

Homeland Security reports losing guns

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By **Thomas Frank**, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The nation's Homeland Security officers lost nearly 200 guns in bowling alleys, public restrooms, unlocked cars and other unsecure areas, with some ending up in the hands of felons. The problem, outlined in a new federal report, has prompted disciplinary actions and extra training.

Most of the misplaced weapons — including handguns, shotguns and military rifles — were never found. "Most losses occurred because officers did not properly secure firearms," says the Homeland Security inspector general report.

At least 15 of the guns ended up in the hands of gang members, criminals, drug users and teenagers, inspector general Richard Skinner found. His report documented 289 missing firearms from fiscal year 2006 through 2008, although not all were lost because of negligence. Some were lost in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and others were stolen from safes.

The report is the first accounting of guns lost by Homeland Security's 185,000 workers.

Homeland Security "took immediate action" to correct problems, department spokeswoman Amy Kudwa said Wednesday. Workers are getting extra training and officials are improving tracking and inspection of guns, Kudwa said.

"The department is strongly committed to ensuring that weapons ... are kept secure," Kudwa said.

Although the number of guns lost is only a small fraction of Homeland Security's 190,000 firearms, any lost weapon "is a very serious matter," said Hubert Williams, president of the Police Foundation, a think tank on law-enforcement issues. "It reflects the competence of the officer."

The report does not say if any of the guns were used in crimes.

Homeland Security said employees have been fired and suspended for losing guns. Guns are carried by many Customs, [Border Patrol](#) and Immigration agents.

A 2008 report found 76 guns lost by the 4,800 agents of the [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives](#) in a five-year period ending in 2007.

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