

Locking Up Guns

Foiling Thieves, Children and the Momentarily Suicidal

Philip Alpers

**A Report Commissioned by the
New Zealand Police Association**

Guns In New Zealand: A Brief Background

In New Zealand, 250,000¹ licensed shooters² own an estimated 1.1 million firearms,³ enough for one in each occupied dwelling⁴ and sufficient to outnumber the combined small-arms of the police⁵ and armed forces⁶ by a ratio of 30 to 1.

We own 16 times as many guns per capita as the English and the Welsh,⁷ 60% more than the Australians⁸ but less than half as many as the residents of the United States.⁹ An additional 14,000 guns are imported to New Zealand in a typical year.¹⁰

Each day an average of seven firearm offences involving danger to life are reported to the police,¹¹ while one in five homicides are committed with a firearm.¹² On average, one person dies by gunshot in New Zealand every four days.¹³

Despite a common certainty that firearms are increasingly misused, there has been little local research. Although critical data on the misuse of firearms are collected by police, these are not made available.¹⁴

Locking Up Guns: foiling thieves, children and the momentarily suicidal
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Firearms Policy of the Police Federation of Australia and New Zealand

- That all firearms should be registered and recorded in a similar manner to pistols.
- That there be legislated control on the type and number of weapons which individuals may own or possess.
- The registered owner of all firearms be required by law to provide the proper security of the weapons.
- That uniform legislation and penalties be enacted by the various State Governments to assist in the control of firearms.
- The possession, sale and importation of automatic or semi-automatic firearms be prohibited except for Government Instrumentalities.

-- Amended policies of the Federation following the
Annual Conference, Rotorua, 9-13 Sept 1991

Introduction

Guns are in New Zealand to stay. In a country with 60% more guns per head of population than Australia, with such a strong tradition of safe use of firearms in sport and in pest control, calls to “ban guns” are ill-advised.

That said, police should receive strong support to prevent firearm-related crime, suicide and accidental shootings. No other group of individuals in New Zealand has the mandate to police gun security, nor a better incentive.

Given the focus of media coverage it is tempting to label the misuse of guns as a “crime problem.” This can be comforting, as the responsibility for guns then shifts to “the criminals,” who are of course people unlike us. Yet to categorise gun violence as a crime issue dismisses nearly 90% of gun deaths. In New Zealand, the overwhelming majority of firearm fatalities have nothing to do with crime. Nine-tenths of our fatal shootings are the result of suicide and accidents.¹⁵ Four-fifths of non-fatal firearm injuries are self-inflicted or unintentional.¹⁶

To those who operate this country’s only national instant-response social service, the New Zealand Police, this is nothing new. Every gun suicide, every accidental shooting of a child or a hunter becomes a painful memory for the police who must by law attend the scene. At other times, for each officer comes the dread thought of confronting a firearm in the line of duty. More than likely it will be a stolen gun.

It is the headline-grabbing effect of the illegal “crime gun” which guarantees it more attention than the lawful, homely firearms which kill nine-tenths of shooting victims. Accordingly, public opinion seems willing to tackle the problem of guns in crime while little attention is paid to the much more common “sporting gun” stored, seemingly harmlessly, in sports shops, on farms and in homes.

This study shows that both weapons are one and the same, separated only by a change of intent or a lapse of security. We hope the information contained here will assist gun owners, police and policymakers to restrict the frequent movement of guns from lawful to unlawful use.

Philip Alpers
Auckland
26 February 1996

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

Evening Post

Monday, February 5, 1996

BOY, 5, SMASHES ARMS CABINET, GRABS RIFLE

PLUS

Waterfront casino
site sale opposed

“The best way of preventing the use of firearms by criminals is to stop burglars and thieves getting hold of them in the first place.”

R N Macdonald, Commissioner of Police
The Arms Code, March 1995

The Importance of Gun Theft

If New Zealanders choose to avoid the American gun experience, our main advantage may be the ocean around us. In New York, handgun possession has been illegal since 1911, yet residents need only cross a river to buy firearms in a state with looser laws. Smuggling guns to New Zealand is much more difficult and illegal imports are rare.¹⁷

Instead, police contend that almost every gun used in crime in New Zealand was lawfully imported and came from the collection of a licensed shooter.¹⁸ As Commissioner Macdonald suggests above, to prevent further firearms reaching the hands of criminals, authorities can safely concentrate their efforts on the theft of guns from licensed owners.

A Hundred Guns A Month

In the late 1980s, police abandoned the task of counting stolen guns. Citing “meaningless” Wanganui Computer printouts as the cause, a spokesman wrote recently: “I cannot give a best estimate of the number of firearms stolen each year.”¹⁹

The last available national figures show an average 1,200 firearms stolen in each of the years 1983-1987, or 100 guns a month.²⁰ Despite much tighter restrictions on ownership, handguns (pistols and revolvers) were being stolen at the rate of one a week.²¹ In the year ended March 1988, Auckland police reported 637 firearms stolen on their patch alone. These included several machine guns.²²

In the decade since, reported violent offences with firearms have doubled.²³ Although no figures exist, it seems likely that the number of guns stolen in 1995 has risen well beyond the 1987 level of two dozen a week. Occasional statements in local papers suggest a higher rate:

“Eight burglaries of rural houses involved gun thefts this week. Most firearms are not being locked up.”

-- Sgt Ivan Pilcher, NZ Police, Te Puke. Bay of Plenty Times, 4 Mar 1994

“From July 1993 until June 1994, 65 firearms were stolen from throughout the Southland area and Ms Slaughter said the bulk of these were unsecured.”

-- Jill Slaughter, District Arms Officer, NZ Police, Invercargill.
Southland Weekend Express, 14 Sep 1994

Previous Research: Stolen Guns Used In Crime

In a recent three-year survey of gun homicide in New Zealand, police reported that 22.5% of victims were shot with a gun which had been unlawfully taken from its licensed owner.²⁴ In a study of non-fatal misuse of firearms (careless use to armed robbery), police reported that 31% of the guns involved had been stolen by the offender. Another 45% were of unknown origin, possibly stolen.²⁵

In the light of these findings the New Zealand Police Association commissioned the following, more detailed study of gun theft and storage.

Survey Methods

The police computer system already contains much of the information needed to provide a count of firearms reported stolen and much more. However this data is not extracted by police, who say they have no requirement for it.¹⁴

Given the inaccessibility of official data, the only practical method of locating thefts on a national scale is by way of a news media case-based study. We engaged a commercial clipping bureau to provide every item mentioning guns which appeared in a magazine or a metropolitan, provincial or suburban newspaper during the 21-month period from 24 January 1994 to 23 October 1995. Of 1,809 clippings, 94 referred to the theft of one or more firearms.

A copy of each theft clipping was sent to the relevant Police District Commander along with a standardised questionnaire and a request for its completion under the Official Information Act. A written response from police was received in 100% of cases. Three of the 94 were excluded when police reported that no theft was proven; three more when police could not locate case files or provide further information.

The 88 remaining cases were double-entered in an established database at the Injury Prevention Research Centre, Auckland University School of Medicine. Data verification and biometric analysis were performed by a qualified epidemiologist employing the Epi-Info computer program. The survey results are published in their entirety in Tables 1-6 on pages 27-28.

Disclaimer

The author's interpretation of these results does not necessarily reflect the views of survey epidemiologist James Gardiner, the Auckland University School of Medicine or its Injury Prevention Research Centre.

Survey Results

During the 21-month survey interval, 398 firearms were reported stolen in 88 incidents, an average of 4.5 per theft.

Newspapers seem more likely to report large-scale thefts, perhaps explaining the high average number of guns taken. Despite this, 75 (72%) of the thefts in our survey involved only one, two or three guns stolen. New Zealanders own three or four guns for every licensed shooter,^{1,3} so three-quarters of the thefts in this study involved a haul typical of a gun-owning household.

If 100 guns are stolen each month (1983-87 figures), then for every gun taken in a press-reported incident, four more currently go unreported.

Common Targets

Of the 88 *incidents* of theft, 45 (51%) occurred at an urban dwelling, 23 (26%) at a rural dwelling, eight (9%) involved unattended vehicles, six (7%) occurred at business premises, five (6%) at a farm outbuilding, while one theft (1%) was from a suburban shooting club.

Thus 68 (77%) of incidents were thefts from private homes.

Of the 398 *firearms stolen* during these incidents, 239 (60%) were taken from an urban dwelling, 70 (18%) from a rural dwelling, 57 (14%) from business premises, 12 (3%) from a farm outbuilding, 11 (3%) from a shooting club and nine (2%) from unattended vehicles.

Thus 309 (78%) of guns stolen were taken from private homes.

Country v City

All buildings or vehicles from which guns were stolen were also classified by responding police under the headings Rural, Town or City. Here a marked difference emerges.

Of the 88 *incidents*, 35 (40%) were rural, 29 (33%) occurred in towns and 24 (27%) in cities.

Of the 398 *firearms stolen* during these incidents, 178 (45%) were taken from a city address, 126 (32%) from a rural location and 94 (23%) from a town.

So while 73% of thefts occurred in rural areas or country towns, only 55% of guns stolen were taken in these thefts. This may be explained by the concentration of large-scale firearm thefts in cities.

Type of Gun

Of the 398 firearms stolen, 220 (55%) were rifles, 135 (34%) shotguns and 20 (5%) handguns. The remaining 23 (6%) were air or gas-powered guns. These figures are broken down by gun type in Table 3 on page 27.

The proportion of long guns (shotguns and rifles) stolen is roughly mirrored by their estimated ratios in legal ownership.²⁶ Although air- and gas-powered guns are far more common than these theft data would indicate, it is likely that airgun thefts are rarely considered newsworthy enough to print.

Licensing Status of the Gun Owner

Of the 88 owners who reported weapons stolen, 83 (94%) were licensed gun owners. This is hardly surprising, as few unlicensed gun owners would report a theft to police. Of the remainder, two were not licensed, one had only airguns stolen (no licence required) and in two cases the owner's licensing status was unknown.

Guns Stolen With Ammunition

Of the 398 firearms stolen, 220 (55%) were reported as having been stolen complete with ammunition. The remaining 178 (45%) were stolen without ammunition.

Deactivated Firearms

Of the firearms stolen, 69 (17%) were reported by police as having been deactivated (rendered incapable of firing) by their owners.

Secure/Insecure Storage

In 46 of 88 incidents of theft (52%), firearms were stored insecurely, i.e. not in compliance with the Arms Regulations in force since July 1993. In 34 incidents (39%), firearms were stored securely in compliance with the regulations. In 8 cases (9%), police reported that the security of storage was unknown.

Of 398 firearms stolen, 259 (65%) were stored securely in compliance with the regulations; 112 (28%) were insecurely stored, and 27 weapons (7%) were stolen from unknown security.


Further examination of these data indicates that the owners of larger gun collections (twenty weapons or more) were less likely to be in breach of safe storage regulations. This would account for the difference between the two findings above.

Police Action Taken

Following the 46 incidents in which insecure storage was reported, police took some action to improve the owner's security in 29 cases (63%). In one of these cases a gun owner's licence was revoked. In the remaining 17 cases (37%), police reported no action taken. In 23 cases of theft from insecure storage (50%) police took no action to improve security beyond a verbal warning to the gun owner. A detailed account of all police actions is set out in Table 5 on page 28.

Stolen Guns Used in Violence

In 20 (23%) of the 88 incidents of theft, police reported that one or more of the stolen guns were later involved in a violent event. These were: five murders, two suicides, an attempted murder, two kidnappings, two robberies, one drug exchange and seven armed disputes. As many firearms are not identified during violent events such as armed robbery, the actual proportion may be considerably higher.



STOP PRESS

Since this report was first printed, the following information has come to hand:

Report of the Police Complaints Authority on the Fatal Shooting of Eric Bruce Gellatly at Invercargill (Gellatly stole a shotgun from an insecure gun rack in a sports store). Sir John Jeffries, 14 March 1996:

“Arising out of this tragic incident and its examination I make a recommendation to the Commissioner that there be instituted as soon as possible a complete review of the statutory regulations and Police guidelines on the control and storage of guns, ammunition, weapons and explosives, particularly in places to which the public have access.”

“Police say they have already acted on a key finding in the Police Complaints Authority report. Police Commissioner Richard Macdonald said regional police commanders were told in January to review security of firearms and ammunition held by dealers and ensure dealers’ premises met security standards.”

-- Waikato Times, 14 Mar 1996

Three .22 rifles, an air pistol and an air rifle were stolen from a Greymouth gun shop. Two .22 single shot pistols and a .38 revolver were also taken from a Rapahoe house.

-- Greymouth Evening Star, 12 Feb 1996

“Gun-shop Security Has Already Improved” -- Police.

-- Otago Daily Times, 14 Mar 1996

Thieves broke into a gun dealer’s shop in Christchurch, stealing a Webley .380 calibre pistol, a 7mm revolver, a double-barrel pocket pistol, a pump-action shotgun and a semi-automatic shotgun.

-- The Press, 28 Feb 1996

“Police Minister John Luxton said yesterday he would seek a report from police on gunshop security before he decided if the law needed to be tightened.”

-- The Dominion, 15 Mar 1996

Discussion & Case Histories

The gun thefts reported in this survey illustrate most aspects of the day-to-day operations of current firearm storage laws. In the following section, selected examples are combined with a few recent case histories from outside the survey period.

Guns on Farms

“A Ranfurly man stole firearms from a farm while the owners were milking the cows.”

-- Waimate Advertiser, 17 May 1995

“Three rifles were stolen from an Ararua farmhouse while the owner was milking his cows.”

-- Northern Advocate, 19 Sept 1994

In a recent survey of New Zealand farmers and farm workers, 43% reported firearms stored in unlocked areas.²⁷ This implies that 34,000 farming families are currently in breach of the security provisions of the Arms Regulations. Despite police statements that “Farmers are being plagued by thieves in search of firearms” and “Gun-owning farmers are to be targeted by police who say they make it too easy for thieves to get firearms,”²⁸ a promised national publicity campaign has yet to materialise.

Unattended Vehicles

Of the nine firearms stolen from unattended vehicles, all were taken in rural areas or country towns. Despite legislation effective since 1993 which prohibits firearms in unsecured or unattended vehicles, neglect is still widespread. Police issue warnings in the media but rarely take action.

- In Gisborne, a respected horticulturist and chairman of the region’s Fruitgrowers’ Federation was shot dead by a man said to be his lover. The killer used a shotgun stolen some time earlier from a tractor parked in a paddock.
- When Stephen Matchitt entered the Bay View Hotel, Kaiaua, for the last time he was armed with three guns. The shotgun he used to kill the publican and a patron had been stolen a week earlier from an unattended, unlocked vehicle parked in a shed at a local farm. The two rifles he then used to shoot up the pub and its gaming machines had been stolen in separate local burglaries. In one theft, six firearms were taken from an unlocked wardrobe. In the other, four guns were stolen from a vacant farm house. Police could locate no files to suggest that the gun owners had suffered any sanction for insecure storage.
- A rifle and 40 rounds of ammunition were stolen from a vehicle near Blenheim. Local police commented on “The large number of hunters who regularly left their weapons in vehicles following a day out... [this] hunter’s negligence was a breach of the Arms Act.” The gun owner was not penalised.

- When a rifle was stolen from an unlocked, unattended vehicle parked outside a hotel in Alexandra, police gave the owner a verbal warning.
- In Taumarunui a champion shooter, New Zealand representative in his discipline and office holder in a national shooting organisation, loaded his car with firearms the night before a competition. Next morning the vehicle had disappeared from his carport complete with guns. In a 1993 letter the same man urged the author of this study to “target the unsafe owners out there, to get a higher interest in Gun Security.” Criticising the licensed shooter whose firearm was stolen from an unattended vehicle, then used by Stephen Matchitt to kill the publican and a patron at the Bayview Hotel, Kaiaua, he wrote: “The owner of that weapon would not be a fit and proper person to own a weapon.” In relation to the theft of his own guns, the Taumarunui man received a written warning from police. He no longer serves as a Mountain Safety Council/NZ Police firearms safety instructor.
- A rifle was stolen from an unattended vehicle left on the roadside north of Ross while its owner went hunting. No police action followed.

Although it does not involve a theft, the following example is also worthy of mention:

- Police found a shotgun and ammunition left in a utility vehicle in a car park outside a Dargaville hotel. The owner, a prominent local businessman, was given a warning by police who told the local paper: “This is simply not acceptable. It is illegal... and people should realise that they may lose their firearms licence from this type of behaviour.” Two nights later the same shooter was found intoxicated with the same ute, same gun, once again insecure in the pub carpark. Investigating police asked that his licence be revoked, but a commissioned officer decided against it.

Ammunition and Deactivation

To prevent the theft of weapons ready to fire, the Arms Regulations require that owners *either* store guns separately from ammunition *or* deactivate the guns in such a way as to make them unusable. In this survey most guns were stolen complete with ammunition, indicating that the first precaution is commonly neglected.

Deactivation, the second option, presents problems of its own. Although theft victims told police that 17% of guns were disabled when stolen (a disappointing level of compliance on its own), there are signs that this was not always the case. Even if police attend the scene of a theft they often have only the owner’s assurance that a gun was deactivated when stolen. In this survey at least eleven “disabled” weapons were in fact fully operational. As in the following cases, the missing part -- a rifle bolt -- had also been stolen from its own separate hiding place:

- Teenagers who burgled a suburban Christchurch home got away with a deactivated .303 rifle. The gun had been insecurely stored in an unlocked wardrobe, its ammunition in the same room but its bolt hidden elsewhere. Later the same day the boys returned, located the missing part and took it to a local flat. Drunk on stolen wine, two of them assembled and loaded the gun. Lying on a mattress, Michael

“Miggs” Tyro-Whittaker (13) held the rifle pointed to his own head and asked his best friend (14) to pull the trigger. The unnamed youth protested that the gun might be loaded, was assured it wasn’t, and so shot his friend dead. Police said that despite the breach of storage regulations the gun owner’s licence was not revoked as this would have been “too harsh.”

- A Kaukapakapa man who stored his rifle and ammunition separately found this to be of no use when the thief comes from within the family. His mentally disturbed son found all that was needed to shoot himself.

While most rifles were bolt-action models, the simple and quick removal of this vital part covered a large proportion of firearms. However few shotguns or semi-automatic, lever- and pump-action rifles are as readily deactivated. In recent years it is possible that such weapons have come to outnumber those which are easily rendered inoperative.

Another method of deactivation recommended by police is a trigger lock. In no case in this survey did police advise that a stolen gun had been fitted with such a device.

Deactivation of Restricted Weapons

An additional provision of the law requires that restricted weapons (submachine guns, machine guns, mortars, grenade launchers etc.) must at all times be “rendered inoperable by the removal of a vital part.” In at least the following cases this was overlooked:

- Two intruders fired a sawn-off shotgun during a late-night raid on the Manawatu property of a prominent local businessman, district councillor and gun collector. Fifty-seven firearms were taken, including five machineguns, eight submachine guns, 15 rifles and military-style semi-automatics (MSSAs), 4 shotguns, 23 handguns, plus ammunition. Only the five machineguns were deactivated in compliance with the law. Local police declined a recommendation from Police National Headquarters that the collector’s licence be revoked, instead giving him a written warning for non-compliance. One of the investigating officers told the author: “He was the victim. He’d had a rough time and there was no point hammering him.”
- An Auckland gun collector hid his weapons in a sea chest under a bed in his Waiheke Island bach. These included a working machine gun once mounted on a tank, 32 rifles, five pistols, a twin-barrelled .450 “elephant rifle” and a grenade launcher. The collector then rented his bach to a Mongrel Mob associate and went overseas. On his return both the weapons and the tenant were gone. The grenade launcher was later used in a bank robbery, while the machine gun and a pistol were seized by police from another licensed gun collector. This man was charged with illegal possession, but the case was later dropped.
- A Rangiora collector lost two operational submachine guns, two semi-automatic pistols, five revolvers and thousands of rounds of ammunition to burglars. Police were disappointed to discover they lacked a record of having checked his “bare minimum” firearm security as required of them by law. Despite the report of

investigating officers that the collector had “failed to comply” by neglecting to deactivate his submachine guns, police decided not to revoke his licence. After one submachine gun was discovered buried at a gang address in Christchurch, the collector negotiated with his insurance company to buy it back.

Gun Collectors

Three thousand New Zealand gun collectors hold licence endorsements which allow them to possess weapons ranging from handguns and machine guns to mortars and anti-aircraft guns. As no special licence is required to keep an unlimited number of long guns, thousands of additional gun owners keep sizeable collections of shotguns and rifles. Registration of individual long guns was abandoned in the 1980s, so police no longer keep track of these.

Collectors present an attractive target for thieves, not always from outside the family. Several handguns owned by Billy T James went missing when he died, while larger collections have been targeted by armed robbers:

- A 63 year-old woman stroke victim, asleep at home in Te Atatu, was woken by three baton-wielding men demanding the keys to her son’s gun safe. The raiders knew he was a gun collector. The woman couldn’t help, so the robbers left.
- A pensioner had inherited a 400-gun collection from his father. He was watching Saturday-night TV in his suburban Auckland home when four robbers jammed a box over his head, tied him up and stole 68 rifles and shotguns, plus ammunition.
- A Northland man well known for his gun collection lost 18 handguns, 13 rifles (including two military-style semi-automatics, or MSSAs), shotguns and ammunition to thieves who smashed into a secure gun room at his farmhouse.
- Veteran bank robber and “most-wanted criminal” Leslie Maurice Green (56) was arrested in Auckland with two .44 magnum revolvers. A licensed arms collector in Levin told police the guns had been stolen from him, then voluntarily surrendered his gun collector’s endorsement following further inquiries. The former collector was later convicted of unlawful possession of an MSSA and a pistol.
- Thieves took two handguns, a shotgun and a rifle from the home of a Hawke’s Bay collector after locating a key to his safe.
- A Rakaia gun collector lost 4 shotguns and ammunition kept in a locked cupboard at his holiday bach. Five rifles were left behind.
- When fourteen rifles were stolen from the suburban Wellington home of an elderly gun collector, police said the thieves knew what they were after.

In some cases, security breaches among collectors are only discovered by accident:

- Hamilton police looking for stolen goods discovered 22 insecurely stored firearms including a submachine gun and 14 handguns at the home of a licensed gun collector. The shed in which most of the firearms were kept “could have been kicked open by a five year-old.” A loaded revolver was found in the man’s bedroom, another in his wife’s bedside drawer. Stickers on the house proclaimed: “This house is protected by Smith & Wesson.” The officer who revoked the collector’s licence was taken aback when he was criticised by colleagues for being “too hard” on the man.

Gun Dealers

Four hundred New Zealanders are licensed arms dealers. Some operate reputable gun shops and sporting goods stores, but many trade from home without the knowledge of their local authorities. Thousands more deal through gun fairs and barter. A basic ‘A’ licence holder can buy and sell unlimited long guns (but not MSSAs) while avoiding the necessity for a dealer’s licence, and detailed police scrutiny. They, too lose guns:

- When twelve firearms were stolen from a gun dealer’s shed in Morrinsville, police voiced concern that they may be used in other crimes.
- In Gisborne an elderly licensed arms dealer had twelve firearms stolen from his home business. His security was found to be inadequate, so police revoked his licences.
- Forty-two firearms were taken from a “gun dealer” who in fact did not require a dealers’ licence to run his backyard gunsmithing business. Almost immediately one of his guns turned up in a dairy robbery.
- A Hawke’s Bay arms dealer and sports store lost ten shotguns in a burglary. Eight were recovered.

Arms dealers also act as a magnet for people with an unhealthy interest in guns. In 1976 Harry Thompson shot and killed a young constable while raiding an Invercargill sports store. In 1983 Joseph Simpson entered a sporting goods store in Auckland’s Queen Street and held a knife to the manager’s throat. During a four-hour standoff he fired 30 shots from firearms taken from display racks. Simpson was captured after wounding police dog Luke. Given these precedents, two 1995 cases seemed like carbon copies:

- Psychiatric patient Eric Gellatly broke into an Invercargill sports store, liberated several firearms and ammunition, then shot at police. The next day he ran out firing wildly and was shot dead.
- Psychiatric patient Barry Radcliffe, a Whangarei man with a fascination for guns, was a familiar figure to local arms dealers. After five years’ window shopping he entered a sports store and wrenched a lever-action pig-hunting rifle from a police-approved display rack. When the single round he’d brought with him didn’t fit, Radcliffe took ammunition from a glass display case and began shooting up the shop. A short while later he was shot dead by police as he ambled out of the store.

Protected Premises

Despite stringent security, even shooting clubs and armouries are not immune to theft. One example reported in the press during this survey:

- Eleven rifles and 1,100 rounds of ammunition were stolen from the New Plymouth Smallbore Rifle Club's suburban East End clubrooms. The club was also broken into 15 years ago, when one of three rifles stolen was later cut down and used to shoot open a lock during a burglary.

In another incident in the survey period which didn't make the papers:

- A Christchurch indoor pistol range applied for permission to provide commercial shooting. Due to handgun prohibitions in many overseas countries this was said to be a potential magnet for Asian tourists. Police refused to grant the considerable dispensation needed, citing as just one reason the risk that a member of the public might steal a gun. This possibility was discounted by the applicant. Then one Sunday afternoon an opportunist thief with a drug habit wandered unchallenged onto the still-private range and stole a 9mm Glock semi-automatic pistol. The gun belonged to the range proprietor, a pistol importer and arms dealer who told the author: "Procedures (at the range) have been changed, but there is always the opportunist thief who will find an opportunity."

Nor do government premises escape. During 1991-94 one Army pistol was stolen from an armoury while two more went missing in transit. Two Sterling submachine guns, eleven rifles and a flare pistol were stolen from the Air Force. These were later recovered. In a 1995 incident in which no firearms were involved, burglars took 5,000 rounds of rifle ammunition from a Waikato District Council store. It was the second such theft in six weeks.

Handguns

The estimated number of fireable registered handguns (pistols and revolvers) in New Zealand is 15,000 to 20,000, or less than 2% of all legally held firearms.²⁹ Before being issued with a special endorsement to their existing firearms licence to permit the possession of a handgun, applicants are more strictly vetted by police. Minimum home storage for a handgun is a steel safe approved following on-site inspection by an arms officer. Weapons must be transported in a locked container, and then only to or from a certified pistol range, dealer or repair shop. Pistol club newsletters remind members to cover their car number plates when parked at the range, lest burglars target their homes.

Given these levels of security, the rate of handgun theft could be expected to remain lower than the ratio of these weapons among all privately held guns (2%). Yet handguns reported stolen in this survey totalled 5%, more than twice their proportion in civilian ownership.

Data from police in two 1995 surveys found that handguns were used in homicide and non-fatal gun misuse in New Zealand at a rate more than six times higher than their distribution among legal firearms.^{30, 31} These findings, along with the present survey could warn of the growth of a handgun culture, where easily concealable pistols and revolvers are illegally held and carried on the pretence of self defence.

Subsequent Use of Guns in Violence

A recent three-year survey of gun homicide examined those cases where the secure/insecure storage of a firearm was a factor in its availability to the offender. In 89% of these killings, police reported that the firearm was taken without permission from insecure storage which breached the Arms Regulations at the time. Only one firearm stolen for a killing was securely stored according to the law when taken.³²

To the victims, families and police involved in the following recent cases, the origin of the gun and its easy availability to the offender were of considerable importance:

- Turning out to a domestic dispute, Whataroa police constable Ian Price was threatened with a sawn-off shotgun, then chased by the offender who shot himself dead shortly afterwards. The shotgun and a .303 rifle had been stolen from insecure storage at a local restaurant only days earlier, but the owner had not reported the theft. The exchange which occurred between the policeman who'd faced the shotgun and the owner of the weapon has been described as a "verbal warning." No sanction was imposed for careless storage.
- Two petty thieves went on a rampage of burglary through the Coromandel and the Waikato. Under a bed in an unoccupied beach holiday home they found an unlocked box containing a .22 rifle and ammunition. The gun's bolt was hidden in a drawer in another bedroom, but that was also taken. A few days later the two youths used the rifle to murder an elderly Te Akau couple, John & Josephine Harrison. The owner's reaction to the murders was: "Bloody horror at my own neglect and carelessness. It was one of the worst things that ever happened to me. If those madmen hadn't got my rifle, those two people wouldn't have been killed. I have dreadful agonies about it." He was surprised that police made no mention of his carelessness. "They didn't say a word -- no admonishment." Police later wrote that the gun owner was not in breach of the 1992 Arms Regulations as, due to his place in the alphabet he "will not be legally required to comply until 1996."³³ In fact the new regulations had been in force since July 1993. The gun owner now tells his shooting club friends: "There's not many things you can do to stop these bastards" (criminals). "One thing you can do is lock away your rifle. The cost of gun security is minimal compared to the cost to others of getting it stolen." Police offered to return the gun after the murder trial, but the owner asked them to dispose of it -- then bought another. He locks the new gun in a security rack, but worries that he may not be able to release it quickly enough to defend himself. He told the author that if an intruder entered his home "especially if he was black and looked nasty, I'd blow his bloody brains off without hesitation."³⁴

- In Wainuiomata, a man involved in a domestic dispute took his brother's rifle from insecure storage and began shooting up the neighbourhood. He lost both legs to police bullets.
- After she refused to have him back, a 22 year-old Maitaha man decided to kill his estranged partner. Taking a shotgun from insecure storage at his father's home, he entered her flat and shot the 20 year-old mother of two in the head, then killed himself.
- A Queenstown woman took a shotgun and a rifle from an unlocked cupboard at a friend's home. She used both guns to kill her former partner after accusing him of sexually abusing their young son. No police action was taken against the owner of the guns.
- A week after nine firearms and ammunition were taken from insecure storage at a Hawke's Bay home, one of the stolen shotguns was recovered from a well-known Hastings criminal who told police he was going to rob a bank with it. The gun's owner received a verbal warning.
- In Tokoroa, a licensed gun owner was distracted by a young relative while another youth removed his hunting rifle from insecure storage. The gun was rented for \$200 to a man who used it to murder another in a drug ripoff. Later the same day the killer returned, and the boys slipped the gun back into the house. Its owner had no idea it had been taken until police arrived. No sanction was imposed for his lack of security.
- Enraged when her husband told her he was having an affair, a Dunedin woman hired a suitor of her own to kill him. Her friend took a rifle from insecure storage at a local farm, shot the husband dead, then returned the weapon without detection. No sanction was imposed on the owner for his lack of security.
- Two men were arrested after an armed robbery of an Awanui dairy in which both brandished shotguns. They'd stolen the gun in a burglary in Kaitaia earlier that day.
- A 15 year-old Whakatane youth took guns and ammunition from insecure storage at his uncle's home, then used one of them to shoot a rival. The uncle had once secured the guns by padlocking a wardrobe, but his nephews forced the door so often to obtain guns for hunting that he'd given up repairing it and left the wardrobe unsecured. The owner temporarily surrendered his firearms pending security improvements. No sanction was imposed.

Suicide, Accidents and Children

Four of the guns stolen in this study are known to have been subsequently used in suicides, two of which were murder/suicides. No unintentional deaths or injuries were reported to have been inflicted with stolen guns identified in this study.

As non-criminal incidents account for 78-90% of gun injury and death,^{35, 36} this indicates that the overwhelming majority of victims in all shootings are injured and killed by lawfully held guns.

After this survey closed, a five year-old Paraparaumu boy hacked open his Dad's lightly fortified gun cabinet with an axe, then dragged a working .303 rifle next door to show a neighbour.³⁷ It is here, in suicide and accidental injury -- especially among the young -- that the ready availability of a firearm can make the difference between a lethal incident, an unsuccessful suicide attempt, a wounding, or no injury at all. If no gun is available, there can be no shooting, while other methods of injury are far less lethal.

Gun owners who are tempted to neglect secure storage of their firearms might also reflect on statistics which show that:

- In a home with a gun, the person most at risk is the owner's own adolescent son, from suicide³⁸
- New Zealand males aged 15-24 have the highest per capita rate of suicide in the developed world.³⁹
- Access to firearms brings with it an increased risk that gunshot will be chosen as the method of suicide.^{40, 41}

As three world experts on gun suicide put it:

“Firearms in the homes of suicidal or potentially suicidal adolescents markedly increase their risk for suicide. In fact, the odds that potentially suicidal adolescents will kill themselves go up 75-fold when a gun is kept in the home... although guns do not make violence, they do make it fatal.”⁴²

Keeping Children Safe

This country has a mercifully low rate of child death and injury by gun. On average each year, a dozen children are hospitalised following accidental shootings, while two or three are killed.⁴³ Yet the debate over child safety in the face of increased calls for guns in the home for self defence has only just begun. By definition, such weapons are kept loaded and easily accessible.

From a shooters' point of view the term “gun safety” often means giving a child a gun as early as possible in the hope that he or she will become “gun safe” after handling it. Pediatricians and child safety workers dispute this, saying it is both dangerous and unfair to pass down to children the responsibility for their own safety in the presence of a gun:

“Children are not little adults. We do not believe, given their developmental limitations and unpredictability, that education or training is the answer. Much better, in our opinion to keep guns out of the hands of children.”

-- Reena Kokotailo, Director, SafeKids, Starship Children's Health, Auckland

On the subject of childproof gun storage, New Zealand's most prominent firearms safety organisation, the Mountain Safety Council, reminds gun owners:

“Remember this is an adult's responsibility.”

-- Firearm Safety: Outdoor Kitset Module 11, NZMC 1986.

News media tend to highlight guns in crime while maintaining relative silence on the majority of gun death and injury, which is non-criminal. As a result, gun owners and parents may only feel the need to protect their weapons from an external threat, or “stranger danger.” In reality, most of the dangers -- especially for curious children and momentarily suicidal adolescent youth -- are much closer to home.

Enforcement and Revocation

Although police reported that gun owners in 46 thefts had breached the storage provisions of the Arms Regulations, in half these cases no preventive or deterrent action was taken beyond a verbal warning. One reason for the general reluctance to penalise negligent owners was explained by the national coordinator of firearms licensing at Police National Headquarters:

“If we start penalising people for bad storage they'll stop reporting thefts.”

-- Insp. John Coote. Conversation with the author, 23 June 1995.

Another police officer recommended that a gun collector lose his licence for allowing his submachine guns to be stolen in ready-to-fire condition, complete with ammunition and spare magazines. But a senior officer was concerned that if police caught the offenders they may need the collector's testimony in court. As revoking the man's licence could have made his co-operation less likely, no action was taken.

Even some signals from above have not encouraged revocation. As a former firearms licensing coordinator explained to the troops:

“Note that a breach [of Reg 19, ‘reasonable steps’ to secure firearms] is not an offence, it is merely grounds for revocation should the police choose to do so. Normally, such a course would be followed only in serious or repeat situations. Warnings will usually be appropriate and sufficient.”

-- Insp. Phil Gubb. Administrative Instruction No 4 to all Police Regions & Districts. PNHQ Wellington, 21 December 1992

Warnings are undoubtedly appropriate and sufficient for minor breaches. Yet as this report shows, even the most negligent acts -- those with catastrophic consequences for victims and their families -- rarely attract any form of penalty which could be seen as a signal to others.

Perhaps the most constant barrier to effective deterrence of insecure storage is the lack of flexibility in penalties. Police are faced with a “revoke or nothing” choice which makes their decision less than simple. No custodial or financial penalties exist for breaching the storage requirements contained in the Arms Regulations. The only sanction is to revoke the gun owner’s licence. If the only penalty for speeding was revocation of a driver’s licence, the law would swiftly fall into disuse and disrepute.

Even when a police officer does push for revocation and a commissioned officer agrees, judges on appeal are often susceptible to special pleading from a plaintiff who simply must have a gun.

Despite this, almost every week around the country, local police press releases bristle with warnings that “shooters’ licences *will* be revoked” if they’re caught with insecurely stored weapons. These same arms officers concede privately that they know this to be an empty threat.

As Police Headquarters explain:

“The requirement for security and storage is merely a requirement. Breach of Regulation 19 [secure storage] of the Arms Regulations is not an offence and it is extremely unlikely that a District Court Judge would on review uphold such a decision unless there were other grounds and reasons.”

-- Insp. John Coote. Coordinator, Firearms Licensing.
Letter to the author, 9 August 1994.

Several recent reversals in court -- one involving a successful \$72,000 damages claim against the police -- have reinforced this opinion.

These obstacles and others combine to guarantee dysfunction. The result is that in late 1995, two years after the current gun storage regime came into force, police could not provide a single example of a gun owner’s licence having been revoked for insecure storage. After a nation-wide hunt and some encouragement to districts with cases of spectacular negligence on their books, a mere two examples have now emerged from a three-year period.

None of this is lost on gun owners and their spokespeople. A recent comment from the proprietor of New Zealand’s largest arms dealership may not be too much of an exaggeration:

“I would say about 90% of shooters are not obeying the (storage) law.”

-- David Tipple, Gun City Group. The Press, 19 April 1994.

Finally, an indication that some thought is going into the problem at Headquarters:

“What we really need in these situations is an infringement fee system, where a ticket can be written out on the spot, with a monetary penalty, similar to the speed camera parking infringements. There is a major problem in the rural areas.”

-- Insp. John Coote. Wayne Mowat Show, National Radio 13 July 1995

Overseas Comparisons

New Zealand is by no means alone with the problems of gun theft and insecure storage, though legislation in foreign jurisdictions varies widely. In the United States, thousands of municipal, state and federal gun laws clash with each other, while pro-gun groups and the arms trade mount fierce opposition to most forms of record-keeping and research. Agencies and academics whose work disproves the claims of the gun lobby are routinely abused and intimidated. As a result, the country with the worst gun problem maintains perhaps the most fragmented and incomplete firearms data among Western nations.

In the United Kingdom, where restrictive laws were originally devised to keep firearms out of the hands of the lower classes, guns are still so rare that all measures of abuse including gun theft in England, Scotland and Wales remain at a fraction of New Zealand levels. However 51 local police forces differ, sometimes markedly, in both record-keeping and enforcement.

In Australia, state governments maintain a patchwork quilt of conflicting firearm legislation while failing to agree on even the basic tenets of gun control. Western Australia and Victoria are more strictly legislated than New Zealand, while Queensland and Tasmania are considerably less so. Among the results: a Perth man flies to Hobart to buy a gun to shoot himself in a local motel, while another man unable to purchase firearms in the Northern Territory drives to Brisbane, buys four guns then returns to the Top End to shoot five people.

Of all countries with cultural and legislative similarities to New Zealand, Canada provides the most comprehensive information on firearms. At a federal level the Department of Justice sets policy to be administered by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, while local police forces observe the same set of rules. The readiness of Canadians to effectively tackle the abuse of firearms stems from a national determination to avoid the levels of gun trauma they witness to the south.

Many of the data from foreign jurisdictions are collected in such a way as to defy accurate comparison with New Zealand figures. However, some examples from overseas countries do appear to have relevance:

- A combination of locked, unloaded gun storage, deactivation and/or ammunition separation is mandatory in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Canada. The laws of Western Australia and the Northern Territory call for “reasonable” but unstipulated security precautions.^{44, 45, 46, 47}
- After the Victorian state government passed legislation making it an offence not to lock guns away, “some hundreds” of residents were prosecuted for insecure storage.⁴⁸ This is now the most common offence for which gun owners lose their licence at an appeal hearing in Victoria, even outnumbering revocations following family violence.⁴⁹

- The Firearms Section, South Australia Police reports: “The overall number of firearms recorded as stolen appears to be reducing, and this could be because of the legislative requirement for firearm security which came into operation on 1 September 1993.”⁵⁰
- In addition to the threat of licence revocation, several Australian jurisdictions impose financial and custodial penalties for insecure storage of long guns. These range from a \$200 fine in Western Australia, to \$2,000 in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital and Northern Territories *and/or*: six months’ jail (NT); twelve months’ jail (NSW, ACT).⁵¹ Where insecure storage is proved, some state police forces also seize and destroy the firearms involved.⁵²
- In New South Wales a severe case of insecure storage, often involving pistols, can attract a two-year jail term. In 1994, 187 gun owners were convicted of the offence Fail to Keep Firearms Safe where this was recorded as the principal or only offence.⁵³ Many others were convicted on the same charge along with other offences.
- In Canada, the maximum penalty for insecure gun storage is also two years in jail.⁵⁴
- Canada recently introduced universal gun registration, a procedure abandoned in New Zealand in the 1980s. This was explained by the Canadian Justice Ministry:

“The Federal Government believes that a registration system encouraging safe storage will help reduce the theft of guns from private homes by instilling in owners a greater sense of accountability for their firearms. At the same time, it will also help keep owners aware of the requirements pertaining to gun storage.”⁵⁵
- In England & Wales, at least one in seven premises from which firearms were stolen had been left insecure.⁵⁶
- Authorities keep count of the number of firearms stolen, sometimes incompletely, in Queensland, the ACT, Tasmania, South Australia, Canada, the United States and Great Britain. For example, a computer printout containing details of every theft and a description of the firearms taken is instantly available to Tasmania Police.⁵⁷

A thorough reading of overseas legislation, scientific research, police reports and opinion reveals far more difficulties and incompatibilities than it yields solutions. To draw comparisons between, say, the gun culture (or lack of one) in Japan, Switzerland, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand serves simultaneously to confirm and to deny almost every theory held on either side of the argument.

In the past, New Zealand’s most successful gun control moves have been of local design. Our stringent regulation of handguns and restricted weapons ensure their comparatively infrequent use in crime. Now, faced with few readily imported solutions to gun theft, we are nevertheless well equipped to devise our own.

Summary & Conclusions

As this study shows, there is evidence that New Zealand gun owners and parents, while priding themselves on gun safety as a group, often fail as individuals to take the precautions they recommend for others.

Deactivation of weapons and the separation of guns from their ammunition, though perhaps the most widely known precautions, seem commonly neglected. As an increasing proportion of firearms are not easily disabled, this measure is now largely unenforceable.

Despite more stringent security regulations universally in force for the past two and a half years, despite persistent publicity, many firearms owners still neglect the obligation to lock guns away. Given experience to date, few would suggest that the current five-year police relicensing programme will eliminate problems of firearm security, especially in the continued absence of enforcement.

Even in cases where negligent gun storage results in death or injury, visible deterrent action by police and the courts is very rare. This could be due to the inflexible nature of the only penalty available, or to a culture which views a careless gun owner as the victim, rather than part of the problem.

Guns left insecurely stored on farms and in unattended rural vehicles emerge as a considerable hazard and deserve concentrated attention.

Despite the high risk their working arsenals pose to society, gun collectors continue to store submachine guns, machine guns and the like in operational condition, contrary to the law. When such collections were stolen in recent years, police did not impose any penalty to discourage others. If we are to prevent more such weapons being taken in working order, such a signal would seem to be overdue.

Police figures show that most New Zealand victims of firearm homicide are shot by a licensed gun owner with a legal gun,⁵⁸ while half the offenders in firearm-related domestic disputes also hold a licence.⁵⁹ Even more so with gun theft, it seems apparent that prevention programmes to curb the flow of firearms from licensed to unlicensed hands should concentrate on the million or more weapons kept by licensed gun owners.

The need for a culture change is evident. As with drink driving and family violence we should aim to turn a corner, after which all would agree that leaving lethal weapons loosely stored at home, on the farm or in a vehicle is no longer acceptable behaviour.

The New Zealand Police Association and its members are well placed to influence such a change, and would be among the first to benefit from it.

Tables

Table 1 **Location of Theft: Premises & Vehicles**

	Incidents	%	Firearms	%
Urban Dwelling	45	51%	239	60%
Rural Dwelling	23	26%	70	18%
Farm Outbuilding	5	6%	12	3%
Business	6	7%	57	14%
Unattended Vehicle	8	9%	9	2%
Shooting Club	1	1%	11	3%
	88	100%	398	100%

Table 2 **Location of Theft: Rural, Town & City**

	Incidents	%	Firearms	%
Rural	35	40%	126	32%
Town	29	33%	94	23%
City	24	27%	178	45%
	88	100%	398	100%

Table 3 **Type of Gun Reported Stolen**

	Number	%	Number	%
Single action rifle	179	81%		
Semi-automatic rifle	34	16%		
Military-style semi-automatic rifle (MSSA)	7	3%		
<i>Total Rifles</i>			220	55%
Single-barrel shotgun	26	19%		
Double-barrel shotgun	95	71%		
Multi-shot shotgun	14	10%		
<i>Total Shotguns</i>			135	34%
Revolver	15	75%		
Semi-automatic pistol	5	25%		
<i>Total Handguns</i>			20	5%
Air/gas handguns	8	35%		
Air/gas rifles	15	65%		
<i>Total Non-Powder Guns</i>			23	6%
	398		398	100%

Table 4		Secure & Insecure Gun Storage			
As defined by the Arms Regulations effective 1 July 1993					
	Incidents	%	Firearms	%	
Insecurely stored	46	52%	112	28%	
Securely stored	34	39%	259	65%	
Storage unknown	8	9%	27	7%	
	88	100%	398	100%	

Table 5		Police Action Taken Following Insecure Storage			
Strongest sanction imposed in each case of insecure storage					
	Incidents	%	Incidents	%	
Revocation of licence	1	2%			
Revocation pending	1	2%			
Voluntary surrender of licence	2	4%			
Temporary surrender of guns pending security upgrade	4	9%			
Written warning	8	17%			
Follow-up security visit	7	15%			
Verbal warning	6	14%			
<i>Some police action taken</i>			29	63%	
<i>No police action taken</i>			17	37%	
			46	100%	
<i>Thefts involving insecure storage after which no police action was taken beyond a verbal warning</i>	23	50%			

Table 6		Subsequent Use of Stolen Guns In Violence	
	Violent Incidents	Percentage of All Incidents (N=88)	
Murder	5		
Suicide	2		
Attempted murder	1		
Kidnapping	2		
Robbery	2		
Drug deal	1		
Armed dispute	7		
	20	23%	

Appendix 1: Armouries

People unfamiliar with the sheer number of guns in New Zealand have suggested what appears to be a simple solution. Why not compel all gun owners (or perhaps just those in cities) to keep their guns in secure public armouries rather than at home or on the farm?

The problems with this idea are legion. In a country plagued with introduced possums, rabbits and goats, farmers have good reason to keep guns at hand for pest control. Even animal rights groups approve guns as humane stock killers. When cattle are sick, an axe is no alternative to a rifle, while keeping a syringe of killer sedative on hand is illegal.

On a farm, humane killings and pest control happen at all hours, many kilometres from the nearest town. Workers setting out for a trip to the backblocks take a gun simply because they *may* come across a herd of goats or a feral cat. Sportsmen wanting to sight-in guns or practice for the next club target shoot should not be asked to make a double return journey to the nearest town for half an hour's shooting. Forcing owners to lock guns away at the local police station is seen by a large segment of the public -- and many police -- as a farcical suggestion.

Certainly the cost would be enormous. Minimal coverage of the country would require a hundred high security concrete bunkers, each containing an average of 11,000 guns. In rural areas, some could be larger and more expensive than the local police station. They would need to be staffed to service hunters driving to the hills in the early hours and returning late at night. Farmers could -- and of course would -- insist on driving to a bunker to get their rabbit guns at all hours. Police have more useful things to do.

To compel only city gun owners to use armouries would neglect rural areas where gun-related family violence, homicide and suicide are as common, if not more so. When armouries were considered in European countries the discussion stopped dead at the potential for creating one-stop small-arms supermarkets for terrorists and gangs.

Above all, the aim of an armoury would be to grant only licensed gun owners ready access to their own weapons. As licensed shooters and legal guns kill most victims in firearm homicide,⁶⁰ armouries would hand over the most commonly abused firearms to those who shoot the most people.

A spokesman for the New Zealand Police has concluded that community armouries are not a practicable solution to gun storage problems. His opinion:

“It is probably best that firearms are held by their owners.”

-- Insp. John Coote. Letter to Alison Roxburgh, President,
National Council of Women, 30 June 1994

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the author supports this view.

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Notes & References

¹ Coote, Inspector John. Firearms Licensing Coordinator, NZ Police National Headquarters. As the necessary data have not been extracted from the Wanganui computer for some years and tens of thousands of licences have been surrendered and revoked during the current relicensing programme, police estimate the number of current firearms licences to be “in the region of 250,000.” Personal interview, 2 Feb 1996.

² Self defence is not an acceptable reason for gun ownership in New Zealand, so the great majority of private firearms are held for pest control, agricultural and sporting purposes. For this reason gun-owners commonly refer to themselves as “licensed sporting shooters.” Every civilian in possession of a powder firearm must possess a current firearms licence, renewable every ten years. Sporting long guns (shotguns and rifles) are not registered, while military-style semi-automatic rifles (MSSAs), handguns (pistols & revolvers), and restricted weapons (mainly fully automatic firearms) are individually registered and more carefully controlled. As a result, crime with registered firearms is rare.

³ New Zealand abandoned the registration of individual long guns (shotguns & rifles) in 1983, so nobody can be certain how many we own. Estimates range from a low of 777,000 legal firearms (Nugent, G. *Hunting in New Zealand in 1988*. Forest Research Institute, Nov 1989:6) through 950,000* (Forsyth, C. *Firearms in New Zealand*. NZ Mountain Safety Council Manual #19, Jul 1985:116-117), to a high of “at least” 1.25 million,* (Badland, R. Firearms Programme Manager, NZ Mountain Safety Council. *New Zealand Firearms Control*. Proceedings of the Conference of the Sporting Shooters Assn of Australia. Melbourne, 1988:52). Adding illegal firearms, plus imports in the years since, results in a commonly accepted estimate of 1.1 million in 1995.* (*250,000 airguns excluded).

⁴ *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1994*. Statistics NZ, p417.

⁵ Jones, Chf Insp G P (Taff). Coordinator: Firearms and Tactical Groups, NZ Police National HQ, Wellington. NZ Police hold approximately 2,000 firearms. Personal interview, 1 Dec 1993.

⁶ McNamara, M. NZ Defence Force. NZDF small arms: 31,461. Personal correspondence, 13 May 1994.

⁷ Forsyth (1985) p23. Per capita ownership of firearms, England & Wales: 0.02 (2 per 100 population).

⁸ Herlihy, J. *The Firearms Debate: a progress report*. Australian Institute of Criminology, Nov 1993 p11. Estimate: 2.5 to 4 million private firearms in Australia. Harding, R. *Everything You Need To Know About Gun Control in Australia*. Briefing paper prepared for the Australian Bankers' Association, Jan 1988 p2. Estimate: 3.5 to 3.75 million. The mid-point chosen from these two estimates is 3.5m. Population of Australia (1993 est): 17.9 million. *Encarta '95*.

⁹ “Number of guns in the US: Approx 200 million firearms.” *Firearms Facts Card, 1995*. National Rifle Association of America. US Population: 1995 projection @ 9.8% growth pa: 264.4 million. *Encarta '95*.

¹⁰ *Imports Firearms (Units)*. 1988-1994 average, long (rifles and shotguns) only: 13,743. NZ Customs, Statistics NZ, J P B Furley & Co, 14 Mar 1995.

¹¹ Watson, T. *Summary of Firearm Offence Statistics, 1983-1994*. NZ Police Research & Statistics Section, 27 Mar 1995, item 6 p2. Five-year average, 1990-1994: 2,533 “danger to life” firearm offences per annum.

¹² Fanslow J, Chalmers D, Langley J. *Injury from Assault: a public health problem*. Injury Prevention Research Unit, University of Otago School of Medicine, 1991 p8.

¹³ Norton R, Langley J. *Firearm Related Deaths in New Zealand 1978-87*. NZ Med J 1993;106:463-5.

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- ¹⁴ Frontline police routinely record data on firearm theft. Their offence reports are coded in the field according to seven different firearm types*, then entered into the GCS “Wanganui computer” system. There it all remains, as “Police have no requirement” to extract these data. (Durville, C. O/C Research & Statistics, Police National HQ. Personal correspondence, 14 May 1995). *Military-style semi-automatic rifles have not been added to the list of choices since the category was created in 1992, nor is there a useful separation between powder handguns and the gas-powered handguns increasingly used in crime in New Zealand.
- ¹⁵ Norton & Langley (1993).
- ¹⁶ Langley J, Marshall S, Norton R. *Non-Fatal Firearm Injuries in New Zealand 1979-92*, in press.
- ¹⁷ In two surveys of firearm homicide and non-fatal misuse of guns, police report that none of the firearms involved were suspected of being illegally imported: Alpers P, Morgan B (1995); Gardiner J, Norton R, Alpers P (1995). During the two years to January 1996 only three cases appeared in news media: foreign diplomats (two pistols found), a returning soldier (one deactivated handgun) and the alleged illegal importation of a semi-automatic pistol used in a family violence killing.
- ¹⁸ Gubb, Insp P. Firearms Licensing Coordinator, NZ Police National HQ. Letter to the author, 4 Feb 1994: “In the overwhelming majority of cases, those firearms (used in crime) came into this country lawfully, and their original NZ owners were the holders of firearms licences or permits.”
- ¹⁹ Coote, Insp J. Letters to the author, 20 Mar, 21 Apr, 5 Oct & 4 Dec 1995. Even a count of *registered* weapons stolen -- handguns, military-style semi-automatic rifles (MSSAs) and machine guns is “not available” from the police computer.
- ²⁰ Coote, Insp J. Letter to the author, 5 Oct 1995.
- ²¹ McLennan, Const Paul. Arms Officer, NZ Police, Auckland. Internal police report, undated, 1989.
- ²² Wyatt, Sgt Earl. Crime Prevention Officer, NZ Police, Auckland. Auckland Star, 19 Jan 1989.
- ²³ Watson, T. *Summary of Firearm Offence Statistics, 1983-1994*. NZ Police Research & Statistics Section, 27 Mar 1995, item 3 p1.
- ²⁴ Alpers P, Morgan B. *Firearm Homicide in New Zealand: Victims, Perpetrators and their Weapons 1992-94*. Paper presented to the Public Health Association of NZ conference, 28 Jun 1995.
- ²⁵ Gardiner J, Norton R, Alpers, P. *Firearm Misuse in New Zealand: Licence Status of Perpetrators and Legality of Firearms*. Paper presented to the Public Health Association of NZ conference, 28 June 1995.
- ²⁶ Police are unable to provide these figures (see note 3). Three estimates of the ratio of rifles to shotguns in legal ownership are: 5:3 (Forsyth, 1985) and 2:1 (Nugent, 1989 & Kopel, 1992). For the past 25 years the ratio of rifles to shotguns imported has averaged 2:1 (NZ Customs, 1995).
- ²⁷ Houghton D, Wilson G, et al. *The Prevention of Injury Among Farmers, Farm Workers, and Their Families*. University of Otago Consulting Group. Summary report, Feb 1995 p20.
- ²⁸ Coote, Insp John. *Gun Blitz on Farms*. Sunday News, 29 Oct 1995.
- ²⁹ Although police figures show 23,679 handguns registered, many of these are said to be non-firing antiques and heirlooms. Asked for an estimate of registered, working handguns, police say they “don’t know”. Coote, Insp J. Firearms Licensing Coordinator, NZ Police National HQ. Personal interview, 19 Jun 1995. A 1976 report estimated 10,000 handguns in New Zealand (Forsyth, 1985).
- ³⁰ Alpers & Morgan (1995)
- ³¹ Gardiner, Norton & Alpers (1995)
- ³² Alpers & Morgan (1995).
- ³³ Joyce, Det Snr Sgt Bill. NZ Police, Hamilton. Letter to the author, 10 Mar 1995.
- ³⁴ Authors’ personal interview with the gun owner on the condition he not be identified, 12 Feb 1996.
- ³⁵ Langley, Marshall & Norton (1996).
- ³⁶ Norton & Langley (1993).
- ³⁷ See *Evening Post* banner reprinted on page 6
- ³⁸ Cantor C, Brodie J, McMillen J. *Firearm Victims: Who Were They?* Medical Journal of Australia., Oct 1991;7:7:442-446.
- ³⁹ Coggan C, Fanslow J, Norton R. *Intentional Injury in New Zealand*. Public Health Commission. June 1995:22. The NZ male suicide rate in this age group was 50% higher than Australia and 77% higher than the USA.
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