

Gun registration rising in Oakland

By Nechama Bakst

Gun registration climbed about 22 percent in Oakland County's townships during the first five months of 1989, compared with the same period in 1988. The figure, which is mirrored in some cities in Oakland County, reflects crime fears, fear of tighter gun control laws and a strong advertising campaign by gun manufacturers, authorities said.

Statewide, gun registration rose 28 percent during the first three months of this year, compared with the same period last year.

By Michigan law, anyone who wishes to purchase a gun smaller than 30 inches must first obtain a permit to purchase from a local law enforcement agency. After the gun is purchased, the law requires the gun owner to return to the police department to register the gun.

Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson said he hadn't had an opportunity to analyze the figures.

However, he wasn't certain the concern should rest entirely with registered handgun.

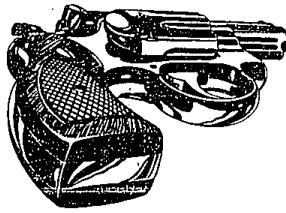
"The concern should be criminals getting handguns," Thompson said, adding that 30 percent of the handguns used by criminals are illegally acquired.

AMID STATEWIDE awareness of accidents and suicides arising from misuse of authorized handguns, state government officials are looking at new laws to tighten up gun control.

A bill by Rep. Burton Leland, D-Detroit, pending in the House Judiciary Committee, would require a prospective handgun owner to attend a safety course in order to obtain a permit to purchase.

Another state bill drafted by Willis C. Bullard Jr., R-Milford, involves tighter controls for allowing guns in businesses.

People perceive that "if you pass that law, who knows what will come next," said Brad Geller, counsel to the House Judiciary Committee.



But local police officials in Oakland County look favorably at the tighter laws. Some have independently instituted cooling-off periods within their local police departments.

In Troy which registered 301 handguns in the first five months of this year, a small increase over

1988, there's a built-in seven to 10-day delay, that police Lt. William Tullock sees as a necessary "cooling-off period."

Farmington Hills, which has had no significant increase in gun registration, also has a 10-day waiting period, personally introduced by Chief William Dwyer.

"If I HAD my say there would be mandatory fingerprinting, mandatory firearms training," Dwyer said.

Fear of crime is another reason people purchase handguns for their homes.

But police officials say the fear is misguided and often backfires.

"A large percentage of the population are fearful that burglaries will be committed while they're fast asleep," Tullock said.

"Actually, at least in our town, burglars don't want that confrontation," he said.

"They'll go to any length to assure that the homeowner is not at home. But what happens when the burglar is in your house stealing your money and comes across a gun. Now we have a legal gun in the hands of a criminal."

Dwyer said the gun which was purchased for self-defense has now become a potential new weapon.

Actually, Dwyer said, the likelihood of using a firearm for reasons other than self-defense is five times

greater than the likelihood of using it for the reason it was purchased."

Handgun accidents are the fourth leading cause of accidental death in children under 14 nationwide.

But gun manufacturers continue to campaign to sell more guns.

GLAMORIZATION OF the "Lady Smith," touted by Smith and Wesson as the gun with the "female touch," has brought about an increase in females registering guns in Farmington Hills, according to Dwyer.

In Detroit, which issues 3,000-5,000 permits to purchase a gun a year, city officials are eyeing an ordinance to require safety training and childproofing of a gun before a permit will be issued.

"There've just been too many incidents where there's been a loaded gun in the house," said Calvin Hughes, a member of the Anti-Handgun Association and aide to Detroit City Council member John Peoples.

Who's dealing here? Teens to senior citizens

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

Teenagers to grandparents. When asked for a profile of the typical drug dealer in Oakland County, that's what Lt. Dorothy McAllen, coordinator of the county's Narcotics Enforcement team, came up with.

She said they use the money for a variety of things — cars, homes, and to supplement their retirement income. And McAllen said dealers like Oakland County for the same reasons everyone else does — nice schools, good police protection and attractive homes.

"We've seen a dramatic increase in Oakland County," McAllen said, referring to drug traffic. "And some of the people we've arrested have been in business here for 10-15 years."

BY LARGE INCREASE, McAllen offered this comparison: In 1985, her unit seized 1.3 pounds of cocaine. Last year they confiscated 31 pounds.

"A large percentage (of the dealers) are residents. A lot have other jobs as they're building up their clientele and business. When things get to a lucrative stage, they dump their jobs" and sell drugs full time, McAllen said.

Cocaine still is the drug of choice in the county. It's close to pure (not 100 percent, but 90 percent to 95 percent due to its own impurities) and sells in that condition for \$900 an ounce, she said. The second most popular drug is crack, the compressed, more potent form of cocaine, which sells for up to \$50 in the suburbs "or about \$10 (per rock) in urban city areas," McAllen said.

"It's a competitive market out there — they're trying to take over each other's territory" through killing, robberies and extortion, she added. "And it would not be unusual to find someone (in the business) 50-60 years old."

Team is made up of officers from the Michigan State Police, the Oakland County Sheriff's Department and "those communities in Oakland County who wish to contribute" to the team, McAllen said. She declined to reveal how many agents are on the team.

'We've seen a dramatic increase (in drug traffic) in Oakland County. And some of the people we've arrested have been in business here for 10-15 years.'

— Lt. Dorothy McAllen
Narcotics Enforcement
coordinator

Contributing agencies get a two-way return on their investment: a countywide team devoted to fighting drug traffic and the monetary benefits from sales of goods confiscated during drug raids.

Gerald Polsson, the county's chief assistant prosecutor, said the Drug Forfeiture Act of 1985 allows law enforcement agencies to keep, sell and retain the profits of items seized from convicted drug dealers.

(The Supreme Court also made it tougher for drug dealers to purchase the services of expensive lawyers by ruling last week that dealers cannot pay for an attorney's time with cash or goods earned from drug sales.)

McAllen and Polsson said those items most commonly include cars, jewelry and cash. Lately, they've included homes — Polsson said the county has four homes in litigation that may be permanently seized under the forfeiture act.

THESE ITEMS are sold at auction annually at the county courthouse. Polsson said this year's sale already

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Anti-drug unit feeds into new grand jury

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

The Anti-Drug Prosecution Unit of the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office is seeking approval for county matching funds to continue operations through Sept. 30.

Jeffrey Butler, unit coordinator, said the county's end of the matching grant is \$25,000. The grant totals \$80,000 and at least part of the work generated by the unit could be presented to the grand jury now being impaneled.

"The order impaneling (the grand jury) directed that I consider homicide cases and narcotics cases," he said. The jury, Oakland County's first in 17 years, will hear information relating to investigations on about 12 unsolved murders and 20 narcotics cases.

OAKLAND COUNTY Prosecutor Richard Thompson confirmed that when he requested the grand jury it was for two purposes — "to deal with unsolved murders and the illegal drug networks that we know are operating in Oakland County."

Thompson said drug cases will be referred to the jury through his off-

ice after investigation by the Narcotics Enforcement Team, which is made up of state and local police.

The board of commissioner's finance committee will investigate Butler's request for matching funds. The unit started with \$178,000 at the beginning of 1988 and that operating budget was supposed to be for one calendar year, Butler said.

However, Butler added, he was asked to stretch the budget as far as he could and make a supplemental request for funding later. He stretched the budget through May 4.

AT HIS PRESENTATION to the finance committee, Butler said 353 cases had been assigned to the unit from January 1988 through last May 4. Of those, 161 resulted in convictions or nolle prosequi, a term that means the prosecutor dismissed one charge in return for a guilty plea on another; four were dismissed; four were found not guilty; 25 were fugitives; and 159 were awaiting trial as of May 4.

Butler updated those figures and as of June 19, 152 cases were pending — nine of them new and 16 disposed of.

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