

Preventing Gun Violence

The Epidemic Continues

The statistics regarding gun violence in this nation are staggering. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Guns claimed the lives of 29,573 Americans in 2001 (the most recent year for which statistics are available).ⁱ
- In 2001, 6,600 high-school-age teens and young adults (ages 15 to 24) died from firearm-related injuries - an average of 18 deaths each day.ⁱⁱ
- In 2002, 58,841 individuals were treated in hospital emergency departments for non-fatal gunshot wounds.ⁱⁱⁱ

In California, 3,273 people died from firearm-related injuries in 2001 and 3,955 others were treated for non-fatal gunshot wounds.^{iv} During the last five years for which statistics are available, more young people (ages 12 to 24) in this state died from gun violence than from motor-vehicle injuries.^v

High-profile shootings like the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Colorado, which resulted in 15 deaths, and the March 2001 Santee High School shooting in San Diego, which resulted in 15 students shot and two deaths, receive significant media attention. However, gun deaths in the U.S. occur quietly on a daily basis. Each day, there are as many American young people killed by gun violence as were killed in the Columbine shooting.

California is a Leader Among States

While gun-safety measures languish in Congress, they receive priority in the state of California, which is widely viewed as the state with the strongest gun laws in the nation. Many of California's laws were modeled after innovative ordinances enacted by cities and counties. California laws:

- Ban assault weapons. (California has the strongest assault weapon ban in the nation, and it will remain in effect even if the federal ban lapses.)
- Prohibit the manufacture and sale of "junk guns."
- Require firearms dealers to equip all firearms with a child-safety lock.
- Prohibit the sale of high-capacity ammunition magazines (i.e., those used in assault weapons).
- Limit handgun purchases to one per person per month.
- Require licensing of handgun purchasers.
- Require all firearm sales to be completed through a dealer. (Federal law has no such requirement and allows private sales conducted in many states to be completed without a background check.)
- Require new models of semiautomatic handguns, beginning January 1, 2006, to have either a magazine-safety disconnect (which prevents the weapon from being fired once the ammunition magazine has been removed) or a load indicator (which clearly indicates when the firearm is loaded). Beginning January 1, 2007, all, newly-designed semiautomatic handguns must include both safety features.

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Local Governments in California are at the Forefront of Policy Reform

California cities and counties lead the state and nation in prevention of gun violence. Since the mid-1990s, California's local officials have adopted over 300 innovative firearm ordinances, providing a catalyst for several new state laws. Cities and counties continue to adopt cutting-edge ordinances to fill gaps in state and federal law, including measures to:

- Prohibit the sale of 50 caliber sniper rifles, which are highly-destructive, long-range, military-style weapons now subject to less regulation than handguns.
- Prohibit firearms dealers from operating in residential neighborhoods or near other "sensitive" areas (e.g., schools, playgrounds and places of worship).
- Require firearms dealers to obtain liability insurance to ensure that persons injured by the dealer's negligence are adequately compensated, and to conduct employee background checks to screen out employees who are prohibited from possessing firearms.
- Prohibit the sale or possession of firearms on publicly-owned property. (This type of ordinance has had the effect of reducing the number of gun shows in the state.)
- Regulate ammunition sales.
- Require the reporting of lost or stolen firearms to assist law enforcement in tracing crime guns and increase gun owner accountability.

KEY ISSUES

Which laws are most effective in preventing gun violence among youth?
What more can be done?

ⁱ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports, Deaths: Final Data for 2001*, Vol. 52, No. 3, September 18, 2003.

ⁱⁱ *Id.*

ⁱⁱⁱ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Web-Based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), Nonfatal Injury Reports*. <http://webapp.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/nfirates2001.html>

^{iv} California Department of Health Services, *Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control Branch (EPIC), Firearms Injuries in California (2003)*

^v *Id.*

This fact sheet was prepared by Legal Community Against Violence (LCAV), a public interest law center dedicated to preventing gun violence. Formed in the wake of the 1993 assault weapon massacre at 101 California Street in San Francisco, LCAV provides free assistance to community activists and leaders, including elected officials, law enforcement and government attorneys, working to prevent gun violence. LCAV conducts legal research and analysis, develops regulatory policies and model regulations, drafts new laws for specific jurisdictions and helps secure pro bono litigation assistance when gun regulations are challenged in court. LCAV's website, www.firearmslawcenter.org, is the nation's most comprehensive source of federal, state and local gun laws and policies, either in print or electronic form. Please contact LCAV at (415) 433-2062.