

ASJ

AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL

The political voice of the SSAA

**WA shooters
rally against
new laws**



Handgun licence vs. car licence

April 2003 Vol. 5 Issue 1
Members-only insert to the Australian Shooter

Web site: www.ssaa.org.au



In this issue

ASJ

**The political voice
of the SSAA**

PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061
PHONE: 08 8272 7100
FAX: 08 8272 2945
Internet: www.ssaa.org.au
E-mail:
AS - as@ssaa.org.au
SSAA - ssaa@ssaa.org.au

A MEMBER OF THE
CIRCULATIONS
AUDIT BOARD



96,048

This *Journal* is owned and published by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy of this Association.

CONTRIBUTIONS: Freelance contributions are welcome. We do, however, recommend that potential authors contact Sub-Editor Jennifer Martens prior to story drafting. Color slides and manuscripts may be sent to the address shown above.

CONTRIBUTORS: Bill Shelton, Paul Peake, Gary Fleetwood, Dr Jeanine Baker, Dr John Whitley

No responsibility can be accepted for errors and/or omissions.

No text or photographs within the *Journal* may be republished, either electronically or in print, without the express written permission of the Managing Editor Tim Bannister. Copyright 2003.

THE AUSTRALIAN SHOOTERS JOURNAL is published bimonthly and is printed by PMP Print, Watson Ave, Netley, SA.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc (SSAA Inc) is subject to the provisions of the National Privacy Act. We collect personal information from members of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia in the various states and territories. Should you want a copy of the SSAA Inc Privacy Statement or seek further information please write to PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061.

- 3** A word from the President

- 5** WA shooters rally against new laws

- 6** Remember who stopped the Monash shooting

- 7** SA Police Minister supports SA farmers with handguns

- 8** Say it again, Sam

- 10** Comments on Port Arthur

- 11** How should we store our firearms?



A word from the President

The SSAA is aware that the Prime Minister has written to state premiers with his recommendations regarding changes to handgun ownership. Of concern is his wish for only metallic silhouette and single action shooting to be allowed to use calibres over .38 and up to .45. This recommendation, if accepted by the states, will have a huge negative impact on other shooting disciplines such as IPSC, Police and Services and Action Match. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is made up of the Prime Minister and the state premiers and, as such, the premiers will now have the opportunity to respond to the PM's recommendations. At the time of printing, the SSAA is still unsure of how the states will respond to these federal proposals but we are aware that COAG's decision will have to be finalised very soon if the timetable of a June 30th buy-back will commence on time. The SSAA has suggested a 'grandfather' clause to lawmakers, whereby those licensed firearm owners with handguns over .38 calibre are allowed to keep them until they leave the sport, at which time the handgun would be surrendered to the government with no compensation paid. We believe this idea has been rejected by the states at a recent meeting of the APMC Working Party on Firearms in Canberra. The rejection of such commonsense proposals by

bureaucrats is disappointing and indicates the deep desire by these governments to confiscate legal handguns no matter how paltry their argument to do so is. Continual government references to sporting competitions as 'combat' is a further indication of its lack of understanding of what sport pistol shooting is. We at the SSAA will continue to take part in the dialogue with the federal and state governments in an attempt to inform decision-makers about our activities. The current situation that handgun owners find themselves in is not a happy one and the hard line taken by governments has culminated in a handgun buy-back that will not purchase one illegal handgun. John Howard's initiative has angered many thousands of sporting pistol owners and those feelings will be with them for quite some time.

Bill Shelton
SSAA National President

**WE WANT
YOUR
GUNS**

Don't hand in or sell off your special firearms to just anyone. Help preserve Australia's firearms heritage and donate them to the SSAA National Firearms Museum for all firearm enthusiasts to see. Contact the SSAA National Secretary Roy Smith on 02 9833 9444.

Secure your gun Secure your sport

A message from SSAA National President Bill Shelton

It is up to you to protect your firearms from falling into the wrong hands - hands that could damage the reputation of other firearm owners who do the right thing.

Besides suffering heavy penalties for failing to secure your firearms, you will also give gun prohibitionists an opportunity to promote their cause.

Our ability to continue in the shooting sports relies upon our ability to be responsible for the security of our firearms in accordance with our respective state legislation.

I ask that you spread this important safety message to your shooting friends.

For information on correct firearm storage, contact your local SSAA organisation or local police.

Police firearm registry contact details

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACT 02 6245 7405 actfirearmsregistry@afp.gov.au www.afp.gov.au | SA 08 8204 2495 firearms@senet.com.au www.sapolice.sa.gov.au |
| NSW 1300 362 562 firearmsenq@police.nsw.gov.au www.nsw.police.gov.au | TAS 03 6230 2720 firearms@police.tas.gov.au www.police.tas.gov.au |
| NT 08 8922 3543 pfes.firearms@pfes.nt.gov.au www.nt.gov.au/pls | VIC 03 9247 3142 firearmsregistry@police.vic.gov.au www.police.vic.gov.au |
| QLD 07 3364 4416 weaponslicensing@police.qld.gov.au www.police.qld.gov.au | WA 08 9223 7000 firearms.branch@police.wa.gov.au www.police.wa.gov.au/firearms |

SSAA

PROMOTING GUN SAFETY

The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Inc.



www.ssaa.org.au



SSAA National President Bill Shelton

WA shooters rally against new laws

Sj ARf] AVR V

February 1 saw more than 1000 Western Australian shooters take to the streets of Perth to protest against the changes to handgun licensing laws agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) late this past year. The rally, which was organised by the SSAA's WA branch, brought together firearm owners from the state's three major pistol shooting groups - the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (WA) Inc., the International Practical Shooting Confederation of Western Australia and the Western Australian Amateur Pistol Association. The protestors called on WA Premier, Geoff Gallop, to guarantee that legitimate handgun owners would be able to maintain access to calibres up to .45 for use across a range of national and international disciplines.

After moving through the heart of the central business district, the rally, which held up city traffic for almost half an hour, was met by the state's Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Michelle Roberts. The Minister accepted a letter setting out the protestors' concerns and calling on the state government to back the schedule of matches originally agreed to in November 2002, under what became known as Option 4 (a). The list included IPSC, Action Match, Single Action Shooting, Police and Services, Metallic Silhouette, Black Power and the full range of ISSF Commonwealth and Olympic Games competitions. Protestors also condemned COAG's decision to support John Howard's 'Buy-back MkII' and called on the state and federal government to tackle the real issue of illegal guns in the hands of criminals. ●



Remember who stopped the Monash shooting

by Dr John Whitley

Dr John Whitley, of Maryland, USA, received his PhD from the University of Chicago in June, 2000. He also holds an MA in economics from Chicago and BS degrees in Animal Science and Agricultural and Applied Economics from Virginia Tech. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Adelaide, where he teaches microeconomics and industrial organisation. His research is primarily focused on market structure and marketing in agriculture. He has also conducted research on crime and gun control laws in the US.

Dr Gordon-Brown and the others involved in subduing and disarming Huan Xiang, the alleged perpetrator in the Monash University shooting, have rightly been celebrated as heroes. According to paramedic Paul Howells quoted in *The Age*, “The people on the floor at the time were just unbelievable. They definitely saved lives.” But the implications of this seem to have been lost on the Prime Minister and others seeking to use these events to call for more gun control.

As with most crimes, it was not the police who stopped the shooter from claiming more lives. Law enforcement activities and a police presence are obviously important factors in deterring crime, but they do not deter all crimes and they almost never stop crimes during their commission. As the tragedy at Monash indicates, the task of stopping crimes during their commission inevitably falls to private citizens. Fortunately in the Monash case, the individuals present were able to subdue the shooter relatively quickly before more lives were lost. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as the tragedy in Port Arthur demonstrated. The obvious question being asked is what can Australia do to prevent these tragedies and to limit the harm in cases that do occur.

The Prime Minister’s answer is to further restrict the rights of law-abiding citizens to own and use guns. Presumably the benefits he sees in this policy are the reduction in availability of guns to individuals like the Monash shooter who apparently acquired his guns legally and, perhaps more importantly, the reduction of the flow of guns into the illegal markets that supply most crime guns. But as the Monash shooting demonstrated, it is law-abiding citizens who are most frequently called upon to stop crimes. Guns make this task easier (especially for physically weaker people like women and the elderly as pointed out by John Lott in *The Australian* last week). In the rash of public school shootings in the US during

the late 1990s, several shootings were stopped by armed principals or teachers (eg, the shootings at Pearl, Mississippi and Edinboro, Pennsylvania), presumably saving many lives. Much has been made of martial arts training of one of the students who intervened in the Monash shooting, further evidence that prior preparation and precaution can make a difference.

It is thus not clear that more gun control laws designed to reduce rates of gun ownership will make Australians safer. While they may reduce the availability of guns for the commission of crimes, they simultaneously reduce the availability of guns for defence, reducing the ability of private citizens to stop crimes during their commission and reducing the deterrent effect received from the likelihood of criminals facing armed victims. To evaluate the Prime Minister’s proposals, we need to consider these potential costs as well as their potential benefits.

Although anecdotal stories are widely available on both the costs and the benefits, these are not sufficient to evaluate the Prime Minister’s policies. Unfortunately, there is very little systematic evidence available on the relative magnitudes of these costs and benefits in Australia. Contrary to the claims of some recent opinion columns and news articles, the suggestive evidence from the gun control laws passed following the Port Arthur tragedy is that crime has subsequently risen.

There have been comprehensive looks at the American experience and one recent look across countries as well. The evidence is strong that recent US restrictions on gun ownership (waiting periods for purchase, restrictions on number of purchases at one time, ‘safe storage’ restrictions, etc) have not reduced crime rates. The biggest reduction in crime seems to come from a relaxation of gun restrictions, the allowing of private citizens to carry concealed weapons for self-defence. In a study by John Lott and David Mustard, it was found that these laws have

led to substantial declines in most forms of violent crime in the states that have adopted them (using the most recent data, about a 10 per cent drop in murder, a 3 per cent drop in rape and a 5.7 per cent drop in aggravated assault). In Jeff Miron’s recent study of crime and gun control laws across countries, he found suggestive evidence that “greater prohibition of guns is associated with higher homicide rates”.

Perhaps most relevant to the current debate is the impact of gun control specifically on the horrible multiple victim public shootings like Monash and Port Arthur. The most comprehensive empirical study on this to date was conducted by John Lott and William Landes and examined all such events from 1977 to 1995 in the US, excluding gang violence and shootings during the commission of other crimes (like drug deals and robbery). They tested for the impacts of numerous gun control laws and law enforcement activities (arrest rates, execution rates, etc). The only policy found to be associated with a decline in multiple victim public shootings was allowing concealed carrying of firearms. States that passed such laws experienced an 84 per cent drop in the number of events and a decline of deaths of 90 per cent and injuries of 82 per cent. The reasons why directly derive from what happened at Monash. The shooters in these events generally desire to kill as many people as possible and often do not plan to live through the attack. Criminal penalties will not deter them and it would be impossible to eliminate the possibility of them obtaining a gun. The only effective deterrence appears to be facing them with the prospect of failure.

The evidence is not in the Prime Minister’s favour. Where studies have been conducted, gun control of the kind he advocates has been found to cost more lives than it saves. Australians should think twice about accepting new gun control laws sold solely on anticipated benefits; these benefits may not be realised and the costs may be large indeed. ●

SA Police Minister supports SA farmers with handguns

South Australian Police Minister Patrick Conlan has voiced his support for South Australian pastoralists carrying handguns.

The decision by Special Magistrate Gumpl to allow a handgun licence to an individual for the purpose of animal destruction on a small property in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia has been overturned in an appeal by the Registrar of Firearms. The Honourable Justice Mullighan of the Supreme Court of South Australia found in favour of the appeal and said “no sound reason for the respondent to require a handgun for use on his property is established in the evidence and the Deputy Registrar was correct in his decision refusing the application.”

Justice Mullighan also said, “There is no basis to grant an H Class licence or endorse an existing firearms licence with an H Class endorsement, when the purpose for the use of the handgun is in the carrying on of the business of primary production.”

Based on Justice Mullighan’s ruling, the Firearms Registry sent out 140 letters to landowners who had handguns for the purpose of primary production. The letters stated that farmers would have to get rid of their handguns. Minister Conlan was quick to respond to the letters.

In a radio interview, Minister Conlan said, “I can say that when we learnt of this early in January I asked the police to go away and devise a way where we could maintain the status quo.

“Now, that’s not quite as simple as it

looks, because what the court decision means is that those licences were never validly issued.”

Minister Conlan said he was trying to come up with a way to validly issue a licence for farmers’ handguns and, at the same time, provide a transition period for those people who, according to the court, don’t have a valid licence. He expressed concern about minimising the disruption for the farmers while he looked at how the status quo could be maintained.

“I have a great deal of sympathy for the position of the large pastoralists. It is, I think, unreasonable to ask people to carry a long-arm where they have to travel very, very long distances in rough conditions. And that was the purpose of the regulation in the past. We are working on that; I hope to be able to tell people about an outcome within the next couple of weeks.”

During the interview, Minister Conlan said the Firearms Branch was in an awkward position because the handgun licences were not legal at this stage. He said it was important to get information out to people to let them know what is taking place.

“We still have to consider whether it will be sufficient to make a regulation or whether we can resort to Parliament if needed, but we’ll be able to sort that out in the next few weeks.

“It is my personal intention to restore the status quo. I think it’s important that we do that, but we have to work through those issues,” said Minister Conlan.

SSAA will keep its readers informed of the outcome. ●



EYzi Vlc^ VcYRd UVdec j VU dYWa ` _ Yzi cf cRj
ac aVog Wc^` cv eYR_ &l j VRozZ 4` f _ej
7Zv DVogZTV UZlecZedf aVogZi` d.YV YRd
ReeV_UVU RTTZUV ed Z.g jgZ X ezZ jVhUVN VcG f
eozZ` d` R_U YRdRe ez` VdkUVdec j VU^` cv eYR
#! ! dYWVa Re` _V ez` Vch YZV` erVc V^ VcXV_Tj
dVogZTV h` d Vad` VaeelVZc cvg jgVad Z_ eYVZ
Y` jdel/ozZ4 jZ` SZ_X eYc f XY eYV eR_XjVU h cvTl
` WR de Tl TRozZ/cU` Vd` _ eaVc^ ZeYVf dVR_U
TRozZRV` WR cz-Vi



EYV Tf acV_eUc f XYeT`_UZZ` d RTc dd 2f decRJR
YRgV cvdf JeVU_ ^ R_j R_Z RjckS` eY U^ A VdeZ
R_U h ZULSVZ_X UVdec j VU Sj JR_U h _Vad Wc
Yf ^ R_U af ca` dVdz<R_XRe` d R_U dYWVa def Tl
Z_ UR^ d df TY Rd eYzi Rcv jVWé UZ/ R Y_ cZSjV
UVReY Z/éV JR_U h _VcZi` _ R^` é cSZ VR_U` _ e
TRozZ_X R cz-V SVTRf dV` W@_ D cvRd` _di

Say it again, Sam

5 c; VR_Z V 3 R Vc

According to the National Coalition for Gun Controls' Samantha Lee, "We could say it's basically easier than getting a car licence to get a licence for a semi-automatic handgun in Australia today." Actually, we can say nothing of the sort. The criteria for obtaining a handgun licence in Australia are far more extensive and restrictive than those for obtaining a car licence (Table 1). While Table 1 shows a simplified set of criteria in order to compare the two privileges, it fails to highlight the ongoing requirements for retaining a handgun licence versus a car licence.

A handgun licence can be revoked or refused for many reasons. These include a previous criminal history, a domestic violence order at any time within a ten-year time frame, a good behaviour bond against the applicant/licensee or even a history of self-harm. A handgun licence may also be revoked if the licensee supplied information that was (to the licensee's knowledge) false or misleading or the Commissioner is of the opinion that the licensee

is no longer a fit and proper person to hold a licence or for any other reason prescribed by regulations.

On the other hand, a car licence can only be revoked by a court decision and this usually occurs long after the offence leading to the court appearance. For example: a case of dangerous driving resulting in death can take up to two years to be finalised. During this time the offender can own or drive any number of vehicles. A criminal can obtain a car licence, own a car and drive on public roads without restriction, even after they have been charged with murder.

The opposite is true for an individual with a handgun licence. A licensed handgun owner can be visited by the police to confirm safe storage compliance at any time without notification. Handgun owners can expect a visit from the police to confiscate any firearms they own if the licensee contravenes any provision of the Firearms Act or the regulations, whether or not the licensee has been convicted of the offence. This visit could occur at any time of the day

Table 1. The criteria that must be met before a licence for a handgun, versus a car, can be issued in Australia. Based on NSW legislation.

| Criteria | Handgun | Car |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----|
| Must be more than 18 years of age | Yes | Yes |
| Show proof of identity when applying | Yes | Yes |
| Undertake a formal training course | Yes | No |
| Pass a knowledge test | Yes | Yes |
| Undertake a practical test | Yes | Yes |
| Accept a criminal background check | Yes | No |
| Meet safe storage requirements for property owned under the licence | Yes | No |
| Accept a 28-day waiting period before licence is issued | Yes | No |
| Have a genuine reason for applying for a licence | Yes | No |
| Belong to a recognised club | Yes | No |
| Attend a required number of recognised club activities per annum | Yes | No |
| Apply for leave of absence from police when club attendance cannot be met (nominal 12 months only) | Yes | No |
| Issue of licence subject to the discretionary authority of the Commissioner | Yes | No |



or night, a situation that civil liberty groups are apparently blind to.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has reported that the overwhelming majority of firearms homicides are by individuals who are not licensed. During the two-year period from July 1997 to June 1999, 9.4 per cent of the firearms homicides were associated with an offender who was also a licensed firearms owner. The opposite is true for cars. In South Australia in 1998, the licence status of individuals responsible for car mortalities was 98 licensed (learners to full licence), one unlicensed and 21 of unknown status. So, the individuals licensed to operate a motor vehicle were responsible for at least 82 per cent of the mortalities. Similarly, the percentage of individuals licensed to operate a motor vehicle and responsible for injuries by car was also 82 per cent. In 2001, using data for all states except Victoria, Queensland and the ACT, 86 per cent of motor vehicle licensed individuals were responsible for all car mortalities and 82 per cent of all injuries by car. The trends seem to be consistent and allow mortalities and injuries to be divided between licensed and unlicensed categories (Table 2). The tendency seems to be that people who do not have a firearms licence overwhelmingly cause firearms death and injury, but people who have been licensed to operate a motor vehicle overwhelmingly cause car death and injury.

If, as Ms Lee seems to believe, it is easier to get a handgun licence than a car licence, then it must also be pointed out that a person with

a handgun licence is far less likely to cause death or injury than the person licensed to drive a motor vehicle. This is despite the fact that both groups have had to meet formal government processes in order to become licensed. In fact, as the figures in Table 2 show, the obvious cause of trauma, where firearms are concerned, is the person who is not licensed, whereas, the majority of trauma associated with motor vehicles is caused by the licensed individual.

In terms of effectively managing the problem of firearm violence in Australia, government authorities need to recognise that simplistic policy initiatives directed against the licensed firearm owner, while politically appealing, offer no hope whatsoever of reducing the problem of firearms violence. As long as policy-makers fail to redirect resources to the unlicensed and illegal user of firearms then it would seem inevitable that statistics related to death and injury will not decline, but will merely continue to fluctuate at random. ●

Resources:
 Australian Bureau of Statistics
 Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues 151
 Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues 161
 Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues 198
 Australian Institute of Criminology Trends and Issues 230
 Radio interview ABC 702 2BL Sally Loane 24/1/2003
 National Injury Surveillance Unit
 NSW Firearms Act 1996
 Transport NSW
 Transport SA
 Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (1997) 'Thanks to participants in firearms buyback', press release, Parliament House, Canberra

Table 2. Comparison between road transport and gun-related mortality and injury, as rate per 100,000 population, for 1998 divided between licensed and unlicensed offenders based on observed trends for each.

| Category | Car Licensed | Unlicensed | Firearm Licensed | Unlicensed |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Mortality (all ages) | 7.5 | 1.7 | 0.2 | 1.5 |
| Mortality (0-14 years) | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Injury (all ages) | 48.9 | 10.7 | NA ^a | NA ^a |
| Injury (0-14 years) | 2.1 ^b | 0.4 ^b | NA ^a | NA ^a |

^a Not available

^b Estimated from ABS 1995 figures of % injury for children less than 15 years of age



Port Arthur

Comments on 'The Mass Murder as Quasi-Experiment: The Impact of the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre.'¹

Sj 5c; VR_Z V3 R Vc

The object of this study was to investigate the following two aims:

- Did the massacre have any subsequent impact on Australian homicides?
- Did the massacre have any subsequent impact on Australian homicides for the specific category classified as victim-offender relationship 'stranger'?

The authors separate the homicide events recorded in Australia into three time periods. The first covers the period July 1, 1989 to April 27, 1996; the second covers the five-day period from April 29 to May 4, 1996; and the third covers the period May 5 to June 30, 1999. These time periods are investigated for total and firearm homicides using two approaches. The first approach estimated the number of homicides per 1000 days based on the number of homicides, total or firearm, recorded for each of the above specified time periods. The second approach uses a special kind of regression model, with the Port Arthur massacre defined as the 'intervention' event.

Without going into any details from either the literature review or the methodology and merely reporting the authors' findings, the following statement is the most telling: "the Port Arthur massacre appears to have had no immediate or direct effect on the incidence of homicide in Australia". The empirical data and analysis indicated no significant effect on either Australian homicides or on Australian homicides for the specific category classified as victim-offender relationship 'stranger'. This is apparent for both total and firearm homicide. In fact, the findings support the conclusions presented in an earlier publication by Mouzos (1999)² that the observed decline in firearm homicide is due to a long-term trend.

It is of more concern that the authors presented an alternate notion that had the Australian Government failed to respond by introducing the firearms policies post the Port Arthur massacre, then firearms

homicide in Australia may have increased. Why the authors should suppose this is somewhat intriguing. Despite the tragedy of Port Arthur having been etched into the Australian psyche because of the enormity of the event, it is unlikely the event would have caused Australians to react by embracing the notion that "human life had little value" (p 125). There is no evidence that earlier Australian firearm massacres (or massacres of any type) had any influence on the subsequent incidence of homicides in Australia in the past so it is unlikely that the Australian people would have regarded the Port Arthur massacre with anything other than abhorrence.

The authors' conclusions that neither the Port Arthur massacre, nor the dramatic policy introductions following Port Arthur, influenced the long-term trends of homicide in Australia highlight that this significant event was not a 'tipping point' in trends and analysis of homicide and violence in Australia. However, it does highlight that licensed firearms owners paid the price of political opportunism and public scape-goating. In this effect, the Port Arthur massacre may well have been the tipping point for politicians to embrace intolerance in the name of political opportunism. ●

References:

- ¹. Carcach C, Mouzos J and Grabosky P (2002) The Mass Murder as Quasi-Experiment: The Impact of the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre. *Homicide Studies* 6(2): 109-127
- ². Mouzos J (1999) Firearm Related Violence: The Impact of the Nationwide Agreement on Firearms. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* (No 116). Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

How should we store our firearms?

by Dr John Whitley

Dr John Whitley, of Maryland, USA, received his PhD from the University of Chicago in June, 2000. He also holds an MA in economics from Chicago and BS degrees in Animal Science and Agricultural and Applied Economics from Virginia Tech. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Adelaide, where he teaches microeconomics and industrial organisation. His research is primarily focused on market structure and marketing in agriculture. He has also conducted research on crime and gun control laws in the US.



How privately owned firearms are stored by their owners is an important, and controversial, issue in the gun control debate. With the 1996 National Agreement on Gun Laws, the states and territories standardised their regulations on storage to include mandating that firearms be stored in locked receptacles, separate from their ammunition, and provided for criminal sanctions including imprisonment for violations. In the United States, the Congress has recently debated (without passing to date) mandating trigger locks be included with all firearm sales and numerous state governments have passed so called 'safe storage' laws promoting particular storage practices.

The potential benefits of 'safe storage' are easy to understand. These practices may prevent accidental gun deaths, reduce gun theft and movement of guns into the illegal markets that supply criminals with their firearms and perhaps even prevent juvenile suicides by reducing the availability of guns in the home of at-risk children. But keeping guns locked and separated from their ammunition imposes potential costs as well. It reduces, if not completely eliminates, the value of guns for self-defence. Moreover, the passage of laws mandating particular storage practices has often been surrounded with intense media coverage portraying gun ownership (and even gun owners) as highly dangerous, potentially causing a decline in gun ownership by law abiding citizens and a subsequent decline in the crime deterrence which occurs from the overall stock of guns in their hands. In Australia, the stringent storage requirements and concurrent gun confiscation have been combined with potential legal penalties for engaging in self-defence, leaving us particularly susceptible to this reduced deterrence cost. A final potential cost to mention is that studies of other safety regulations have found a 'lulling' effect whereby safety actually declines following the regulation. Examples include requiring safety caps for medicine leading to more poisonings as individuals are lulled into taking fewer storage precautions or simply leave the caps off, and seat belt and air bag requirements for cars leading to more accidents and death as drivers take more driving risks.

The title of this article is 'How should we store our firearms?'. The obvious answer in a free society is to weigh the potential benefits and costs of various storage practices and choose the practice that offers the largest net benefit. There is probably no 'one size fits all' answer to the question. Families with small children may be more inclined to lock up their firearms while families in high crime areas

may decide to leave their firearms more available. Families with small children in high crime areas have to evaluate the risks to their children of having access to less secure guns against the risks of leaving their children more vulnerable to crime by securing their guns. Australia and some states in the US have removed some of this discretion and the direct focus of this article is to evaluate the impacts of these laws and attempt to understand what guidance this provides us in deciding how we should store our firearms.

Unfortunately, direct measurement of the impacts of Australian laws is made difficult because of the timing and way in which the laws were enacted and the limited availability of comprehensive data. Data availability and timing issues in the US do facilitate an attempt to measure with some degree of confidence several of the potential costs and benefits of the laws there. A recently published study by John Lott and myself¹ has undertaken that task and after a brief review of the 'safe storage' laws in the US, this article will examine the results from that study on accidental gun deaths, suicides and crime.

US 'safe storage' gun laws

There are 50 states in the United States and one capital territory (the District of Columbia, home to Washington). From 1989 to 1996, 15 of these states adopted 'safe storage' laws. The states are geographically dispersed and their adoption dates of the laws were staggered throughout the eight years. It is this diversity and the lack of such laws in the other 36 states and territory that facilitate advanced statistical analysis of the data yielding relatively confident conclusions.

The US laws have a different focus than the Australian laws. The Australian laws mandate specific storage practices and a violation of the law occurs when these storage practices are not adopted. The US laws are criminal liability laws that do not require any particular storage practices per se. Under standard laws of liability and negligence, if an individual engages in a negligent act that causes harm to another they can be subjected to civil (law suits) and criminal (fines and imprisonment) penalties. The US laws single out gun ownership and specify that if a child obtains a gun and subsequently is involved in an accidental shooting or crime, the owner of the gun can be held criminally liable.

Storage practices become involved because the laws generally protect owners from liability only if the firearms are kept in a locked

HOW SHOULD WE STORE OUR FIREARMS

box, secured with a trigger lock or obtained through unlawful entry. The laws differ across states in the maximum age of the child covered (the ages range from 12 years to 18 years of age) and in the level of criminal penalty. In Connecticut, California and Florida, violations are felony offences and can result in large fines or imprisonment. In the remaining states, a violation is a misdemeanour and the maximum penalty is usually only a fine.

Accidental gun deaths in the United States

The first things to note about accidental gun deaths are that they are incredibly rare and in the US they have been declining over recent decades. The diagram below illustrates the trend in juvenile accidental gun deaths for the US from 1979 to 1998. The count of total deaths is provided for all gun accidents, handgun accidents (a subset of all gun accidents), accidental drownings in bathtubs, and motor vehicle accidents. The data include all children from one year of age to 14 years. Children under one were excluded from the entire analysis as there are virtually no accidental gun deaths in this age group (although there are a large number of bathtub drownings and motor vehicle accidental deaths in this group).



As can be seen in the diagram, there were about 121 accidental gun deaths in 1998, of which about 26 were attributed to handguns. For comparison, there were about 66 drownings in bathtubs and about 2408 deaths from motor vehicle accidents. In 1998, there were about 54,352,419 children in this age group. For comparison to Australia, in 1998 Australia had about two juvenile accidental gun deaths (none attributed to handguns) and 101 motor vehicle deaths from a population of 3,674,077 children aged one to 14 years old.

While obviously a good thing for society, the downward trend in accidental deaths makes measuring the impact of 'safe storage' laws more difficult. Simply taking the average accidental gun death rate before the law and comparing this with the accidental gun death rate after the law has been in place for a few years will obviously show a decline, but this same decline was occurring in all other states and would likely have been there without the law and it would be a mistake to attribute causation for this decline to the 'safe storage' law. To separate out the impact of just the laws, we used three specific tests in our study (we actually controlled for and tested many more than three factors, but these are the three most important tests). We

tested for whether or not juvenile accidental gun deaths declined faster in states with the law after passage versus states without the law, whether gun deaths fell at a different rate than accidental deaths of all kinds in the states with the law and whether accidental gun deaths of children fell at a different rate than for adults in the states with the laws. The first test is obvious but the second two may need some explanation.

The second test starts from the obvious observation that a 'safe storage' gun law should only affect accidental gun deaths, it should not have any impact on motor vehicle deaths, drownings, lightning strikes, etc. All types of accidental deaths were declining during the period of the study. If the law has an impact, then states with the law should start to see their accidental gun death rates decline at a faster rate after passage while their accidental death rates from other causes should continue along the same trend. The third test starts with the observation that locking up guns is more likely to affect the availability of these guns to children than adults (who can presumably defeat the locking apparatus more easily than children) and that the laws only apply to children obtaining access to the guns. If this observation is correct, then the laws should be more effective at preventing accidental gun deaths of children than adults. Thus, the third test simply measures whether or not passage of the law is followed by a more rapid decline in accidental gun deaths for children than for adults.

All three tests were conducted for children ages 1-4, 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19 and controlled for a wide variety of factors through time and across states (including other gun control laws in the state, the demographic make-up of the state, per capita income, poverty rates, education level, unemployment level, fraction of families that have only one parent present, population and income support payments like pensions, unemployment benefits and welfare). The unfortunate conclusion was that there was no evidence of benefit from the 'safe storage' gun laws as measured by reduced rates of accidental gun deaths of children. In other words, there was no evidence of a reduction in gun deaths that could be attributed to the laws. This included tests on all accidental gun deaths and tests on accidental handgun deaths alone. We also tested for whether the severity of the penalty (felony versus misdemeanour) and age of children covered by the law had any impact. Again no effect was found. In fact, the only statistically significant result found was that there was a slight increase in deaths for children age five to nine (perhaps evidence of a 'lulling' effect), but the effect was extremely small and only occurred for one particular configuration of the tests.

Gun suicides in the United States

The first thing to note about gun suicides is that, among young children, they are even more rare than accidental gun deaths. Unfortunately, unlike accidental gun deaths, suicides have been increasing over recent decades. The following diagram illustrates the trend in suicides for the US from 1979 to 1998. The count of total deaths is provided for all gun suicides, handgun suicides (a subset of all gun suicides) and non-gun suicides for children from

HOW SHOULD WE STORE OUR FIREARMS



one year of age to 14 years (there were no recorded suicides by gun for children under one year of age during this time period).

As can be seen in the diagram, there were about 154 gun suicides in 1998, of which about 34 were handgun suicides. There were about 170 suicides by other means in that year. As before, there were about 54,352,419 children in this age group. Australia experienced about two gun suicides in this age group (none attributed to handguns) and about five non-gun suicides (with a total population of about 3,674,077 children aged one to 14 year olds).

Basically, the same three tests were conducted on suicides: did states with a 'safe storage' law experience a different level of suicides (or rate of change of suicides) than states without the law, did states with the law experience a differential between their gun suicide and non-gun suicide rates and did states with the law experience a differential between suicide rates of children and suicide rates of adults. There is another factor to be accounted for in the suicide case, however. If gun suicides decline, does this decline represent a decline in total suicides or simply a substitution from guns to other methods (ie, is there an offsetting increase in non-gun suicides). It proved unnecessary to test this possibility because we found no evidence that 'safe storage' gun laws caused a decline in gun suicides.

As with accidental gun deaths, we tested for different age groups (we only used under 15 and 15 to 19 since there are virtually no suicides for ten year olds and younger). We controlled for all of the variables listed above in the tests with accidental gun deaths. We examined the severity of penalties and the age of children covered by the law. No matter what we did, there was no evidence of a relationship between passage of 'safe storage' gun laws and juvenile gun suicides in the United States.

Crime in the United States

Jessica Lynne Carpenter is 14 years old. She knows how to shoot...Under the new 'safe storage' laws being enacted in California and elsewhere, parents can be held criminally liable unless they lock up their guns when their children are home alone...so that's just what law-abiding parents John and Tephanie Carpenter had done...[The killer], who was armed with a pitchfork...had apparently cut the phone lines. So when he forced his way into the house and began stabbing the younger children

in their beds, Jessica's attempts to dial 9-1-1 didn't do much good. Next, the sensible girl ran for where the family guns were stored. But they were locked up tight...[T]he children's great-uncle, the Rev. John Hilton, told reporters: "If only [Jessica] had a gun available to her, she could have stopped the whole thing. If she had been properly armed, she could have stopped him in his tracks. Maybe John William and Ashley would still be alive."²

There are at least two possible reasons why 'safe storage' laws in the US have no effect on accidental gun deaths and gun suicides, either no-one obeys the law or the subset of gun owners that do obey the law are not the same subset that experience accidental gun deaths and gun suicides. In fact, previous published research does indicate that accidental gun deaths are concentrated in a small subset of the population. Studies have found that accidental shooters were much more likely to have been arrested for violent acts and/or alcohol-related offences, have a disproportionate number of car crashes and traffic citations, have had their driver's licence suspended or revoked and demonstrate "poor aggression control, impulsiveness, alcoholism, willingness to take risks and sensation seeking"³.

But if the small number of accidental gun deaths are concentrated in a small subset of the population unlikely to obey the law in the first place, does the general gun-owning public obey the law and, if so, are there any measurable impacts from this? Unfortunately, there is no good way to directly test compliance with the 'safe storage' laws. There was a survey conducted in the US in 1994 that asked individuals how they stored their firearms and it provides some evidence that within several years of passage of a law these states had higher rates of guns stored 'safely', but the limitations of these survey data do not allow highly confident conclusions to be drawn. To solve this problem, we tested the second part of the above question by examining if there were any measurable impacts of the law on crime. This question is interesting in its own right and it provides an indirect test for the first part of the question, whether or not anyone obeys the law.

There are many ways in which 'safe storage' laws may have an impact on crime rates. If these laws reduce gun theft, this may reduce the flow of guns into the illegal markets that supply criminals and reduce crime rates. Alternatively, burglaries and assaults on people in their homes may increase because of the reduced availability of guns for self-defence. Indeed, there is significant evidence that criminals are very rational when it comes to selecting their victims and considering the likelihood of armament. This is revealed in surveys of prisoners where they indicate that they frequently avoid late night burglaries out of fear of being shot and that US burglars spend more time 'casing' a house to ensure that nobody is home than their foreign counterparts. The 'hot' burglary rate (burglaries that occur while the residents are at home) is 59 per cent in Britain (with tough gun control) while only 13 per cent in the US.⁴

There are other, more indirect, ways that 'safe storage' gun laws may impact crime. As with the Australian laws in 1996, the individual state laws in the US generally attracted a lot of attention and were featured in the state newspapers during their legislative debate and adoption date. Emotional cases of tragic accidental gun

HOW SHOULD WE STORE OUR FIREARMS

deaths were often trumpeted in support of the laws and, in extreme cases, gun ownership and gun owners themselves were vilified. If this inaccurate portrayal was taken seriously by less informed gun owners, then it is possible the laws could be associated with decreased rates of gun ownership (this obviously occurred in Australia where guns were confiscated with the new laws, but it may have occurred in the US as well). Given the large deterrent effect gun ownership by law-abiding citizens has on crime, crime rates may subsequently rise with the adoption of 'safe storage' laws. Furthermore, the increased liability these laws impose on gun owners may further cause a decline in gun ownership and owners decide it simply isn't worth exposing themselves to that extra risk. There is no good measure of gun ownership rates in the US, but we did attempt to test this with some survey data and found that gun ownership rates did fall in states after passage of 'safe storage' gun laws, but the limitations on these data preclude the same level of confidence being attached to this result as to the other results presented here.

The (relatively) good data available on crime allow for systematically testing the impacts of 'safe storage' laws in the same manner as was done for accidental gun deaths and suicides. Under US reporting policies, there are two major divisions of crime statistics: violent crime and property crime. Violent crime includes murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny and auto theft. The following table lists the reported rate of these crimes per 100,000 people in the US and Australia for 1998.

| Crimes in the United States and Australia in 1998 | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | U.S. Rate | Australian Rate |
| Total Violent Crimes | 566.4 | 904.5 |
| - Murder | 6.8 | 1.8 |
| - Rape | 34.4 | 76.6 |
| - Robbery | 165.2 | 127.1 |
| - Aggravated Assault | 360.5 | 699.0 |
| Total Property Crimes | 4,049.1 | 5,524.5 |
| - Burglary | 862.0 | 1,812.9 |
| - Larceny | 2,728.1 | 3,008.9 |
| - Auto Theft | 459.0 | 702.7 |

Note: Rates are the number of crimes per 100,000 people. Australia data are not directly comparable as the category definitions reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics diverge somewhat from the categories reported by the U.S.

We tested for a relationship between 'safe storage' laws and crime in several ways. Most importantly we examined whether average crime rates fell in the states that adopted the laws after adoption and if there was any change in the trend of crime rates after adoption. We controlled for the same variables as for accidental deaths and suicides and we also controlled for arrest rates for the crime categories and execution rates. We also tested for age of children affected by the law and penalty of the law, both of which increased the magnitude of the results listed below.

The simplest results to interpret are for the change in average crime rates after adoption. We found strong evidence that average rape rates rose by 9.2 per cent, robbery rates rose by 10.6 per cent and burglary rates rose by 6.1 per cent following passage of a 'safe storage' law.

There was very weak evidence murder rates rose, aggravated assault rates declined, larceny rates rose and auto theft rates rose, but these results cannot be viewed with confidence. In the 15 states that adopted the laws by 1996, this implies that there were 3738 more rapes, 26,724 more robberies, and 69,741 more burglaries per year following adoption. By extrapolation, if the rest of the US had adopted the laws, there would have been an additional increase of 5070 rapes, 23,525 robberies and 24,058 burglaries.

It is very difficult to draw direct comparisons between countries because of all the factors that differ between the countries that cannot be controlled for. To put the aforementioned results into perspective for Australia, however, it is interesting to impose these results on the Australian crime data. If the storage provisions of the National Agreement on Gun Laws had the same effect in Australia that the 'safe storage' gun laws had in the US, then without the new laws Australia would have seen 1208 fewer sexual assaults, 2281 fewer robberies and 19,520 fewer burglaries in 1998. Again, these estimates should not be used as predictions about the National Agreement on Gun Laws, but they do place the US results into an Australian perspective.

Conclusions

Our recent study on the impacts of 'safe storage' gun laws in the US has revealed that it is very unlikely that they imparted any benefit to society and that they were probably very costly. One clear conclusion is that imposing 'one size fits all' storage practices did not make US society any safer and may have even made it less safe. As with most risky activities individuals have to engage in during their life, the best policy seems to be keeping the public fully informed about the various costs and benefits and then letting them make their own judgements about what is best for them.

Australian gun owners have an obvious obligation to obey the law. Within these requirements, however, there is some latitude and gun owners should be aware that there is strong evidence pointing to a large protective and deterrent effect from responsible gun ownership and use of firearms in self-defence while there is little evidence that storage practices are related to the level of accidental gun deaths and gun suicides. Regardless of emotive newspaper accounts, it is not a forgone conclusion that individuals are safer when their guns are kept locked up. This information is important in the long run as well, where laws can be changed. If the Australian experience is similar to America's, it may be the case that safety and welfare have been lowered by the storage provisions in the National Agreement on Gun Laws. While lobbying efforts must be targeted to where they will be most effective and accomplish the greatest good and the harmful effects of the storage provisions may be smaller in magnitude than other aspects of Australian gun control laws, the storage provisions should not be neglected in the overall battle for the basic rights of gun owners in Australia. ●

(Footnotes)

¹ John Lott and John Whitley, "Safe-Storage Gun Laws: Accidental Deaths, Suicides, and Crime," *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 44, October 2001, pp. 659-89.

² Vin Suprynowicz, *Las Vegas Review - Journal*, 24 September 2000, at 2K.

³ Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and Their Control*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997.

⁴ See Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and Their Control*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997, and David Kopel, *The Samurai, the Mountie, and the Cowboy*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1992, for international comparisons on hot-burglary rates.

[Editor's Note: Opinions expressed in this story are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SSAA.]

ATTENTION NSW MEMBERS

Complete this section ONLY if you wish to use your membership of the SSAA to support your "genuine reason" for having a shooters licence.

To register as an affiliate member of the SSAA (NSW) Inc or SSAA (ACT) Inc* please register your SSAA club activities by marking one or more of the following boxes:

- TARGET SHOOTING
 HUNTING
 COLLECTING

Note: Under NSW legislation, shooters licence holders who use club membership to support their genuine reason must fulfil the minimum attendance requirements below:

Target shooters –
 pistols - 6 range attendances each year.
 long arms - 4 range attendances each year.

Hunters –
 attendances at 2 club activities each year.

Collectors –
 attendance at one club meeting a year.

Once the issuing club or dealers stamp has been affixed this form may be used as proof of membership to satisfy the "genuine reason" requirements of the Firearms Act 1996.

*SSAA (ACT) is the holder of club approval for target and hunting only.

This application is made in full recognition of the Association's requirement for responsible and ethical behaviour. I undertake to do all in my power to preserve the good image of the sport and the Association.

I understand that the members breaking the code of ethics and or Association regulations will be subject to suspension or expulsion.

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____



SSAA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NEW RENEWAL

Membership Office, SSAA PO Box 906, St Marys NSW 1790 ABN 95 050 209 688
 Phone 02 9623 4900 Fax 02 9623 5900 E-mail mem@ssaa.org.au

Membership No.

Title (PLEASE CIRCLE) Mr Ms Mrs Branch _____

First name _____

Middle name _____

Last name _____

Address _____

Town/suburb _____

State _____ Postcode _____

Phone (bus/mob) _____ (priv) _____

Fax _____

E-mail _____

Date of Birth

Select Membership type - Fees are per year unless specified and include GST.

Membership categories

Adult (over 18 years) - \$65 current family member's No.

Family (no magazine - available to each immediate relative of a member paying the full adult rate) - \$50

Pensioner (available on production or photocopy of pension concession card) \$50

5-year Adult - \$325 GST on recreational club subscriptions

Member for life - \$1300 CANNOT be claimed as Input Tax. If, despite this you require a tax invoice please contact the membership office.

Overseas - \$70

Junior - \$20 (under 18 years) (magazine required)
 Parent's or guardian's signature

I also wish to donate \$..... to the SSAA

Payment options

Enclosed is payment for the amount of \$.....

Cheque **Money order** **Bankcard** **Mastercard** **Visacard**

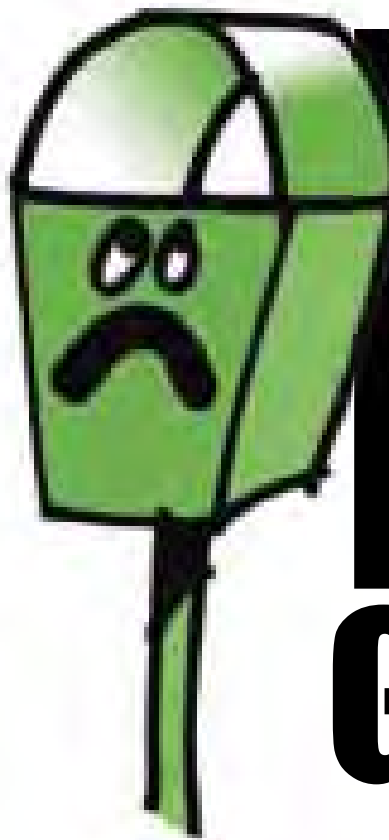
Card number

Expiry date Signature.....

Cheques payable to the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia

**MAIL TO: MEMBERSHIP OFFICE ,
 PO BOX 906, St Marys, NSW 1790**

SSAA Inc is subject to the provisions of the National Privacy Act. Should you want a copy of the SSAA Inc Privacy Statement or seek further information please write to PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061.



NOT GETTING IT?

Delivering Australia's most popular shooting sports magazine, the *Australian Shooter*, to your door is difficult if your current contact details are not on our records.

YOU NEED

to supply us your:

- current postal address
- **mobile phone number**
- e-mail address

WE NEED

to communicate with you if there is a problem with magazine delivery or urgent membership matters.

You can contact us - can we contact you?

Let's make it happen.

Ring Gary Fleetwood 0407 616 218

E-mail gf@ssaa.org.au



**Mobile
numbers
preferred**