

Towards fewer guns: An Analysis of the Worcester Goods for Guns Buyback 2009-2014

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Purpose: Firearms are implicated in numerous fatal and nonfatal injuries each year. Despite contradicting evidence as to their effectiveness, buybacks have continued to flourish and gain support of community and government officials. An annual buyback has happened in Worcester since 2002; the eight-hour event at the Worcester Police Department offers anonymous disposal of firearms in exchange for gift certificates, of which the value varies based on the type of firearm. This study seeks to describe recent participants to the Worcester gun buyback program and their motivations for surrendering their firearms.

Methods: We analyzed survey responses among participants to the Goods for Guns Buyback program in Worcester, Massachusetts during the years 2009-2014. The survey was designed by the Injury Free Coalition for Kids, Worcester. Descriptive statistics were used to determine respondent demographics, source of gun(s), motivation for turning in the gun(s) and safety training and habits.

Results: 257 participants submitted surveys between 2009 and 2014. Of these participants, 49% were white males over the age of 55; there were five non-white participants. Participants represented 61 zip codes across Worcester County, with 21 in 2014. 20% were from rural zip codes. The majority of participants turned in guns because they no longer needed the weapon (49.8%); other reasons included fear of children accessing the gun (14%), general safety concerns (7.8%) and need of gift certificates (7%). 69% of respondents had received formal training and 80% had read firearm safety information. The majority of training was from previously military or police experience; most safety information was obtained from local sportsmen clubs. 61% of participants report still having firearm(s) at home; 90% of these individuals report locking these weapons. 33% of people with guns at home say children living or visiting the home could access the guns. 40% of participants were interested in the free gunlocks provided at the event, of whom 61% still had guns at home.

Conclusion: The Worcester Goods for Guns Buyback has collected over 900 guns between 2009 and 2014. The program seems to attract a certain demographic. Delving deeper into the reasons people turn in their guns offers the opportunity to expand the program's appeal and success. For example, raising awareness about pediatric firearms injury would tap into participant concern about children accessing guns. Another intervention could utilize networks of families and friends to have a wider reach given that 85% of participants knew at least one other person with a gun. As one part of an integrated and multipronged approach, the buyback offers a cost effective way to reduce gun violence and gun-related injury and mortality.

