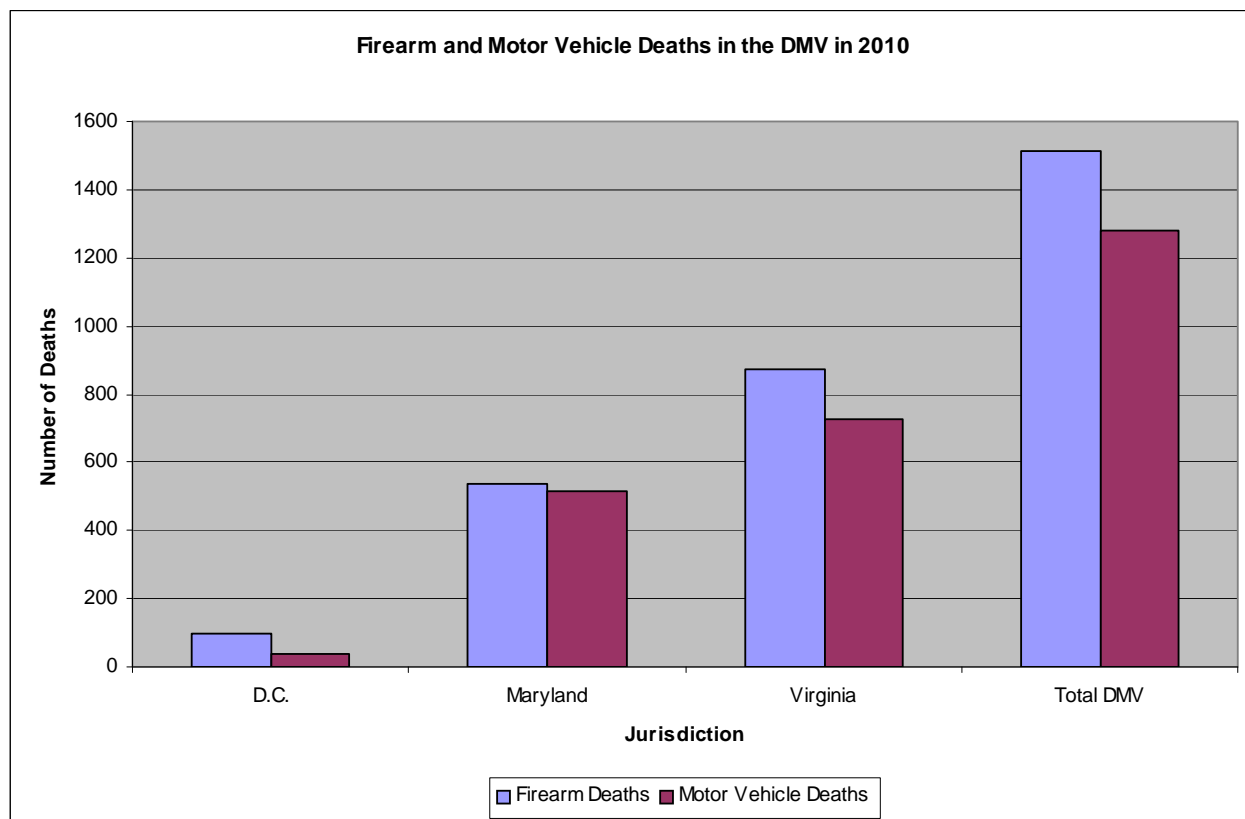




## Gun Deaths Outpace Motor Vehicle Deaths in the DMV in 2010

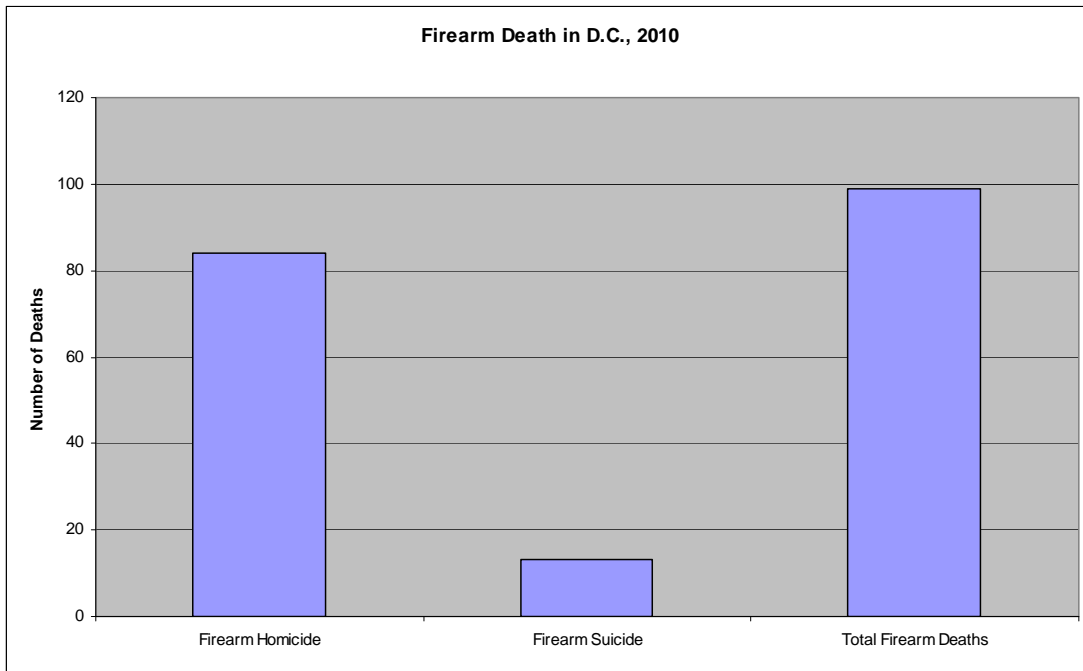
Firearm-related fatalities exceeded motor vehicle fatalities in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia) in 2010, the most recent year for which data is available for both products. Firearm-related deaths include homicide, suicide, and unintentional fatal injuries (see chart below).<sup>1</sup> Gun deaths outpaced motor vehicle deaths not only in the region as a whole, but in each of the three jurisdictions that comprise the DMV. In 2010, gun deaths in the DMV totaled 1,512 while motor vehicles deaths totaled 1,280.

The statistics in the DMV offer a stark illustration of a public health emergency that often receives scant attention from policymakers. Firearms remain the only consumer product not regulated by a federal health and safety agency, while the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has overseen automobile safety since 1966. Nationally, firearm fatalities almost equal motor vehicle deaths despite the fact that roughly three times as many Americans own automobiles as own firearms. The tolerance for such a high level of gun death is even harder to comprehend when the relative utility of the two products is taken into account. Unlike guns, motor vehicles are essential to the functioning of the U.S. economy.

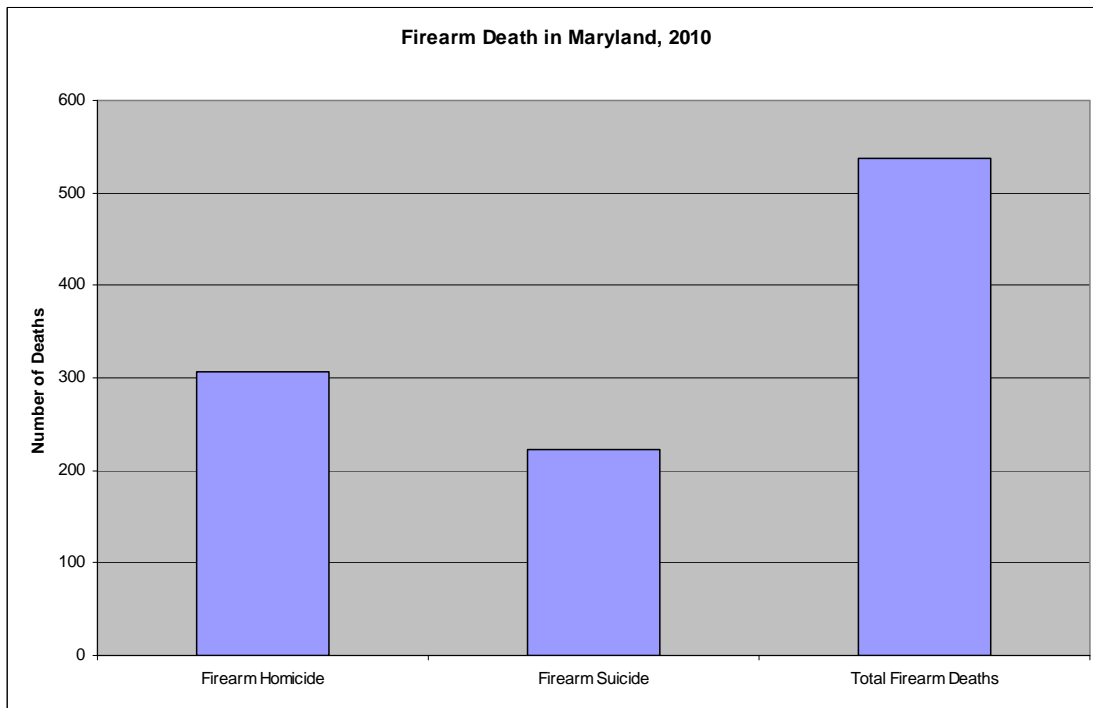


<sup>1</sup> In 2010 there were 31,672 firearm deaths nationwide for a rate of 10.26 per 100,000 and 35,498 motor vehicle deaths (both occupant and pedestrian) nationwide for a rate of 11.50 per 100,000. Source: WISQARS database, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

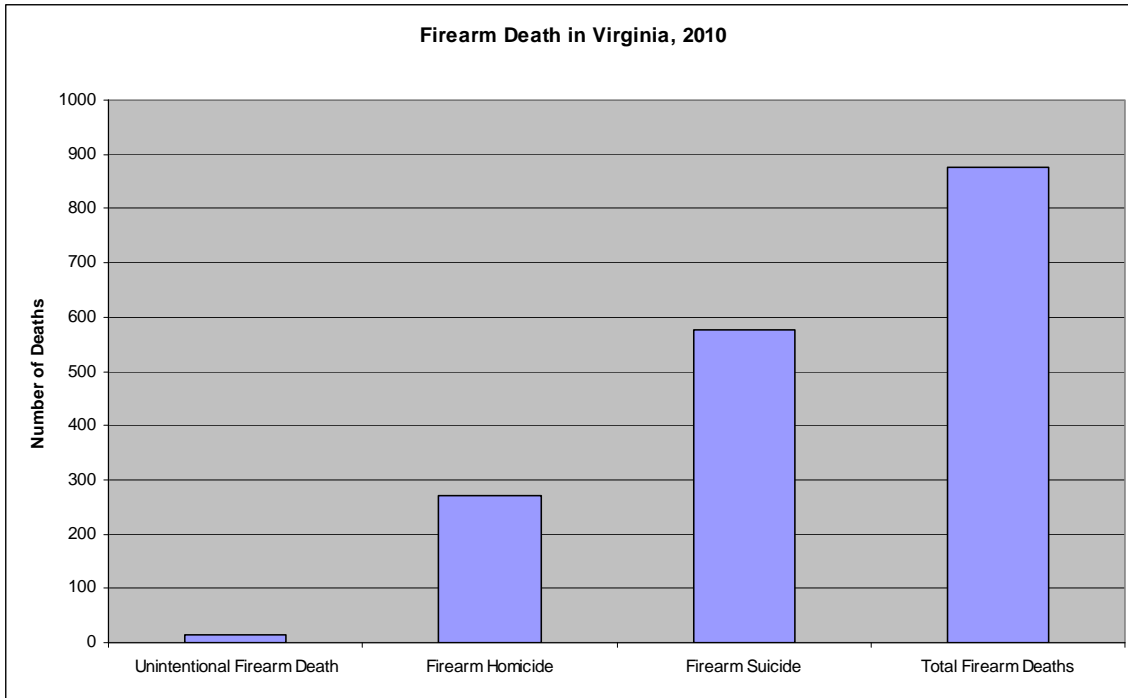
In the District of Columbia there were 99 firearm deaths reported in 2010, 84 of which were identified as homicides and 13 of which were identified as suicides. That same year, there were 38 motor vehicle deaths in the District.



In Maryland, there were 538 firearm deaths reported in 2010, 306 of which were identified as homicides and 222 of which were identified as suicides. That same year, there were 514 motor vehicle deaths in the state.



In Virginia, there were 875 firearm deaths reported in 2010, 271 of which were identified as homicides, 576 of which were identified as suicides, and 13 of which were identified as unintentional deaths. That same year, there were 728 motor vehicle deaths in the state.



Nationally, while motor vehicle-related deaths are on the decline as the result of a successful decades-long public health-based injury prevention strategy, firearm deaths continue unabated—the direct result of the failure of federal and many local policymakers to acknowledge and act on this ubiquitous and too often ignored public health problem. The comparative death rates associated

<b>Firearm and Motor Vehicle Deaths in the DMV, 2010<sup>2</sup></b>					
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Firearm Homicides</b>	<b>Firearm Suicides</b>	<b>Unintentional Firearm Deaths</b>	<b>Total Firearm Deaths</b>	<b>Total Motor Vehicle Deaths</b>
District	84	13	‡	99*	38
Maryland	306	222	‡	538*	514
Virginia	271	576	13	875*	728

<sup>2</sup> ‡ State-level counts of fewer than 10 deaths are suppressed. \* Total is greater than the sum of homicide, suicide, and unintentional deaths due to suppressed totals of less than 10 deaths for legal intervention, undetermined intents, and/or unintentional deaths.

with the two products are particularly striking considering the fact that more than 90 percent of American households own a car<sup>3</sup> and fewer than a third of American households contain a gun.<sup>4</sup>

## A Tale of Two Products

### Motor Vehicles: Effective Regulation Has Reduced Traffic Fatalities

Nationally, in 2010, the number of fatalities in motor vehicle traffic crashes continued their steady decline for a total of 35,498.<sup>5</sup> This drop took place despite an increase in the number of miles Americans drove.<sup>6</sup>

Experts agree that the formation of the federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 1966 coupled with a sustained decades-long effort to develop and implement a series of injury-prevention initiatives have saved countless lives. Numerous changes in both vehicle and highway design followed the creation of NHTSA. For example, vehicles incorporated new safety features, including: head rests; energy absorbing steering wheels; shatter-resistant windshields; and, safety belts. In addition, the roads that the vehicles traveled were improved by: better delineation of curves; use of breakaway signs and utility poles; improved illumination; addition of barriers separating oncoming traffic lanes; and, guardrails.<sup>7</sup> Experts also cite the increase in the use of seat belts beginning in the mid-1980s as states enacted belt-use laws as well as a reduction in alcohol-impaired driving as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and other organizations changed the public's perception of the problem and laws were enacted to increase the likelihood that intoxicated drivers would be punished. Graduated licensing laws are credited with helping to reduce the number of teen drivers crashing on our nation's roadways.<sup>8</sup> Between 1966 and 2000, the combined efforts of government and advocacy organizations reduced the rate of death per 100,000 population by 43 percent which represents a 72 percent decrease in deaths per vehicle miles traveled.<sup>9</sup> NHTSA estimates that seat belts, child restraints, and frontal air bags saved more than 15,000 lives in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Households by Number of Motor Vehicles: 2010," Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed history of gun ownership in the United States as reported by the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, see the April 2011 Violence Policy Center report *A Shrinking Minority: The Continuing Decline of Gun Ownership in America*, <http://www.vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> WISQARS database, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>6</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Press Release, "U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Announces Lowest Level Of Annual Traffic Fatalities in More Than Six Decades," December 8, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> "Motor-Vehicle Safety: A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Public Health Achievement," *JAMA*, June 9, 1999—Vol 281, No. 22 (*MMWR*, 1999; 48:369-374).

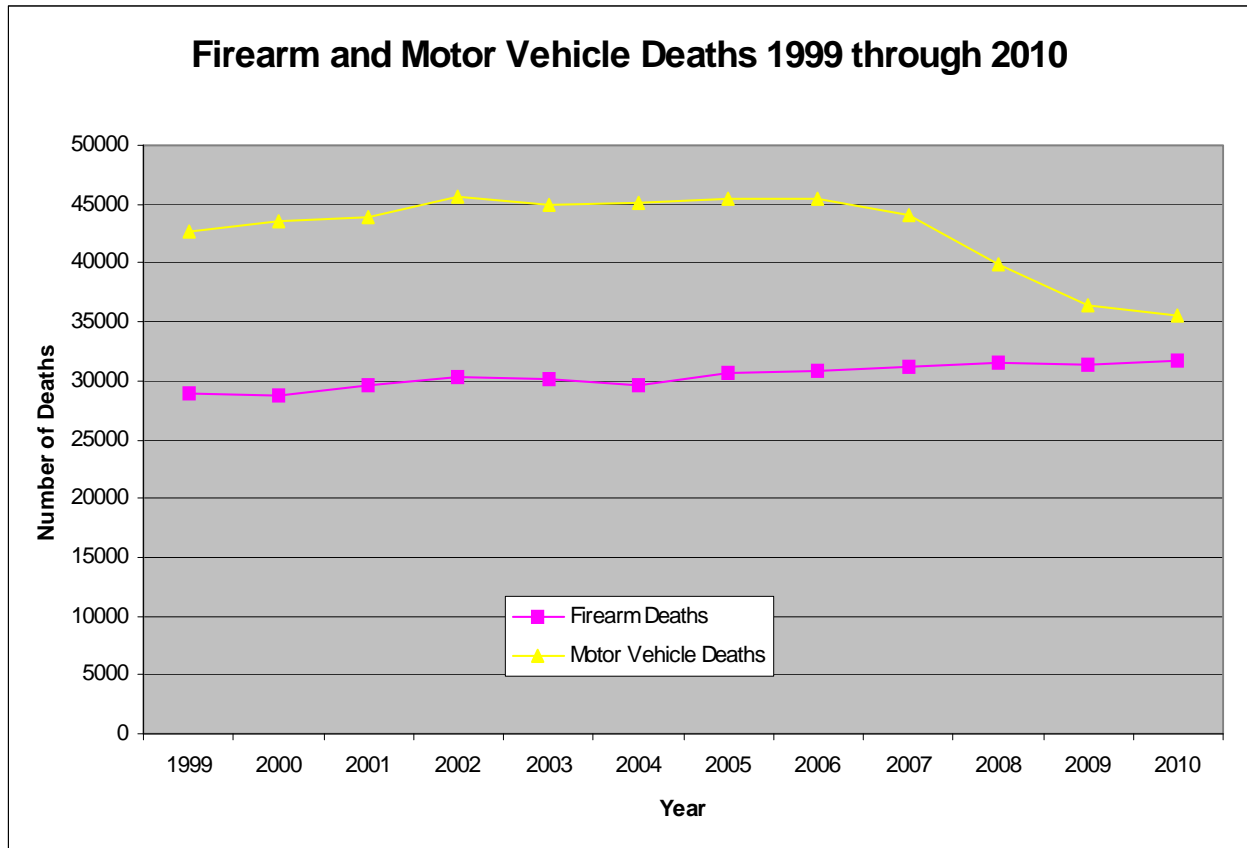
<sup>8</sup> "50 years of progress: Where do we go from here?," presentation by Adrian K. Lund, PhD, President, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety at Edmunds' Safety Conference: Truly Safe?, May 24, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> David A. Sleet, *et al*, "Traffic Safety in the context of public health and medicine," AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2010: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System, NHTSA, U.S. Department of Transportation.

## Firearms: The Last Unregulated Consumer Product Manufactured in America

The health and safety regulation of motor vehicles stands as a public health success story, yet firearms remain the last consumer product manufactured in the United States that is not subject to federal health and safety regulation.



While the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is charged with enforcing our nation's limited gun laws, it has none of the health and safety regulatory powers afforded other federal agencies such as NHTSA.<sup>11</sup> Health and safety regulation of firearms is left to the states and very few impose meaningful regulation designed to decrease all categories of gun-related death and injury. Moreover, the effectiveness of one jurisdiction's efforts is often undermined by weak standards in neighboring jurisdictions coupled with the lack of minimum federal standards.

<sup>11</sup> As noted prior, literally every other consumer product sold and manufactured in the United States is regulated by a federal agency for health and safety—guns and ammunition are the unique exception. Examples of federal agencies and the products for which they are responsible include: Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), household products (except for guns and ammunition); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), pesticides and toxic chemicals; Food and Drug Administration (FDA), drugs (including tobacco) and medical devices; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), motor vehicles.

Dr. David Hemenway, director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center and the Youth Violence Prevention Center, notes in his 2004 book *Private Guns, Public Health*:

[T]he time Americans spend using their cars is orders of magnitudes greater than the time spent using their guns. It is probable that per hour of exposure, guns are far more dangerous. Moreover, we have lots of safety regulations concerning the manufacture of motor vehicles; there are virtually no safety regulations for domestic firearms manufacture.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this extreme disparity in exposure, as seen on the chart on the prior page deaths nationwide from these two consumer products are on a trajectory to intersect.

Such an approach to injury prevention has been applied to every product Americans come into contact with every day—except for guns. And as is the proven case with motor vehicles, health and safety regulation could reduce deaths and injuries associated with firearms.

Comprehensive regulation of the firearms industry and its products could include the following components—

- Detailed and timely data collection on gun production, sales, use in crime, as well as analysis of the types, makes, and models of firearms most associated with injury, death, and criminal use;
- Implementation of minimum safety standards for firearms (i.e., specific design standards and the requirement of safety devices);
- Ban certain types of firearms that have no sporting purpose such as “junk guns” and military-style assault weapons;
- Limit the firepower of firearms available to the general public, e.g. restrict ammunition magazine capacity;
- Expand the categories of persons prohibited from possessing firearms by including restrictions on categories known to present a higher risk of misuse such as possession by those convicted of a violent misdemeanor;
- Restore restrictions on the carrying of loaded handguns in public spaces;
- Improve enforcement of current laws restricting gun possession by persons with histories of domestic violence;
- Improve enforcement of current laws restricting gun possession by persons with mental health disqualifiers;
- Implement public education campaigns that communicate the extreme risks associated with exposure to firearms.

Absent action at the federal level, the District, Maryland, and Virginia can implement many of these policies on their own and have to varying degrees. For example, the District and Maryland regulate assault weapons and “junk guns.” In addition, programs have been initiated in Maryland to deter illegal gun carrying, track gun offenders, and put special focus on preventing domestic homicide.

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<sup>12</sup> David Hemenway, *Private Guns, Public Health*, University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 182.

These neighboring jurisdictions could cooperate to track illegally trafficked firearms and identify the sources of such weapons. In this regard, guns traced to crime in Maryland and Virginia overwhelmingly originate within each state while guns traced to crime in the District originate primarily from Maryland and Virginia. Those two states could also do more to educate their residents regarding the association between gun availability and firearm suicide.

While individual states and localities can help reduce gun death and injury, history and experience teach that comprehensive federal regulation is the most effective approach to preventing product-related death and injury.