



Written by [James Heiser](#) on February 19, 2010

Homeland Security Loses Nearly 300 Firearms

According to its website, the Department of Homeland Security “has a vital mission: to secure the nation from the many threats we face. ... Our duties are wide-ranging, but our goal is clear – keeping America safe.” Unfortunately, while ostensibly busy with the performance of those wide-ranging duties, DHS employees have managed to lose track of nearly 300 firearms — and some of those weapons have fallen into the hands of known criminals.



[According to a USA Today article,](#)

The nation’s Homeland Security officers lost nearly 200 guns in bowling alleys, public restrooms, unlocked cars and other unsecure areas, with some ending up in the hands of felons. The problem, outlined in a new federal report, has prompted disciplinary actions and extra training. Most of the misplaced weapons — including handguns, shotguns and military rifles — were never found. “Most losses occurred because officers did not properly secure firearms,” says the Homeland Security inspector general report.

At least 15 of the guns ended up in the hands of gang members, criminals, drug users and teenagers, inspector general Richard Skinner found. His report documented 289 missing firearms from fiscal year 2006 through 2008, although not all were lost because of negligence. Some were lost in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and others were stolen from safes.

The report lends itself to some obvious questions, such as, “How do you forget to take your firearm with you when you leave the restroom?” and, “How do you ‘misplace’ a shotgun?” The fact is that presumably virtually all of these weapons are now in the hands of criminals, since honest citizens do not simply take home a Glock or Beretta they find lying around like it was loose change found in the middle of the street. Furthermore, the relatively short time frame for losing track of 289 firearms leaves one



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wondering what the ongoing rate of loss—and the total losses since the formation of the DHS on November 25, 2002—actually might be.

The *USA Today* story continues,

Homeland Security "took immediate action" to correct problems, department spokeswoman Amy Kudwa said Wednesday. Workers are getting extra training and officials are improving tracking and inspection of guns, Kudwa said.

"The department is strongly committed to ensuring that weapons ... are kept secure," Kudwa said. Although the number of guns lost is only a small fraction of Homeland Security's 190,000 firearms, any lost weapon "is a very serious matter," said Hubert Williams, president of the Police Foundation, a think tank on law-enforcement issues. "It reflects the competence of the officer."

But one may justifiably ask how it could be that DHS was doing such a sloppy job keeping track of firearms *before* this study was conducted. For an agency that has more guns than it has employees — 190,000 firearms for 185,000 people on the payroll — the notion that controls were sufficiently loose to irretrievably lose track of nearly 300 firearms is unacceptable. Furthermore, one wonders how many weapons were lost, and then later recovered, and thus not included in the statistics cited above.

Heavily armed federal bureaucracies are a poor substitute for regular state and local law enforcement officers. And now we find that their training has, to date, been an inferior substitute, as well.

Photo of Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano: AP Images



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