

washingtonpost.com

ATF Lost Guns, Computers

418 Laptops Vanished in 5 Years; Contents Largely Unknown

By Holly Watt
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, September 18, 2008; A19

Over a five-year period, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives lost dozens of weapons and hundreds of laptops that contained sensitive information, according to a scathing report issued yesterday by the Justice Department.

Inspector General Glenn A. Fine identified "serious deficiencies" in ATF's response to lost or stolen items and called the agency's control of classified data "inadequate."

From 2002 to 2007, ATF lost 418 laptop computers and 76 weapons, according to the report. Two weapons were subsequently used to commit crimes. In one incident, a gun stolen from the home of a special agent was fired through the window of another home.

Ten firearms were "left in a public place." One of them was left on an airplane, three in bathrooms, one in a shopping cart and two on the top of cars as ATF employees drove away. A laptop also fell off the top of a car as an agent drove off.

Another weapon "fell into the water while an agent was fishing," according to the report.

"This seems like deja vu when you look back at previous reports outlining the same missteps by DOJ law enforcement agencies in 2001," said Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), who has criticized federal law enforcement agencies for failing to account for weapons and laptops. "Keeping track of government property may seem like housekeeping to some, but when it comes to guns and computers with sensitive information, it's critical to public safety, national security and the credibility of the ATF."

A regular audit of weapons and other sensitive items has been conducted since a study in 2001 revealed that the FBI and other agencies had misplaced hundreds of firearms.

Yesterday's report showed that ATF, a much smaller agency than the FBI, had lost proportionately many more firearms and laptops.

"It is especially troubling that that ATF's rate of loss for weapons was nearly double that of the FBI and [Drug Enforcement Administration], and that ATF did not even know whether most of its lost, stolen, or missing laptop computers contained sensitive or classified information," Fine wrote.

W. Larry Ford, assistant director of ATF's Office of Public and Governmental Affairs, said the agency "is committed to strengthening controls over weapons, laptops and ammunition by more strictly enforcing agency policies and by developing new procedures outlined in our response to the OIG."

Advertisement



Many of the missing laptops contained sensitive or classified material, according to the report. ATF began installing encryption software only in May 2007.

ATF did not know what information was on 398 of the 418 lost or stolen laptops. The report called the lack of such knowledge a "significant deficiency."

Of the 20 missing laptops for which information was available, ATF indicated that seven -- 35 percent -- held sensitive information.

One missing laptop, for example, held "300-500 names with dates of birth and Social Security numbers of targets of criminal investigations, including their bank records with financial transactions." Another held "employee evaluations, including Social Security numbers and other [personal information]." Neither laptop was encrypted.

ATF employees did not report the loss of 365 of the 418 laptops.

The report was less critical of ATF's control of explosives, but when the inspector general reviewed inventory records, he found that amounts "on hand did not correspond with the amounts recorded" in records at eight of 16 locations.

ATF investigates crime involving firearms and explosives, arson and trafficking of alcohol and tobacco. It was transferred to the Justice Department from the Treasury Department in 2003, and the report contained implicit criticism of earlier auditing of the sensitive materials. ATF held "inaccurate data accumulated over several years," it said.

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

Post a Comment

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the [full rules](#) governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

© 2008 The Washington Post Company

Ads by Google

Executive Protection

Security, Consulting & Protection Professionalism & Integrity
www.bpsnow.com

Protect Your Self

Protecting YOUR Family Everyday YOUR Source for Defense & Training
www.SelfDefense-2u.com

Denied Security Clearance

Have you been Denied a Security Clearance? Free Advice-Contact Us!
Lawyer.onlineLawyersource.com