

Robyn Tice

From: Don Kraher
Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2021 11:49 AM
To: Jared Moore; Ann Hill; Sherri Myers; Jennifer Brahier; Casey Jones; Teniade Broughton; Delarian Wiggins
Cc: Elaine Mager; Sonja Gaines; Ericka Burnett; Robyn Tice
Subject: Gun Buy Back Program

Council President and Members of City Council

Please find enclosed a link to information that a fellow Council Member wished to share.

<https://www.thetrace.org/2015/07/gun-buyback-study-effectiveness/>

Respectfully,

Don Kraher
Council Executive
Office of the City Council
222 W. Main Street
Pensacola, FL 32502
(850) 435-1686 – Office
(850) 384-6363 – Cell



City of Pensacola

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Community Violence

Police Trade Cash For Thousands of Guns Each Year. But Experts Say It Does Little to Stem Violence.

Most gun buyback initiatives turn up old or broken weapons — and cost police departments thousands of dollars in the process.

By **Kate Masters**

Jul 17, 2015



Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and LAPD Chief of Police Charlie Beck announce the results of the 2011 Gun Buyback Initiative.

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On June 27, the Tampa Police Department staged a daylong gun buyback event in response to a recent rise of shootings and homicides in Hillsborough County, Florida. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., anyone in the county could anonymously exchange an operating gun for \$50 in cash and walk away with no questions asked. By the end of the day, the department had collected 521 firearms: 213 revolvers, 135 pistols, 104 rifles, and 79 shotguns. After being catalogued, the haul will be processed and dumped in the Atlantic Ocean to create artificial coral reefs.

In [news reports](#) about the buyback event, Tampa police stressed the impact the buyback would have on preventing crime in the future. In the words of Janelle McGregor, a spokesperson for the department, “That’s 521 firearms that will now be destroyed and never get into the hands of a criminal.”

That kind of endorsement is common from law enforcement officials, yet it runs counter to the facts: There’s no evidence that gun buybacks actually curb gun violence. Though the events have become ubiquitous in the U.S. since the ’90s, they’re coupled with a [number of academic studies](#) that pointedly demonstrate the ways that buybacks fail to reduce crime. “[Studies show that] the guns you get back are nonfunctioning, that we’re paying money and we’re not getting real benefits,” Ralph Fascitelli, the president of Washington CeaseFire, a Seattle-based gun safety organization, tells The Trace. “They’re just feel-good things that don’t do much real good.”

[The Trace](#)

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The feel-good nature of gun buybacks often spurs police departments to organize them in the wake of major killing sprees, such as a 2014 buyback organized by L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti after a gunman killed six people near the University of California’s Santa Barbara campus. This June alone, local officials from Florida, Connecticut, California, Arkansas, and Massachusetts launched city- or county-wide buybacks in response to violent shootings or rising crime rates. But experts claim it’s unlikely that these officials truly believe the events help reduce crime.

“Experienced police officers will have a sense that [gun buybacks] are likely to be of marginal value,” says Michael Scott, director of the Center for Problem-Oriented

Policing. “I think that’s safe to say that the primary function of a gun buyback program is to do something symbolic.”

So why don’t buybacks get guns off the street? For one thing, according to Alex Tabarrok, professor of economics at George Mason University, it’s impossible to significantly reduce the number of guns in a community with buyback events that collect, on average, fewer than 1,000 firearms. “In the United States, there are hundreds of millions of guns,” he says. “And even if a city buys up some of them, that’s not going to have any effect on how many guns people actually have. People can still go out and buy more guns.”

Moreover, the firearms that cities do collect aren’t likely to be the types used in crime. “The main drawback to gun buyback programs is that they tend to get junk guns or guns that have been with a family for a long period of time,” says James Pasco, executive director of the Fraternal Order of Police. “They’re not catching the nine-millimeter and forty-caliber semiautomatic handguns that are so prevalent in violent crime today.”

The “no questions asked” policy shared by most buybacks can also make them vulnerable to what Tabarrok calls “gun entrepreneurs,” generally private sellers who use the events to profit off their local government. He cited a particularly notorious 2008 buyback in Oakland, California, where police bought handguns and assault rifles for \$250 each. The event attracted local gun dealers, who bought cheap guns out-of-state and sold them back to the government for a profit. A 2006 Boston buyback also attracted out-of-state gun dealers looking to offload some of their old inventory. It became such an issue that when the city relaunched its buyback program in 2014, police began questioning donors to make sure they really were from Boston.

“There’s always that balance,” Scott says. “They want the financial incentive to be great enough to attract some people, but not so great that it increases the risk that some people would be inclined to take the money [from surrendering their gun] and use it to buy a better gun.”

Experts say that gun buybacks can achieve elevated public awareness about gun violence, and may prevent suicides or accidental shootings. In Australia, a wide-scale gun buyback program in 1997 was associated with [decreased suicide rates](#). The real problem with gun buybacks, Tabarrok says, is that local governments raise funds and spend time organizing these programs instead of investing in methods that are proven to reduce gun-related crimes. Buybacks can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$250,000 and sometimes take months to organize. The Tampa Police Department held several focus groups before deciding to hold their June buyback, and the Boston Police

Department spent four months developing their last buyback program in 2014, which ran for over seven months.

Scott recommends police departments channel those funds into efforts that utilize “[focused deterrence](#),” which he says originated with the Boston Police Department in the late 1990s and has spread to several dozen jurisdictions across the country. The method requires coordination between law enforcement and social-service providers to objectively identify the most dangerous offenders in a community, and make an effort to routinely check those individuals for firearms.

“Gun buybacks probably don’t do much harm,” Scott says. “The major concern is that if local officials truly believe them to be an effective strategy, and run them on blind faith, doing that precludes them from even exploring more effective kinds of alternatives.”

[Photo: [Flickr](#); David Starkopf / Office of the Mayor]

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[Chase Woodruff](#)

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