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Another look at the data on gun violence

Pat Perriello | Jan. 27, 2014 NCR Today

I wanted to gather some recent data on gun violence in our country for consideration. Let's look first at some data generated by Heeding God's Call [1]: There are 283 million guns currently in civilian hands in the United States, yet the number of homes with guns has declined from 54 percent in 1977 to 33 percent in 2009. The average number of guns per owner has therefore increased from 4.1 in 1994 to 6.9 in 2004. Firearms kill 30,000 people each year in the United States, a number that includes accidental shootings and suicides.

Other items of interest include some statistics from other countries. There are fewer than 50 gun homicides each year in Japan. Germany, Italy and France each have fewer than 150 gun homicides annually, while Canada has fewer than 200. In the United States, more than 10,000 gun homicides occur each year.

Here is some additional data from the National Institute of Justice [2]. A total of 467,321 individuals were victims of crime committed with a firearm in 2011. Firearms were used in 68 percent of all deaths, most involving handguns. In 1993, there were 17,075 gun homicides. In the ensuing years, that number has fluctuated, but stood at 10,869 in 2008. Gang-related homicides involved a gun in 95 percent of cases. The percentage of homicides caused by firearms in the commission of a felony went from 60 percent in 1980 to 74 percent in 2005.

Let me also remind us of some of the well-publicized shootings from 2012. There was the Colorado movie theater shooting in July. The Sikh temple shooting in Wisconsin followed in August. The tragic events in Newtown, Conn., followed in December.

Mother Jones *[3]*notes [3] that 62 mass shootings have occurred since 1982 in 30 states, from Massachusetts to Hawaii. Twenty-five of these shootings have taken place since 2006, and seven of them happened in 2012.

Finally, CNN on Jan. 18 highlighted a number of shootings [4] that occurred in *one week* in January of this year. In Philadelphia, two 15-year-olds were wounded in the gym at Delaware Valley Charter School. In Indiana, two women were shot to death at a supermarket. A 12-year-old student in a New Mexico middle school seriously wounded two students. In Florida, a 71-year-old retired policeman shot and killed a moviegoer who was texting at the movies.

A couple of points should be clear to everyone. First of all, the incidents are occurring in every corner of our country. No area is immune, and no venue remains free from gun violence. Gun violence is happening in every strata of the community and every socioeconomic group. The numbers should be troubling to all of us. When compared to other countries, we are clearly doing something wrong.

We need to get beyond the rhetoric that divides us into two hostile camps and find a bipartisan group of legislators who can bridge the divide. Our interest needs to be in making our country safer while still protecting legitimate gun rights. The goal cannot be blind adherence to the First Amendment with no possible restrictions, nor should it be to take guns away from legitimate gun owners. The goal should be to make this a safer country for our families. We and our children need to feel safer in our schools, our malls, our theaters and our streets.

A safer country can be achieved. The senseless killings can be addressed. Lives can be saved. We do not need to wake up each day to another story of carnage happening somewhere in America. All across this country and in the halls of Congress, Americans need to stand up and demand action.

The effort to reduce the number of lives lost through senseless gun violence deserves a response that is at least as robust as that evidenced by the thousands of Americans who marched on Washington in the snow to oppose abortion on Jan. 22.

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[1] http://www.heedinggodscall.org/content/pfctoolkit-10
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