

States must unite to put an end to illegal gun trafficking

BY RICHARD ABORN

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Last week, a federal appellate court, citing a statute backed by the [National Rifle Association](#) that blocks municipalities from suing gun manufacturers, dismissed a landmark lawsuit seeking to put an end to the pipeline of illegal guns to [New York City](#).

Having failed in the courts, [New York](#) must seek to crack down on the influx of illegal guns to this city by entering into a formal agreement with states that would utilize shared data centers, the latest tool in combating crime in our post-9/11 world.

Information has become the backbone of modern-day law enforcement, and in response to 9/11 many states have built data centers that collect crime information from across their state. These centers identify crime patterns and detect trends in criminal activity that would otherwise not be evident. Originally designed to collect information on terrorism, these centers are now adapting to include all crimes.

In light of the years of deafening silence on this issue at the federal level, an interstate solution is needed to combat illegal gun trafficking. State law enforcement must band together and act.

Since gun trafficking crosses a number of state boundaries, complicated jurisdiction and investigative issues abound, and the [U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms](#) (ATF) is simply too small to work on the large number of trafficking cases. Aggravating these difficulties is the fact that there is no central storehouse of gun trafficking data.

The lack of data is particularly problematic because recent reports regarding illegal gun dealers show that these dealers are often located in very small cities, which are beyond the reach of police departments that collect the crime data. Indeed, 63% of the dealers that have been sued by the city are located in towns with a population of less than 27,000, and the vast majority are located within states that are the primary source of illegal guns to New York.

Though the ultimate goal to link these data centers from across the nation is years away, the information on gun trafficking could be merged relatively quickly. Indeed, each of the states that serve as a gateway for illegal guns to New York City has a data center, and each collects statewide information from different types of crimes, including gun trafficking information.

New York and the data collection centers of the six primary states for illegal weapons to New York - [Virginia](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [North Carolina](#), [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#) and [South Carolina](#) - could mobilize and form an interstate gun trafficking pact. This "I-95 Compact," named for the interstate we all share and shamefully dubbed the Iron Pipeline, would exchange uniform gun data that are collected at each participating state's data center.

Startling statistics on illegal gun trafficking only serve to underscore the critical need for this database. The ATF reports that 85.9% of traced guns used in crime in New York City come from outside the state. In 2007, guns came from Virginia (358), Pennsylvania (305), North Carolina (290), Alabama and Georgia (243 each), and South Carolina (213). Illegal guns originate from these states because of their weak gun laws, but also because of a virtually undetectable mode of available transportation on Interstate 95.

Ironically, these six states also serve as chief suppliers of illegal guns used in crimes in their own states. This tragic twist should provide impetus for these states to work with New York and ferret out illegal trafficking.

The technology and information is there to crack down on illegal gun trafficking to New York City. Using the innovative data collection techniques conceived to battle terrorism, states along I-95 could easily band together, and once and for all do away with the Iron Pipeline.

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