

Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City)

April 28, 2007 Saturday

U.S. Attorney Calls Unlicensed Gun Sales a Hazard

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U.S. Attorney for Utah Brett Tolman says people who sell guns without a federal license at gun shows are putting the public at risk.

Three men indicted on charges of violating federal law when they sold firearms at gun shows to undercover federal agents joined Tolman during a press conference Friday to urge gun sellers to get their federal dealer's license.

Grover Snedeger of Richfield said he began going to gun shows about 10 years ago. Over time he began to sell a few guns, then more guns. "At some point I purchased a table and then multiple tables," he said. "At the time I didn't know what I was doing was against the law."

He found out when he was indicted and faced time in federal prison.

Tolman said convicted felons, drug users, domestic violence offenders and others who by law are not allowed to possess a firearms often turn to gun shows as a way to circumvent the background check process.

"We are attempting to stop the stream of guns that are finding their way into the hands of criminals or other restricted persons," Tolman said.

Tolman pointed to the case of 21-year-old Creshon Lamont Butler as an example. Butler, a convicted felon, tried to buy a Hi-Point .9-mm pistol at a gun show in Utah last January. He approached a gun seller who was a licensed federal firearms dealer. Upon an instant background check, the dealer discovered Butler had lied about his felony record. Last Wednesday, Butler pleaded guilty to a felony charge of attempted possession of a firearm by a restricted person and now faces up to 10 years in federal prison.

Tolman said Butler's case is an example of how the system is supposed to work, but agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives have reported other sellers who are unlicensed and don't bother with background checks.

ATF Resident Agent-in-Charge Laurie Dire said agents know felons can be drawn to gun shows for this reason.

David Yadron of Provo and Harvey Ritter of Jackson, Wyo., also urged gun sellers to become licensed or face possible felony charges, as they did. All three men agreed to make public appearances and are restricted from access to firearms in exchange for not being fully prosecuted. Each faced a maximum of five years in federal prison.

Tolman said federal gun laws can be confusing. While federal law allows a person to sell a gun to another, there are many restrictions to unlicensed sellers, such as a prohibition on selling guns to someone from out of state. Dyer said if people are unsure, they should contact the ATF to find out.

The press conference comes a day before the Crossroads of the West Gun Show is set to begin at the South Towne Exposition Center in Sandy. Tolman said he wants the public to also know that it is routine for federal agents to be sent undercover to make sure gun sellers are following the law and that sellers should assume a person could be an agent.

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