

About Project Safe Neighborhoods

Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide commitment to reduce gun crime in America by networking existing local programs that target gun crime and providing these programs with additional tools necessary to be successful. The Bush Administration committed over \$1 billion to this effort in its first 4 years. This funding is being used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training, distribute gun lock safety kits, deter juvenile gun crime, and develop and promote community outreach efforts as well as to support other gun violence reduction strategies.

Executive Summary

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a comprehensive, strategic approach to reducing gun crime in America. By linking together federal, state, and local law enforcement, prosecutors, and community leaders, PSN provides a multifaceted approach to deterring and punishing gun crime. The program was announced in May 2001 and implements President George W. Bush's [promise](#) to fight gun crime by building on effective programs across the United States.

Under this initiative, the number of federal firearms prosecutions has increased significantly—up 76 percent in the past 4 fiscal years (FY 2000 to FY 2004). In FY 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) filed 11,067 federal firearms cases and prosecuted 12,962 offenders with federal firearms offenses. In FY 2004, 93 percent of defendants charged with federal firearms offenses were sentenced to time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other offenses.

The U.S. Attorney in each of the 94 federal judicial districts, working side by side with local law enforcement and other officials, has tailored the PSN strategy to fit the unique gun crime problem in that district. Criminals who use guns are prosecuted under federal, state, or local laws, depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment. Each district engages in deterrence and prevention efforts through community outreach and media campaigns and ensures that law enforcement and prosecutors have the training necessary to make the program work.

The Administration has devoted more than \$1 billion to PSN since its inception. The funds are used to hire new federal, state, and local prosecutors; provide training; hire research and community outreach support; and develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts.

The Challenge

Despite progress in the fight against gun crime in America, gun crime rates continue to be among the highest in the industrialized world. In 2003, for example, nearly 10,000 of the nation's 14,400 murder victims died from gunshot wounds. In that same year, murder victims ages 13 to 24 were over four times more likely to be murdered with a gun than with all other weapons combined.

Nearly half a million people are victims of firearm crime each year. Of particular alarm is the high toll gun crime takes on young people. Nearly a third of those murdered in 2003 were between the ages of 13 and 24, though this age group represents just 17 percent of the country's overall population. Young people also use guns to commit criminal acts. In 2003, about 30 percent of all murderers were between the ages of 13 and 24, and the vast majority of these criminals used firearms to kill their victim.

Faced with these startling statistics, Project Safe Neighborhoods is working to stop the destructive cycle of gun violence by vigorously enforcing firearms laws and sending the clear message that gun crime means hard time.

Project Safe Neighborhoods: A Comprehensive Enforcement Strategy

Five essential elements are required for a vigorous and successful gun crime reduction strategy: (1) Partnerships, (2) Strategic Planning, (3) Training, (4) Community Outreach and Public Awareness, and (5) Accountability. Mindful of the varying problems facing each district, Project Safe Neighborhoods does not mandate a “one-size-fits-all” approach that supplants effective strategies already in place in each district. Instead, these elements are tailored to the needs of each individual district and the gun crime problem therein.

To effectively deploy the substantial resources dedicated to this effort, each district has designated a Project Safe Neighborhoods point of contact in the U.S. Attorney's Office to serve as the project coordinator and help streamline communication about the initiative. Each U.S. Attorney also is encouraged to create a specialized unit within his or her office to target the most significant gun crime problems within the district to maximize the impact of this initiative and help ensure the safety of our nation's communities.

The five elements essential to a vigorous and successful gun crime reduction plan are outlined below:

PARTNERSHIPS: Strong partnerships lay the foundation on which the success of Project Safe Neighborhoods is built. The U.S. Attorney in each judicial district is uniquely situated to bring together all law enforcement agencies to ensure a uniform and comprehensive approach to reduce gun crime. As such, every U.S. Attorney is tasked with bringing together and leading a local task force composed of federal, state, and local prosecutors and law enforcement, researchers, media and outreach specialists, and community leaders. The task force members work together to implement strategies of prevention, deterrence, and prosecution aimed at stopping criminal offenders from terrorizing our nation's communities. The tired old rivalries and competing agendas that sometimes exist among law enforcement officials must give way to strategic partnerships focused on community safety.

On the national level, DOJ created a Firearms Enforcement Assistance Team (FEAT), composed of persons within the agency with expertise in the core elements of Project Safe Neighborhoods. This network assists the districts with their implementation efforts.

STRATEGIC PLANNING: Of vital importance to the success of any law enforcement partnership is the formation of a strategic plan to attack gun crime. The strategy will depend on the specific causes of gun crime in the community, the availability of law enforcement resources, and the expected outcome of each approach. Although the specific approach to combating gun crime will vary from district to district, PSN asks each U.S. Attorney to incorporate three national priorities in his or her strategic plan. Those priorities are as follows:

- Increased prosecution of violent organizations by aggressively using federal conspiracy, racketeering, narcotics, and all other available laws to attack and punish violent drug traffickers, violent street gangs, and violent robbery rings.
- Heightened enforcement of all federal laws against illegal gun traffickers, and the corrupt federal firearms licensees that supply them, with an emphasis on those gun traffickers who supply illegal firearms to violent organizations and to juveniles.
- Renewed aggressive enforcement of federal firearms laws against those persons prohibited from possessing firearms or who use firearms in furtherance of illegal activities, including those persons denied under the Brady Act.

Each strategic plan should reflect the three national priorities, but the individualized district plans, like the specific gun crime problems, have unique features. For example, in one district, a proactive plan to target domestic violence may be appropriate, while in another district, a strategic plan to target armed robberies may be more productive. The goal of each U.S. Attorney's plan is the same—to reduce the levels of gun crime—but the solution will vary depending on the particular problems facing each district.

TRAINING: Specialized training is essential for participants to keep current on laws and trends that affect law enforcement as well as to maintain an edge in the attack on gun crime. As part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, therefore, DOJ, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), has joined with several organizations to conduct innovative regional cross-training involving prosecutors, agents, and officers involved in gun crime cases. These national training partners include the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), Michigan State University (MSU), American University, the Institute for Law and Justice (ILJ), the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Community Policing Consortium, and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). It is through these national partnerships that PSN offers its expansive network of training and technical assistance to PSN task forces across the country. This training addresses issues such as firearms identification, safety, federal and state firearms statutes, federal and state search and seizure laws, crime scene and evidence management, firearms trafficking and tracing, and strategic planning.

U.S. Attorneys also are encouraged to design and conduct their own training programs at the local level. The U.S. Attorney is best suited to organize and schedule regional and local training so that key law enforcement personnel, both local and federal, are able to develop and maintain the skills necessary to make PSN a success.

Please visit our [training page](#) for a complete overview of PSN training opportunities and programs.

OUTREACH: Community outreach and public awareness constitute essential components of any successful gun crime reduction plan. By conveying the priorities, message, and results of this enhanced enforcement and prevention effort to the media and community members, the U.S. Attorney can help shape the attitudes of law-abiding citizens and those who would otherwise believe they can violate our gun laws with impunity.

Outreach activities include producing and distributing literature, conducting mail campaigns, sponsoring local workshops, and producing public service announcements (PSAs), educational literature, crime prevention toolkits, billboard advertisements, press releases, and news articles. Each district selected an outreach partner to work with the local PSN task forces to identify local stakeholders, leverage the support of potential partners, identify resources, and engage members of the community in the PSN initiative.

Additionally, in collaboration with The Ad Council, DOJ has launched three national public service advertising campaigns aimed at reducing gun crime. The PSAs couple a strong enforcement message with prevention and deterrence messages. Focusing on the consequences of using guns illegally, the PSAs use the tagline “Gun Crimes Hit Home.”

To view these national PSAs, as well as local PSAs, please visit psn.gov/outreach/psas.html.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Careful and consistent review of gun crime reduction efforts is necessary for an effective and proactive gun crime reduction strategy. If we are to target our resources strategically, we must continually evaluate the problems we face and the efficacy of our response, both at the local and national level.

To encourage the U.S. Attorneys to assess regularly the effectiveness of their plans and the emerging trends in their districts, the Attorney General requires U.S. Attorneys to report back to the Department every 6 months on the status of their PSN strategy. These reports provide an opportunity to describe fully the gun crime problems in each district, as well as the strategies the PSN coalition is employing to combat those problems. These reports are reviewed by a team chaired by the Office of the Deputy Attorney General and that comprises individuals with expertise in each of the five PSN elements. The team provides feedback to the districts, identifies model programs to share with other jurisdictions, and provides assistance to districts encountering difficulties implementing particular elements of the PSN initiative.

Accomplishments Under PSN

- Federal firearms prosecutions have increased 76.2 percent in the past 4 years (from FY 2000 to FY 2004). In FY 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice filed 11,067 federal firearms cases—the highest number ever recorded by the Department.
- In FY 2004, federal prosecutors charged 12,962 offenders with federal firearms offenses, an increase of almost 61 percent from FY 2000 figures.
- Defendants charged with federal firearms offenses are being sentenced to significant jail time. In FY 2004, approximately 73 percent of these offenders were sentenced to prison terms greater than 3 years for convictions on firearms charges or other offenses. In FY 2004, over 93 percent of defendants charged with federal firearms offenses were sentenced to time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other offenses.
- During 2003, only 7 percent of violent crimes were committed with a firearm, down from 11 percent in 1993. The rate of violent victimization by an offender armed with a firearm has declined by approximately two-thirds over the last decade.
- In the past 3 years, while law enforcement has worked hard to prosecute and prevent gun violence, 350,000 fewer Americans were victims of gun crime than in the 3 years prior to Project Safe Neighborhoods.