootings through NIBIN, resulting in 25 state arrests, 8 prosecutions for U.S. federal firearms violations, and 18 referrals to the joint criminal enforcement group for further investigation. In addition, the CGIC has generated 20 officer safety bulletins involving shooting suspects and facilitated 5 revocations of parole. ATF IOIs assigned to the CGIC have provided three referrals to the field for targeted inspections of Federal Firearms License holders identified as being sources of crime guns.

The Regional Approach Continues to Spread

Similar initiatives can be found in operation or in developmental stages in cities such

as New York, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles, California; Boston, Massachusetts; and New Orleans, Louisiana. The State of New Jersey is operating such a program on a statewide basis driven by new legislation, which requires the use of tools like NIBIN and crime gun tracing by all agencies within the state.

All of these Regional Crime Gun Intelligence initiatives involve, at a minimum, the following elements: (1) defined and consistently followed crime gun processing protocols designed to generate maximum actionable intelligence from crime guns and related evidence, and (2) the timely application of the protocols across the geographical areas in which armed criminals are most likely to be crossing multiple police jurisdictions. ❖

To learn more about the Denver Regional Crime Gun Intelligence Center, please contact the ATF Denver Field Division at 303-575-7600 or the Denver Police Department at 720-913-6010.



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