



Q: What is a "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law, and why is it important?

A: The following explains the "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law:

The Basic Problem: The Brady Law effectively stops convicted criminals and other prohibited purchasers from directly buying handguns from a gun store. The Brady Law does not stop straw purchase transactions. In a straw purchase transaction, an individual who may legally purchase a firearm is hired to purchase firearms for an individual who is either prohibited by law from making the purchase (i.e., felons and minors) or does not want to be traced. Gun traffickers often employ straw purchasers to buy firearms in bulk - the guns, in turn, are sold on the illegal market, often to juveniles, and eventually wind up on our nation's streets.

Interstate Gunrunning: Many states have strict gun laws designed to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals, but interstate gun trafficking undermines the effectiveness of those laws. Law enforcement officials report that there is an "iron pipeline" of guns that are illegally trafficked up and down the East Coast of the United States. Gunrunners who operate in cities with tough gun laws (like New York and Boston) travel to states with less restrictive laws (like **Pennsylvania**, Georgia, Florida, Ohio and Texas) and buy a large quantity of handguns. Under existing federal law, the purchaser of a handgun must be a resident of the state in which a gun is sold. Out-of-state gunrunners circumvent this law by obtaining false identification (usually a driver's license) or by hiring a local resident, known as a straw purchaser, to make multiple purchases. The guns are then illegally transported to other states and jurisdictions, even other countries, for illegal resale to criminals, children, and other prohibited purchasers.

Intrastate Gunrunning: Even states with strict gun laws have some difficulty in dealing with the problem of straw purchasers. Before Maryland passed its "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law, police records revealed a suspiciously high volume of multiple purchases. In any given year, one to three percent of gun buyers were accounting for up to 16% of all guns purchased. In 1995, Maryland State Police set up Operation Maryland Cease Fire to begin investigating some of these larger volume purchases. In one instance, Maryland State Police went to the home of a 21-year old man who had recently bought 27 guns from Glen Burnie pawnshops. Upon further investigation they found that the guns had been resold to a Baltimore narcotics ring. Pennsylvania is experiencing the same type of problem. In Philadelphia 50% of all crime guns came from just 8 dealers, indicating a strong likelihood of trafficking.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, and Firearms 76 percent of crime guns in Philadelphia were originally purchased in Pennsylvania. In Pittsburgh, 81 percent of the crime guns were bought in state. These statistics indicate that Pennsylvania's gun trafficking problem is largely an intrastate problem. Therefore, limiting bulk purchases of handguns within the state could seriously stem the tide of illegal handguns.

The Solution: A "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law makes it illegal for anyone to purchase more than one handgun in any 30-day period. By limiting handgun purchases to one per person per month, a gunrunner is unable to obtain many handguns at one time, dramatically reducing the profitability of gunrunning. Quite simply, these laws put most gun traffickers (and their straw purchasers) out of business.

Q: What states have "One-Handgun-Per-Month" laws?

A: In 1975, South Carolina became the first state to limit purchases of handguns to one per month. In response to their growing reputation as the number one gun trafficking state to the northeastern United States, Virginia passed a "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law that went into effect on July 1, 1993. In 1996, Maryland became the third state to limit handgun purchases to one per month and in August of 1998, California became the fourth.

Q: Why did Virginia pass their "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law?

A: Virginia had become the "firearms supermarket" for the East Coast. Virginia gun dealers were found to supply more than 40% of guns seized in crime in New York City. Virginia's leaders did not want the distinction of being the nation's number one source of guns used in crime. Their reputation as the supplier of crime guns in America was seen as an economic issue that was hurting the state's business development.

Q: Where do gun traffickers sell their guns?

A: On the East Coast, many of the weapons end up in northeastern cities where they are sold for as much as a 400% - 500% profit. These cities and most northern states have imposed stringent gun control laws, but the effectiveness of their laws has been undermined by guns coming in from other states and jurisdictions. Gun trafficking is a national problem, crossing boundaries between states with weak and strong gun laws. With the Brady Law now requiring background checks on all handgun purchases, more criminals are relying upon straw purchasers and professional gun traffickers to obtain firearms.

Q: Are there any exceptions to the one handgun per month limit?

A: Yes. In Pennsylvania's proposed legislation an exception is made for law enforcement agencies, private security companies, the purchase of antique firearms and for persons whose handgun was stolen or irretrievably lost and needs to be replaced immediately.

Q: Does this type of legislation adversely affect hunters and sportsmen?

A: Absolutely not. The legislation is limited to handguns, and does not regulate shotguns and rifles. During the debate in Virginia, many hunters supported this limit on handgun purchases. A typical reaction appeared in *The Washington Post* from a lifetime hunter who said he was willing to **"sacrifice my right to purchase an infinite number of pistols if it will keep guns out of the hands of criminals and save lives."**

Q: How are limits on multiple purchases enforced?

A: To successfully enforce limits on multiple handgun purchases it is important that retail handgun sales be reported to a state or national law enforcement office and that those records be computerized and maintained for at least 30 days. Pennsylvania's legislation would require the reporting of all retail handgun sales to the Pennsylvania State Police. Before a handgun can be sold in Pennsylvania, the dealer must call the State Police and ascertain whether the buyer has bought another handgun within the past 30 days. Maryland's law operates on a similar basis. After 30 days, the purchase indicator is removed.

Q: Has the law worked?

A: Yes. Virginia's law has greatly disrupted the gun trafficking pattern from Virginia to states in the northeastern United States. For guns purchased after implementation of the new law that were recovered in the Northeast, Virginia's share fell by 54% - to 16% of all guns traced back to the Southeast. Even more dramatically, the percentage of guns traced back to Virginia gun dealers fell by 61% for guns recovered in New York, 67% for guns recovered in Massachusetts, and 38% for guns recovered in New Jersey. Further, according to law enforcement officials in Virginia, straw purchases of handguns that had made that state the "firearms supermarket" dropped sharply after the law was passed.

Reports from public officials in Virginia have been very encouraging. The Virginia State Crime Commission concluded that, "Virginia's [One-Handgun-Per-Month] statute has had its intended effect of reducing Virginia's status as a source state for gun trafficking. The imposition of the law does not appear to create an onerous burden for law-abiding gun purchasers." According to Helen Fahey, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, "Since passage of the [One-Handgun-Per-Month] legislation, instances of gunrunning have decreased dramatically."

In Maryland, handgun sales dropped more than 25 percent during the first year of that state's "One-Handgun-Per-Month" law. Maryland officials attributed much of the drop to an 80 percent decrease in the number of multiple sales. Furthermore, the number of Maryland multiple-sale guns turning up at crime scenes in Washington, D.C. dropped from 23 to zero, and from 26 to four in Baltimore.

Q: What does the gun lobby say about "One-Handgun-Per-Month" legislation?

A: During the legislative debate on the "One-Handgun-Per-Month" bill in Virginia, the National Rifle Association (NRA) sponsored a rally opposing the bill. During the rally, NRA Executive Director Wayne LaPierre admitted, "Not a lot of Virginians buy more than one handgun a month." This admission did not stop the gun lobby from opposing the law, however, or trying to repeal the law once it took effect.

Q: How does the public feel about "One-Handgun-Per-Month" legislation?

A: According to a recent poll, 76% of Pennsylvanians support a "one-gun-a-month" law. Among gun owners: 61% of Pennsylvania gun owners support a "one-gun-a-month" law

Nationally, 69% of Americans support a limit on handgun purchases to one per month, according to a January 1994 Gallup Monthly Poll.