

Montreal gangs 'locked and loaded'

by Albert Sevigny

While Canadian gun control advocates say they believe our firearms registration system has done much to reduce gun related crimes, some police officials describe the program as a failure.

"Gun control is a joke," says Montreal homicide detective Steve Roberts. "Bad guys don't register their guns, only people like you and me register their weapons."

The government has spent over a billion dollars on the registration program but Roberts says the 300 million weapons in the US has turned it into an expensive fiasco.

"It would have been a lot cheaper if the government changed the Criminal Code and started treating armed criminals like they do in England," says Roberts. "Robbery in England is one thing, but armed robbery is something else. That's worth an easy 10 years of jail time."

Gun control advocate Wendy Cukier disagrees. "The registration and licensing of firearms has done a lot to reduce criminal violence, especially in situations where there is domestic violence," she says. "Police must have the capacity to convict someone if they possess an illegal weapon."

Any unregistered weapon is by definition an illegal weapon.

While Cukier is aware of the problem created by guns being smuggled over the border, she still credits the firearms legislation with reducing problems.

"Gun related homicide rates are far lower in Canada than they are in the States," she says. "We start having problems when guns are smuggled into the country from the States."

Montreal police say that common street criminals are often well armed with cheap weapons. SPVM (Service de la Police de la Ville de Montreal) Commander Sylvain Lemay says that his men, unless they know otherwise, now treat every suspect as if they are armed and dangerous. Lemay, who commands the SPVM's street gang division in the city's southern sector, says easy access to weapons has 'raised the bar' of ordinary street crime.

"Guns are cheap," says one plainclothes investigator, "and you never know who has one."

While a decent 9mm pistol might cost around \$1000, 'low-end' models can be had for as little as \$400.

"If their guns weren't so cheap, the killers might not want to get rid of them," says homicide division Commander Andre Bouchard. "That would make our job a lot easier."

While police sources don't believe that anyone is running guns in an organized fashion, RCMP Corporal Francois Paar thinks that the city is getting the overflow from the US illegal gun market. Paar is part of the National



Firearms Enforcement Support Team -- there're only four police officers working for Quebec's PWIU (Police Weapons Inspection Unit) -- and his job is to trace weapons once they have been used in a crime. While he thinks that the firearms enforcement law is a good idea in principle, he also worries about all the hardware south of the Canadian border.

"We usually trace a gun back to the States before we lose the trail," he says. "Once we hit the PWB (principal weapons buyer), the trail begins to fade."

An American citizen with no criminal record can buy one gun a week in every state of the Union, he notes. The PWB builds up a stock of legal weapons and later sells to criminals after declaring a weapon lost, stolen or otherwise destroyed. While guns can be bought new for as little as \$79 (US), the price usually doubles when the weapon is sold.

Paar says that a Canadian biker, after making a few phone calls, might send his girlfriend down to Virginia, known for its easy gun regulations, with a credit card and a few thousand dollars to pick up some guns.

"All it takes is a quick ride through customs and that's how another 10 to 15 guns hit the street."

Montreal's street gangs, at the lowest rungs of the criminal ladder, have lots of cheaper models but organized crime, especially the city's bikers, prefer the high end weaponry.

Gunsmith Michel Vezina, presently serving a five year federal jail sentence, supplied the Montreal Hells Angels with many of their weapons. He would buy gun parts over the Internet from a number of US gun manufacturers and have them sent to a PO box in Plattsburg, New York. He'd pick them up there, break apart the packages, throw the parts into an old tool box and drive back to Montreal.

After building his custom-made weapons, often equipped with a silencer of his own design, he would sell them to the Hells. One police

officer who worked on the Vezina file estimates he built more than a thousand different weapons, including dozens of Cobray sub-machine gun pistols, for various clients.

Paar says that Vezina used to buy the Cobray parts the same way you can buy a piece of furniture at IKEA. In order to get around American firearms import and export regulations, the packaged weapon was missing its 'bottom receiver slide,' an integral piece of its firing mechanism. This technically altered the pistol's definition as a deadly weapon.

To produce a working machine gun, he had a local tool-and-die shop make the missing piece and would sometimes alter the pistol's barrel so that it could be fitted with one of his own, custom-made silencers. Police believe that there are still dozens, if not hundreds, of his altered machine-guns hidden away.

An Ontario judge recently ruled that Canadian natives are exempt from gun registration laws. Police working the anti-gang squad believe that organized crime, especially the bikers, will be quick to react and begin hiding their weaponry on reserves.

Albert Sévigny is Blue Line Magazine's Quebec correspondent. He can be reached via eMail at albert@blueline.ca.

CRACK-DOWN ON ILLEGALLY TINTED WINDOWS

Free Trial Offer

Reduce The Number of Cars With Blacked Out Windows & Puts Probable Cause In The Palm Of Your Hand

Model 100 Slides over roll down windows to test light transmission of aftermarket window tint. \$89 U.S. Funds IN QTY OF 3	New Product Free Window Tint Comparison Cards Includes free comparison card.	Model 200 A two-piece unit to test light transmission of any car window with aftermarket window tint. \$149 U.S. Funds IN QTY OF 3
---	---	---

508 923-6416
www.Laser-Labs.com

FOR FURTHER DETAILS GO TO **BLUE LINKS** AT WWW.BLUELINKS.CA

REPRINTED WITH THE PERMISSION
Morley Lymburner, Publisher, Blue Line Magazine