Myths and Facts on the Gun Registry

"Family guns', 'duck guns' are harmless"
All guns are lethal, and registering them once is a small inconvenience.

- Most firearm-related deaths in Canada are caused by rifles or shotguns, which are unrestricted firearms.
- They are the guns most often used in domestic violence, suicides, and to kill police officers.
- Rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands are just as deadly as handguns.
- There are currently 6.9 million registered "unrestricted guns". This category includes rifles and shotguns such as the powerful semi-automatic Ruger Mini 14, used in the Montreal Massacre, and sniper rifles, including .50 caliber sniper rifles.
- New guns are usually registered at the point of purchase, and fees have been waived. Once a gun has been registered, it does not have to be re-registered ever again, unless it is sold or given to someone.
- In communities such as Surrey, York Region, and Ottawa, long guns outnumber handguns 2 to 1 in firearms recovered in crime. Even in large cities, rifles and shotguns constitute a substantial proportion of the firearms recovered in crime.

"It penalizes rural gun owners for big city problems"
Registering guns does not prevent law-abiding owners from using them for legitimate purposes.

- More gun deaths and injuries occur in rural areas. Between 2001 and 2005, the Canadian average firearms death rate was 2.5 per 100,000. For that same period of time, the Northern Territories had rates dramatically higher than the average – Nunavut 19.76; Northwest Territories 8.6; Yukon 7.84 - as seen in the western provinces and provinces with larger rural populations as well - New Brunswick 4.08; Saskatchewan 3.76; Alberta 3.52; Nova Scotia 3.34; Manitoba 3; Quebec 2.86 (per 100,000).
- Domestic violence, suicide, and murders of police officers with firearms occur more often, on a per capita basis, in rural communities.
- Women experiencing domestic violence in rural areas report threats and intimidation using firearms. Women are more likely to express concern for their safety when the firearms owners are not licensed and the guns not registered or safely stored.
- Unlike car or pet registration that is renewed annually, guns are registered once to their owners' name. Fees have been waived.

"It's useless, handguns have been registered for 30 years but they are still used in crime"
No law prevents all crime, but the evidence shows our gun control is effective.

- The substantially lower rate of handgun violence in Canada compared to the U.S. is a testament to the effectiveness of our gun control program.
- Rates of homicide without guns in the U.S. are only slightly higher (1.3x) than in Canada, whereas rates of homicide with handguns are much higher (7.3x).
- At least half the handguns recovered in crime originate in the U.S., in large part because they do not have effective controls.
- The fact that the government is NOT proposing to eliminate the registration of handguns suggests, in fact, that it is effective and useful.

The Coalition for Gun Control is the only national non-profit organization working to reduce gun injury, death and crime in Canada. We are endorsed by more than 300 crime and injury prevention, policing, health, child safety, victims’ rights, grassroots and community organizations. These include: the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Dawson College Gun Control Committee, the YWCA of Canada, just to name a few.

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“The gun registry is costly”

The system is in place, and the costs of going forward are minimal.

- The Auditor General confirmed that the cost of developing and implementing the entire Firearms Program was $1 billion over 10 years.5 This is a sunk cost, the money has been spent.
- Most of the cost of setting up the program was for licensing 2 million gun owners, and screening them for risk factors.
- 6.9 million rifles and shotguns have been registered. Registration is a one-time only procedure.
- According to the RCMP, abolishing the long gun registry would save between $1.5 and $4 million per year.5 That is a pittance given the costs of gun death and injury in Canada, estimated in 1995 at $6.6 billion per year.6 The 2006 Small Arms Survey estimated the decrease in gun injuries and deaths since 1995 equals savings up to $1.4 billion annually.7
- Since 2006, the government has waived fees associated with license renewals. It is estimated that this amounts to a loss of revenue of $21 million annually.8


“Gun control doesn’t work”

Empirical evidence shows that stronger gun control laws have helped reduce gun violence.

- The number and rates of firearm homicides, suicides, and accidents have decreased with stronger gun controls.
- The rate of homicide with rifles and shotguns has decreased by 62% since 1995.9 Homicides with handguns have remained relatively stable, as most illegal handguns are smuggled, and are therefore not affected as much by domestic controls.
- When controls on rifles and shotguns were strengthened in 1995, 1125 Canadians were killed with guns; in 2007, the number was 723.10
- Studies have correlated the introduction of Canada’s gun control law with a significant reduction in gun-related suicide rates (-43%), without evidence of displacement.11
- Public health and public safety experts stand firmly behind the gun registry.

11 For example INSPO, Brief to SECU on Bill C-391 (May 2010).

“No law will prevent all tragedies, but evidence shows that gun control works.”

Prevention is difficult to evaluate, but it does not mean that it is not working.
- In 2010, 574 gun licences were refused, and 2035 were revoked because of public safety concerns.12
- We know that the gun registry has not killed anyone, but getting rid of it may.


“It is useless and full of errors”

Police say the gun registry is useful and essential to their work.

- It is true that the successive amnesties introduced by the Conservative government have undermined the system, but in spite of that, most Canadians have renewed their licenses and registered their firearms.
- While the information may not be perfect, police say it is better to have more information than less. We know that the DNA databank does not have information on all Canadians, still it is used on a regular basis to support criminal investigations.
- Many high-profile crimes have been solved thanks to Canada’s gun control law.
- Police consult the Canadian Firearm Registry Online (CFRO) 14,000 times a day.13
- The information contained in the gun registry is also used, for example, by public health experts when they are preparing release plans for patients at risk of suicide or domestic violence, and to enforce prohibition orders.


“Criminals don’t register their guns.”

Strong controls over legal guns reduce the chance that they will fall into the wrong hands.

- Licensing gun owners and registering firearms reduces the chance that guns will fall into the hands of dangerous and suicidal people.
- All illegal firearms begin as legal firearms. Controls over legal guns are essential to preventing diversion and choking off the illegal supply. Almost 3000 guns are stolen annually in Canada, by definition ending up in the hands of criminals.
- Only a fraction of firearms used in crime are ever recovered. Among the firearms that are traced, about half of the rifles and shotguns used in homicides are registered.
- The very fact that registered guns are not used often in crime suggests that the system is working – legal guns for the most part are being used by legal owners for legitimate purposes.