



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 9, 2013

ATF Resorts to Dubious Tactics to Secure Arrests

An exposé by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reports that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (still known as ATF) engaged in rogue tactics to go after guns on the street, including exploiting the mentally ill, purchasing weapons at extremely high costs, and allowing minors to smoke marijuana and drink.



The exposé follows one that the *Journal Sentinel* [ran](#) earlier this year that focused on the Milwaukee arm of the ATF. According to that article, the undercover ATF agents opened a storefront sting operation that was said to have focused on breaking up criminal operations in Milwaukee by purchasing illegal guns and drugs from felons.

Unfortunately, the operation was a fiasco.

The newspaper noted,

But the effort to date has not snared any major dealers or taken down a gang. Instead, it resulted in a string of mistakes and failures, including an ATF military-style machine gun landing on the streets of Milwaukee and the agency having \$35,000 in merchandise stolen from its store, a *Journal Sentinel* investigation has found.

When the 10-month operation was shut down after the burglary, agents and Milwaukee police officers who participated in the sting cleared out the store but left behind a sensitive document that listed names, vehicles and phone numbers of undercover agents.

And the agency remains locked in a battle with the building's owner, who says he is owed about \$15,000 because of utility bills, holes in the walls, broken doors and damage from an overflowing toilet.

Officials claimed that the blunders committed by the Milwaukee ATF were limited to that specific office, but the most recent [exposé](#) reveals that there is a clear "pattern of questionable decisions that were employed by six ATF operations, including Milwaukee, nationwide," Fox News [writes](#).

Saturday's report by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* says that a review of thousands of pages of court records, police records, and other important documents reveals that the ATF often resorts to rogue tactics such as those seen in the Milwaukee sting.

Fox News reports,

Similar to the Milwaukee operation, agents in other cities set up a gun buyback program that turned into a cash cow for sellers. The ATF offered sky-high prices, so people would just buy guns at other shops and turn them over to undercover agents for a quick profit, according to the report.



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The undercover ATF agents running Squid's Smoke Shop in Portland, Oregon, convinced a mentally disabled young man to get a tattoo on his neck of a squid smoking marijuana to help promote their business, and even paid him \$150 to convince him to do so. Months later, he would learn that the shop was part of a setup.

Careful review of the documents revealed a number of disquieting findings. ATF agents used mentally disabled people to help promote their businesses, and then arrested them for their participation in at least four cities, in addition to Milwaukee.

Likewise, agents in Albuquerque, New Mexico, gave a brain-damaged drug addict a "tutorial" on machine guns, despite his meager knowledge of weapons.

In several other cities, agents opened undercover gun and drug operations in safe zones near churches and schools and permitted juveniles to smoke marijuana and drink. In Portland, attorneys for three teens who were charged stated that one of the female agents had dressed provocatively, flirted with the boys, and encouraged them to bring drugs and weapons to the store for sale.

Other sting operations involved agents running fake pawnshops and selling stolen merchandise. In Atlanta, for example, ATF agents bought guns that had been stolen, in some cases, from police cars.

ATF agents also inflicted damage on buildings that they rented for their operations by tearing down walls and rewiring electricity, and they left landlords with the repair bills. One property owner in Portland claims that agents removed a parking lot spotlight, damaged a new \$30,000 roof, resulting in leaks, and then disappeared without leaving a means to be contacted.

Agents permitted suspects to leave their stores with guns. Agents in Wichita for example suggested that a felon take a shotgun to shoot and then return, and even provided the felon with instructions on how to do so. Those agents then charged the man with a serious crime.

ATF agents hired a felon in Pensacola to run a pawnshop. The *Journal Sentinel* explains, "The move widened the pool of potential targets, boosting arrest numbers. Even those trying to sell guns legally could be charged if they knowingly sold to a felon."

Later, the felon was convicted of pointing a loaded gun at someone, but rather than receiving the sentence typical of someone who has committed such a crime, he got six months in jail.

Given all that was revealed in the report, skeptics are finding it difficult to believe that these actions are exceptions to the rule, and not indicative of the normal methodologies of the ATF.

"To say this is just a few people, a few bad apples, I don't buy it," asserted David Harris, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and an expert on law-enforcement tactics and regulation. "If your agency is in good shape with policy, training, supervision and accountability, the bad apples will not be able to take things to this level."

Of course, there was already abundant evidence that the ATF had been mishandling its operations — most notably, Project Gunrunner.

As reported by Andrew Breitbart's BigGovernment.com,

[Gunrunner] was a project of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Fireworks [sic]. In late 2009, the ATF was alerted to suspicious buys at seven gun shops in the Phoenix area. Suspicious because the buyers paid cash, sometimes brought in paper bags. And they purchased classic "weapons of choice" used by Mexican drug traffickers — semi-automatic versions of military type rifles and



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pistols. According to news reports several gun shops wanted to stop the questionable sales, but the Bureau encouraged them to continue.

It is now known that ATF weapons — which U.S. officials involved in the project allowed to be purchased by suspicious individuals in the United States and then be “walked” to and distributed in Mexico — have been turning up in Arizona drug crimes.

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