

Unaccounted For: Hundreds of Guns Lost or Stolen From Bay Area Police Agencies Since 2010

NBC Bay Area
11.16.2015

An NBC Bay Area investigation into the loss and theft of police firearms uncovered more than 500 weapons have gone missing from eight different law enforcement agencies, including the California Highway Patrol, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration and six local departments since 2010.

The investigation found the problem of lost and stolen law enforcement weapons goes far beyond the gun stolen from a Bureau of Land Management ranger's vehicle in San Francisco. That gun was later tied to the shooting death of Kate Steinle on Pier 14 in San Francisco on July 1, 2015, police confirm.

NBC Bay Area's investigation uncovered hundreds of guns missing from Bay Area law enforcement agencies, stolen from officers' homes or vehicles, or simply unaccounted for. The BLM, the agency responsible for the gun that killed Steinle, did not respond to NBC Bay Area's open records requests submitted in July, shortly after the shooting, and the question of how many firearms that federal agency can't account for remains open.

The NBC Bay Area Investigative Unit filed California Public Records Act requests with law enforcement agencies at the federal, state and local level following Steinle's death, seeking records pertaining to the loss or theft of law enforcement firearms. In the Bay Area alone, six local law enforcement agencies can't account for at least 379 firearms since 2010 because of loss or theft. The weapons unaccounted for include military grade assault rifles such as AR-15s and M16s, sniper rifles, shotguns, a gas grenade launcher and hundreds of handguns. The vast majority of those weapons have never been recovered.

Attorneys

Frank M. Pitre

Practice Areas

Municipal & Public Entity
Litigation

UNACCOUNTED FOR: HUNDREDS OF GUNS LOST OR STOLEN FROM BAY AREA POLICE AGENCIES SINCE 2010

One agency, the Oakland Police Department, refused to turn over records or say how many guns the agency couldn't account for, saying the records were exempt from disclosure as part of criminal investigations, even though other law enforcement agencies readily turned over similar records.

Out of the six local law enforcement agencies that provided records to the Investigative Unit, the San Jose Police Department was responsible for 324 firearms discovered missing during a 2010 audit of the department's inventory. San Jose Police gave NBC the entire audit and was transparent about the problem of unaccounted weapons there.

"Back in 2010, we proactively did an audit of the range and we discovered that we have about 300 guns that are unaccounted for," said deputy chief Phan Ngo. "Totally unacceptable."

Ngo said decades of poor recordkeeping is to blame for the missing guns and that inventory controls have been tightened since the audit.

"I'm always concerned when we have about 300 guns that are unaccounted for," he said. "We're doing our best to ensure that the situation doesn't occur again in the future." Even so, Ngo admitted only a handful of those missing guns have been recovered or located to this day.

The majority of the missing weapons from San Jose police were handguns issued to officers. But the department's audit also discovered they were missing six sniper rifles, two M-16 rifles, 10 40mm launchers, and 49 shotguns. According to police records, only 16 of the lost guns have been located since the audit, which also found 2,448 of the department's weapons were never registered with the U.S. Department of Justice.

"We need to know that when law enforcement officers are given the privilege to carry around weapons, that they are going to be held to the requirements that are imposed in making sure they're secured and not easily available for criminals to use in crimes," said Frank Pitre, the attorney representing the Steinle family... *(To read the entire article, please click [HERE](#))*