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Bulletin

Rocky Mountain Information Network

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**NIBIN: Collect,
Compare, Connect**
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Law enforcement sensitive

Crime guns & NIBIN: Collect, compare the casings, connect the dots

By **Kate von Seeburg**
RMIN Publications Editor

The unique markings left on spent bullets and cartridge casings can be the firearm equivalent of pocket trash: of great value to a law enforcement investigator, if the information's been properly collected and processed and is readily available. Information that might seem of little value to one agency can be a critical factor to the success of another agency's investigation.

The National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), coordinated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), is a tool to help law enforcement make sure a crime gun tells its story while helping agencies investigate gun-related crimes. Basically, digital images of the markings on spent ammunition from criminal investigations are stored and compared with firearm test fires in order to identify any possible links to violent crime shootings. To date, more than 31,000 NIBIN hits have been confirmed across the U.S.

Within the RMIN region, for example:

Colorado Springs (Colorado) Police Department responded to a shooting at a residence where the victim sustained multiple gunshot wounds. Later that month, New York City Police Department (NYPD) conducted a traffic stop and arrested three men for unlawful possession of firearms. One of the suspects was a Colorado resident. Using NIBIN, the NYPD crime lab matched the .40 caliber pistol seized as a result of the traffic stop in New York to the shooting incident in Colorado. Following extradition from Colorado and a guilty plea

to attempted murder, the Colorado suspect was sentenced to 16 years in prison.

A number of expended .45 caliber cartridge casings were collected by **Las Vegas (Nevada) Metro Police Department** officers at a nightclub crime scene in Las Vegas. A month later, during a traffic stop by a Los Angeles (California) Police Department gang squad officer, a .45 pistol was seized when the occupant was arrested for illegal firearms possession. The pistol was test fired and entered into the NIBIN database. A link was made with the Las Vegas nightclub shooting and provided investigators in Nevada with a prime suspect.

When a gang related drive-by shooting injured two victims in New Mexico, investigators from the **Albuquerque Police Department** discovered casings at the scene and processed them into the NIBIN system. Six days later, Albuquerque police responded to another drive-by shooting and found a victim shot in the head. Casings at the scene were recovered and entered into NIBIN. The same day, Albuquerque police responded to a second call of a drive-by shooting as well as to a shots fired call at

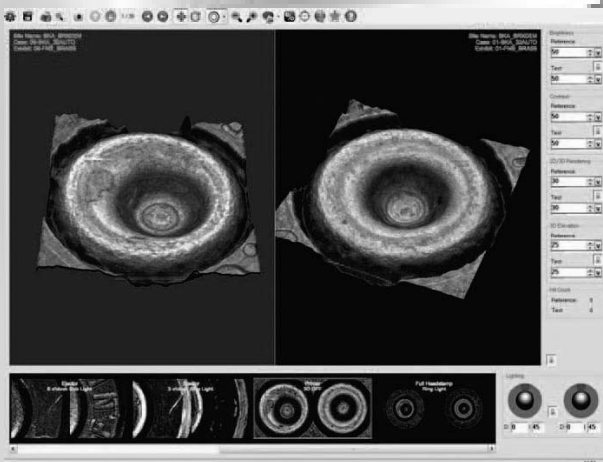
a convenience store. Casings were found at both scenes and entered into NIBIN. Sixteen days later, casings were again found when police investigated a shooting from a vehicle. The five separate shootings were linked to the same firearm through NIBIN. Three months later, a pistol was recovered during the execution of a search warrant and linked to all five shootings. Two felons were ar-

rested for firearms violations and have been identified as prime suspects in the shootings.

In **Arizona**, detectives from the **Phoenix Police Department** investigated a home invasion robbery during which suspects stole the elderly victims' vehicle, a camera and cash. The following day, just three miles away, a man was murdered – shot in the back as he tried to run to safety; cartridge casings left at the scene were processed and entered into the NIBIN database. About two weeks later, when officers from nearby **Mesa (Arizona) Police Department** responded to a drive-by shooting, they found a victim with a gunshot wound to his leg and cartridge cases were recovered at the scene. A week later, officers with **Tempe (Arizona) Police Department** responded to a report that someone had pointed a gun at people in another vehicle; a short time later, a vehicle matching the description of the suspect vehicle was stopped by Tempe police. Three guns were seized from the vehicle and the occupants were interviewed. Cartridge case evidence from the Mesa drive-by shooting and from

guns seized during the traffic stop in Tempe were entered into the NIBIN database and a hit, matching the pistol seized during the traffic stop

with the murder in Phoenix, was confirmed. Last spring, the cases against four suspects who were charged with multiple crimes, including murder, resulted in lengthy prison sentences.



Phoenix Metro NIBIN Program

In one year, the Phoenix Police Department's NIBIN site increased its number of database entries by 52 percent (2009 entries: 4,200; 2010 entries: 6,400), finishing as the highest volume NIBIN site in the United States. This increase was made possible by the dedication of the Phoenix Police Department's combined efforts of its Gun Enforcement & NIBIN Squad, Phoenix Police Department Crime Lab and through the increase in participation among other law enforcement agencies through the implementation of the Phoenix Metro NIBIN Program launched last summer.

The Phoenix Metro NIBIN team submitted more entries into the NIBIN database in 2010 than did any of the other 156 NIBIN squads in the U.S., including the New York, Chicago and Los Angeles police departments. The Phoenix Metro NIBIN Program is viewed by ATF and other law enforcement agencies throughout the country as a model in cooperative law enforcement practices.

Calling this a "stunning success," Sgt. Brandon Huntley praised the work of the NIBIN team at PPD: Police Assistants Fran Hanson and Donna Brown and Detectives Patrick Murphy, Neil Worden, Donnie Courty, Linda Guertin, Dennis Olson, Daniel Moncrief and Michelangelo Caggiano. Sgt. Huntley oversees the Gun Enforcement & NIBIN squad, housed within the Home Invasion & Kidnapping Enforcement (HIKE) Unit, led by Lt. Lauri Burgett.

"The Phoenix Metro NIBIN team has made a commitment not only to quantity but to the highest quality work, too," noted Sgt. Huntley. Agencies participating in the Phoenix Metro NIBIN program include ATF and the police de-

partments of Avondale, Chandler, El Mirage, Gilbert, Glendale, Maricopa, Peoria, Phoenix, Salt River, Scottsdale, Surprise and Tempe.

During 2010, Phoenix Metro NIBIN:

- Identified more than 130 possible hits
- Confirmed more than 70 hits with an additional 50 pending confirmation
- Test fired more than 4,000 guns from 12 law enforcement agencies

Bill Newell, Special Agent in Charge of the Phoenix Field Division of the Bu-

reau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF), presented the Phoenix

Metro NIBIN team members with ATF challenge coins in celebration of the team's success. "The number of entries is a tribute to your hard work," said Newell, "and because of what you're accomplishing, chiefs [of police] across the country are paying attention to the NIBIN program. The program is expanding, in part, because of what the Phoenix Metro NIBIN unit is doing."

The Phoenix Metro NIBIN program, in partnership with ATF, is committed to:

- Increasing the number of agencies participating in the NIBIN program
- Ensuring the timely submittal of firearm-related evidence into the NIBIN database
- Providing effective investigative follow-up on cases that may be connected

"The week-long training program is

worth the \$1,000 to \$1,500 per person because in addition to an individual who's knowledgeable and well trained, the agency has access to the NIBIN database and all the equipment.

According to Sgt. Huntley, NIBIN is cost effective because the training is thorough and the resulting data being entered is of high quality. The equipment is designed to reduce processing time and increase productivity. Technology and the system allow data to be shared electronically, increasing the ability of law enforcement agencies to make ballistic matches across crime scenes and jurisdictions. After a shell casing has been entered, a squad member correlates the image looking for potential hits to

other images. The system has the capability to sift through thousands of other entries to look for a hit.

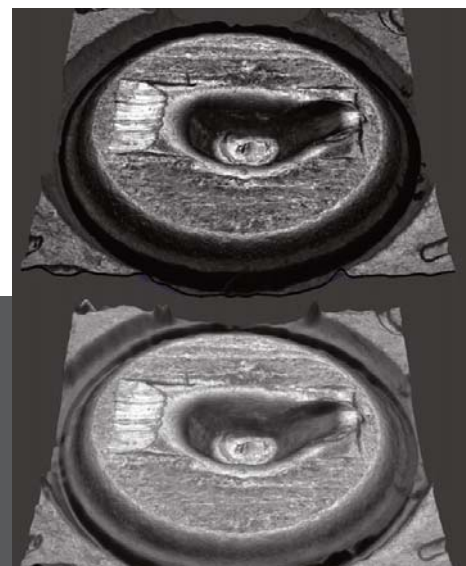
Once a potential hit is identified, crime lab personnel specializing in firearms confirm the hit.

The effectiveness of a database hinges on the quantity and quality of information in it. In order to connect the dots—or the casings—they have to be there."

– Sgt. Brandon Huntley

Phoenix Metro NIBIN

- Focuses on processing recent cases to help provide law enforcement with timely information and follow up;
- Provides actionable intelligence can help lead to successful investigations;
- Works with the case agent and generates a supplemental report, providing valuable assistance and saving time.

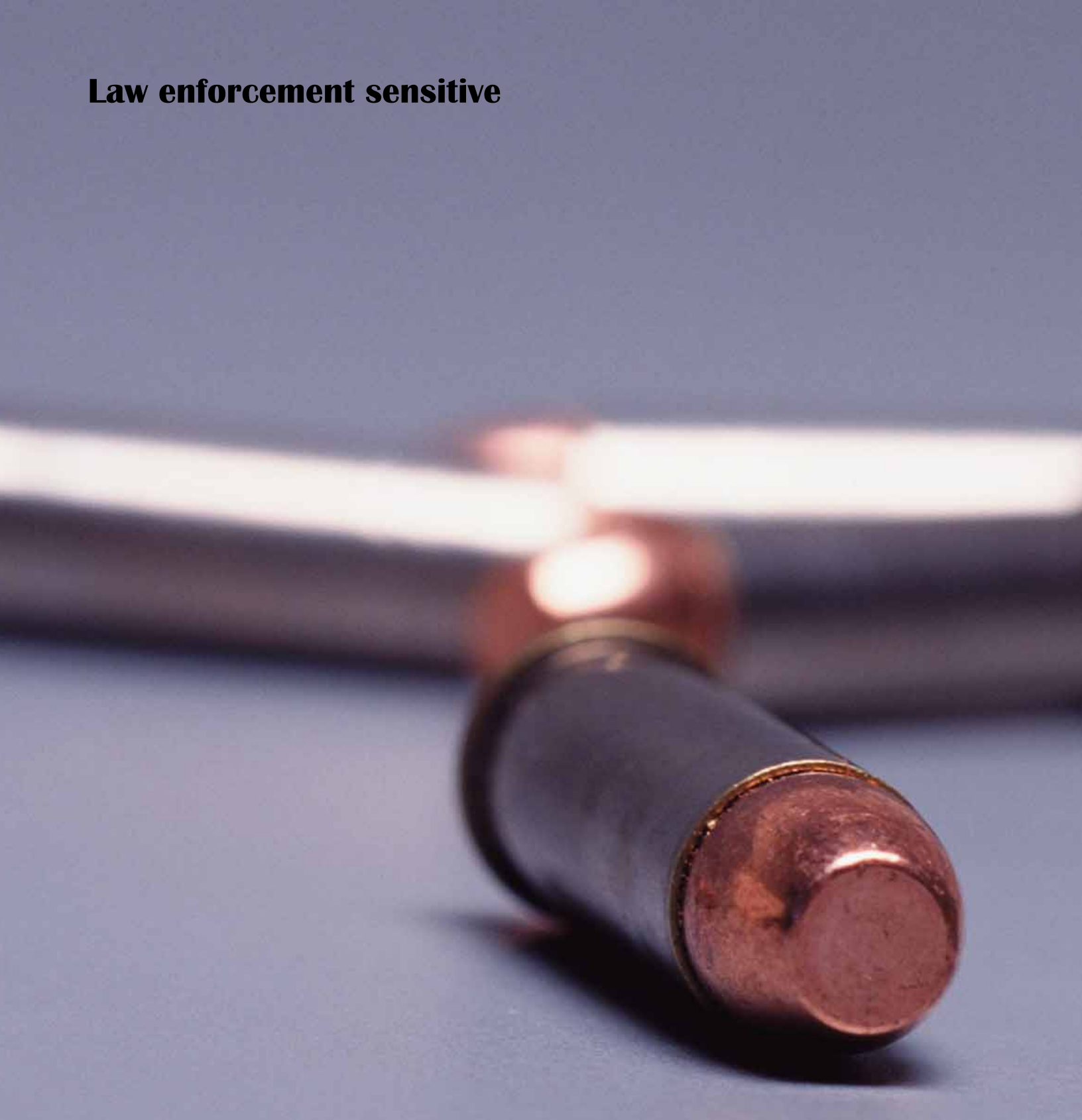


Interested in learning more about NIBIN?

- Contact Sgt. Brandon Huntley of PPD at brandon.huntley@phoenix.gov or by phone to (602) 262-7626
- Visit http://www.phoenix.gov/police/gun_enforcement.html for information and to view the PPD/NIBIN video
- Visit www.atf.gov or call the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives at (202) 648-7140

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