

Dealers: Assault rifle sales up; long waiting list for handguns

Taking aim at the economy

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MEDIA

Gun advocates are up in arms and that means big business for firearm retailers.

Since the 2008 presidential election, gun sales have spiked nationally, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation tracking 1.53 million criminal background checks in November, a 42 percent increase compared with November 2007.

During election week alone, from Nov. 3 to Nov. 9, there was nearly a 49 percent increase in background checks from the same period in 2007.

“Before the election, we might have sold one or two assault rifles a week,” said Stan Dix, co-owner of Top Gun Shooting Sports of Imperial, Mo. “We’ve gotten to maybe 10 or 15 a week.”

In St. Louis County, the number of applications for concealed carry licenses mirrored the rise in gun sales. In 2008, there were 563 applications for the months of November and December, compared with 282 for the same period in 2007.



Al Rothweiler, co-owner of Mid America Arms at 8205 Gravois Road, said President-elect Barack Obama’s stance on gun control is contributing to the spike, as is the declining economy.

“Arms sales tend to be stable to begin with,” he said. “And when the economy does bad, gun sales usually do better.”

Rothweiler said traffic and calls to his shop were up between 60 percent and 70 percent while sales have jumped nearly 40 percent. He described the sales of the firearms, ranging between \$300 to several thousand dollars, as “comfort purchases.”



Rachel Parsons, a spokeswoman for the National Rifle Association, also pointed to the economy and White House change to explain soaring gun sales nationwide. According to Parsons, the gun buyers show an increasing concern about theft during economic downturns, while others are anticipating that certain firearms will be banned under the incoming administration.

Any new federal legislation concerning gun ownership remains uncertain at the moment. However, gun advocates point to Obama’s endorsement of tax increases on firearm and ammunition purchases of up to 500 percent, as well as support for reinstating the Clinton-era federal Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in 2004, as causes for concern.

Andy Molchan, director of the National Association of Professional Firearms Retailers, said 98 percent of FBI background checks lead to a purchase. Based on that, he estimates nationwide gun sales were up 25 percent above expectations for 2008. New firearm sales total about \$4 billion a year, he said.

Jim Stephens, owner of Bull’s Eye LLC, an indoor firing range and retailer at 5100 Manchester Road, said his sales took off the day after the election. Traffic has gone up 50 percent, with sales increasing about half that, according to Stephens. “People are showing their concern (about potential gun bans) by buying all they can,” Stephens said. “Now there’s a shortage of inventory across the whole industry.”

Top Gun Shooting also has seen a recent increase in sales, between 30 percent and 35 percent, according to Dix.

“Handguns usually always available now have a five- to 10-person waiting list,” Dix said. “There’s a six- to eight-week waiting period just to get a high-dollar handgun from the factory.”

Bookings for firearm instruction classes at Top Gun also have increased. “We’re booking a month or so out now, as opposed to a couple weeks,” Dix said.

Top Gun Shooting recently purchased a building two miles from its existing facility. The multimillion-dollar investment increases the facility from 5,000 square feet to 15,000 square feet, according to Dix.

“We’re sort of putting our necks on the line with this investment,” he said. “So we’re hoping the President-elect doesn’t make any changes to gun legislation.”