



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on July 4, 2009

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## ATF Surge in Texas

"Ever turning up the heat on cartels, our law enforcement and military partners in the government of Mexico have been working more closely with the ATF by sharing information and intelligence," said acting ATF director Kenneth Melson at a summit in New Mexico about gun running. He also said there are a "massive number of leads" that need to be followed.



In a *Houston Chronicle* entitled "[Federal agents target guns, one house at a time](#)," the reporter describes the effort currently under way: "The agents are combing neighborhoods and asking people about suspicious purchases as well as seeking explanations as to how their guns ended up used in murders, kidnappings and other crimes in Mexico."

"The ATF has been so successful in developing leads from tracing data we saw the need to relocate personnel and put them into specific areas we've identified as areas for gun trafficking," Melson explained. "With this surge in capability, we hope to reduce our backlog in leads and refer more defendants" to prosecutors. Dewey Webb, the special agent in charge of the ATF's Houston branch, said he expects the surge in agents to "make an impact in putting some of these trafficking organizations out of business permanently."

Last year the Mexican government asked the U.S. to trace thousands of guns that were discovered at crime scenes south of the border. One of the tactics for dealing with these sorts of requests is visiting gun dealers and inspecting their records.

One of their targets, according to the *Houston Chronicle* report, was a police officer. "He said he bought a few military-style rifles, left them in his car and — on the same night — forgot to lock a door. He couldn't explain why he didn't file a police report or why he visited Mexico the day after the alleged theft." Another tip led them to a pastor's house who said he bought two pistols for target practice.

The ATF has also been forging partnerships with other federal agencies in its battle against guns flowing into Mexico. It signed an agreement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Tuesday, though deputy attorney general David Ogden, who was present at the signing, acknowledged "it's hard to say when we'll see results." It also worked with the Drug Enforcement Administration to track some suspected traffickers to the border using an airplane last week.



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