



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 25, 2012

Gun Makers May Leave if States Pass Microstamping Laws

Executives of the historic firearms companies on America's East Coast may not all be young men, but they might want to follow Horace Greeley's advice, anyway. They may want to go west if legislators pass laws that would limit their sales while driving up their costs.

That could be the fate of the Remington Arms Company plant in Ilion, New York, the economic lifeblood of the small New York town lying halfway between Albany and Syracuse. The company's roots in the town go back nearly 200 years, since Eliphalet Remington, Jr. forged his first rifle barrel there. Today the company employs about 1,000 workers in a town with a population of just over 8,000. But the company has suggested, none too subtly, that it may move its Ilion plant to another state if Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the state's lawmakers enact gun legislation now under consideration in Albany.



The proposals, the *New York Times* [reported](#) Friday, include a limit in firearms sales of no more than one per month to any one person and a background check of anyone purchasing ammunition. Most troubling to the manufacturers, however, is a plan to require, for the purpose of ballistics identification, the microstamping of every semiautomatic pistol sold in the state. The law would require manufacturers to laser-engrave the gun's make, model, and serial number on the firing pin of each handgun so the information is imprinted on the cartridge casing when the gun is fired. Gun makers say the method is flawed, could easily be defeated, and would require a retooling of the industry that would add what Remington executive Stephen P. Jackson, Jr. called "astronomical sums" to the cost of manufacturing.

"Mandating [f]irearms microstamping will restrict the ability of Remington to expand business in the Empire State," Jackson, the company's chief strategy and acquisition integration officer, wrote in a March 16 [letter](#) to Governor Cuomo. "Worse yet, Remington could be forced to reconsider its commitment to the New York market altogether rather than spend the astronomical sums of money needed to completely reconfigure our manufacturing and assembly processes. This would directly impact law enforcement, firearms retailers and consumers throughout New York — if not the entire country.

"Of course, passage of microstamping would also hurt New York taxpayers, who would be forced to foot the bill for expensive scanning electron microscopes and software necessary to read the firearms make, model and serial number," Jackson added. "Hurting businesses and tax payers to support a concept that



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has been proven flawed is ill-conceived.”

The firearms industry in Connecticut succeeded in its efforts to defeat similar legislation when it was proposed in that state in 2009. Manufacturers, lawyers, and union and trade group representatives all took aim at the proposed microstamping mandate in a [press conference](#) in March of that year, warning that the bill could threaten the livelihood of some 1,750 workers employed by the gunmakers.

“This feel-good legislation will do more harm than good,” said Carlton Chen, vice president and general counsel with Colt’s Manufacturing Company. “Let us not make a mistake, with the unintended consequences of driving businesses and jobs out of Connecticut.” Industry spokesmen also cited studies they said proved that the microstamping technology is unreliable as well as costly.

“Further studies are needed on the durability of microstamping marks under various firing conditions and their susceptibility to tampering, as well as on the cost impact for manufacturers and consumers,” according to a report from the National Academy of Sciences, one of two studies cited by the firearms manufacturers and supporters. Another, done at the University of California at Davis, found the technology “flawed” and not suited to all guns and ammunition. “Further testing, analysis and evaluation is required,” the researchers concluded.

The studies “further validate our longstanding concerns that this technology is unreliable, that it simply does not work as advertised and can and will be easily defeated by criminals in seconds using common household tools,” said Lawrence Keane of the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

Gun makers may be looking west at opportunities in Montana, South Dakota, and Idaho, or South to Alabama, all states that are said to be making efforts to persuade gun manufacturers in the East and Midwest to relocate or expand operations in environments where there are fewer gun laws and a more gun-friendly culture. That possibility is being taken seriously in the Mohawk Valley of New York, an area that has lost 11,000 manufacturing jobs since 1990, the *Times* reported. Ilion is one town in the valley that has seen job growth as Remington has increased production there.

If Remington goes away, “Ilion goes away,” said Rusty Brown, a furnace technician at the plant. Diana Bower, who runs a small engineering business with her husband, told the *Times* that backers of the proposed gun laws don’t really understand what that could mean to the town.

“If you don’t live here and work here,” she said, “you really don’t know what it means to say, ‘Pass this,’ or, ‘Pass that.’” But Gov. Cuomo, in an apparent reference to recent deadly shooting sprees in Colorado and Wisconsin, spoke of “current events that have really shaped the psyche of this state.” While the state already has some of the most restrictive gun laws in the nation, “I think there’s an appetite for reform, and I think that’s a good thing,” Cuomo said.

“I think it’s ridiculous for [Remington] to argue that they would leave New York,” said Jackie Hilly, executive director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, which supports a microstamping requirement. “Look, frankly, if we really want to keep jobs in New York, let’s invest more money in yogurt,” she added, referring to one of the state’s growing industries.

That argument does not go down well with state Senator James L. Seward, a Republican whose district includes Ilion. Passing new gun laws “would send a bad signal to this gun manufacturer that they’re in a state that’s hostile to gun ownership and gun manufacturing,” he said.

“It may make people feel good to think they’ve done something,” Seward said, “but at the end of the day, the criminal element and those that go out and do these horrible things, they’re going to get their



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weapons. And the cost could be great for a community like Ilion.”



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