

Justice Dept. to Fast-Track Process for Tracing Guns Used in Shootings

The U.S. Justice Department plans to fast-track the process for tracing guns that were used in shootings back to the original purchasers, as part of a broader effort to crack down on violent crime.

The announcement came just a few days after Stephen Paddock gunned down 58 people from his 32nd-floor suite of the Mandalay Bay hotel on the Las Vegas Strip, in what now marks the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

Justice Department officials said the gun-tracing effort was part of a new mandate that U.S. Attorneys must devote more time and resources to violent crime.

Normally it can take the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives five to six days to trace a gun used in a crime back to the original buyer, a Justice Department official said.

If a ballistics evaluation by the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, or NIBIN, determines that a certain gun was used in a shooting, the bureau must call the manufacturer, distributor and retailer to track down the original buyer.

Once they locate the store, agents must comb through forms until they locate the one with the gun's serial number.

However, in certain cases involving a violent crime, the bureau now can jump the line of trace requests so that police can get the information within 24 hours.

"We have lots of traces that the national tracing center goes

through every day, so when you call in and it's just a regular trace, it goes to the end of that line," the department official said. "Now, if we know there's a NIBIN hit associated with that firearm, it will go to the front of the line."

Plans call for implementing the trace program's expansion by year-end.

The department also released a three-page memo from Attorney General Jeff Sessions instructing all U.S. Attorneys to play a more active role in helping reinvigorate the Project Safe Neighborhoods program.

That project, first implemented in 2001, calls for working closely with local law enforcement to develop customized programs in different regions to reduce gang and other violent crimes.

As part of that, the Justice Department said it was devoting 40 additional prosecutors to about 20 U.S. Attorneys' offices to focus on violent crime reduction. {eo}

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