



Violence Policy Center

JULY 2019

REVISED EDITION

MAKE LOVE LOUDLY.

MAKE WAR SILENTLY.

Silencers

A THREAT TO PUBLIC SAFETY



Advanced Armament Corp
SILENCERS MADE IN THE U.S.A.



MAXIM SILENCER FIGURES IN MURDER

By United Press.

New York, Feb. 1.—That Maxim silencers can be bought by anyone on the open market became known here today for the first time in the investigation of a triple murder and suicide in

COPYRIGHT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Copyright © July 2019 Violence Policy Center

Violence Policy Center

1025 Connecticut Ave., NW

Suite 1210

Washington, DC 20036

202-822-8200

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national nonprofit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public.

This publication was funded in part with the support of the Lisa & Douglas Goldman Fund.

For a complete list of VPC publications with document links, please visit <http://www.vpc.org/publications>.

To learn more about the Violence Policy Center, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to help support our work, please visit www.vpc.org.

INTRODUCTION

Silencers are devices that are attached to the barrel of a firearm to reduce the amount of noise generated by the firing of the weapon. By providing a larger contained space for the gases generated by the discharge of the gun's ammunition round to dissipate and cool before escaping, silencers reduce the sound generated by the weapon's firing.

Since 1934, silencers have been regulated under the National Firearms Act (NFA).¹ The NFA requires that transferees of silencers submit fingerprints and a photograph, pay a special tax, and undergo a background check. It also requires a "Chief Law Enforcement Officer" or CLEO to sign a statement confirming that a certifying official is satisfied that the fingerprints and photograph accompanying the application are those of the applicant and that the certifying official has no information indicating that possession of the silencer by the applicant would be in violation of state or local law. In January 2016, however, the Obama administration

finalized a new rule that eliminates the CLEO sign-off requirement and replaces it with a requirement that local law enforcement need only be notified of the transfer of a silencer.



Hiram Percy Maxim is credited with patenting the first silencer in 1908. But a short time later their utility in crime was demonstrated in a tragic murder-suicide on Central Park West in New York City in 1915.

In the decades that followed, silencers were used by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II for clandestine missions. Silenced handguns were also used in Vietnam for multiple purposes. According to a former Special Forces NCO, military units used suppressed pistols "for all sorts of sneaky ops, from dumping guards to out and out assassinations."²

In 1967, a new generation of silencers was developed by Mitch WerBell for Sionics, a company that specialized in counterinsurgency equipment. The acronym Sionics stood for Studies in Operational Negation of Insurgency and Counter Subversion. The company supplied silencers and similar items for covert operations by military and "CIA-type" clandestine organizations.³ These next-generation silencers were more efficient than their turn-of-the-century predecessors and could effectively be used on battle rifles and Carbines. Today's military silencers are used by special operations units to reduce noise and muzzle flash.

1 Examples of the types of firearms that must be registered under the National Firearms Act [26 U.S.C. §5845] include: machine guns; the frames or receivers of machine guns; any combination of parts designed and intended for use in converting weapons into machine guns; any part designed and intended solely and exclusively for converting a weapon into a machine gun; silencers and any part designed and intended for fabricating a silencer; short-barreled rifles; and, short-barreled shotguns. Also included are "destructive devices." These include Molotov cocktails, anti-tank guns (more than 50 caliber), bazookas, and mortars. "Any other weapon," which includes cane guns and other gadget-type firearms, such as "pen" guns, which fire a projectile by the action of an explosive are also regulated under the NFA.

2 "The Ruger/MAC MKI: Vietnam's Silent Service," *Small Arms Review*, May 2005, accessed October 30, 2015 from <https://www.smallarmsreview.com/display.article.cfm?idarticles=1873>.

3 "Sionics Incorporated," *Small Arms Review*, November 2011, accessed October 27, 2015 from <https://www.smallarmsreview.com/display.article.cfm?idarticles=230>. For more detail on Sionics and the use of silencers in Vietnam, see "Silencers: the NRA's latest big lie," *Salon*, December 30, 2012.

A relatively new priority for the gun lobby and firearms industry has been to expand the market for the legal use of silencers. In 42 states silencers are now legal. But the ultimate goal is to weaken *federal* law regulating the transfer and use of silencers. Legislation has been introduced in Congress to accomplish this goal. Misleadingly labeled the “Hearing Protection Act,” the bill would remove silencers from the list of NFA-regulated firearms and accessories, making them subject only to the regulations that currently apply to hunting rifles. In their public statements, proponents of the bill would like the public and policymakers to believe that silencers are innocuous devices used merely to protect the hearing of shooters, including children. But in fact, the campaign to deregulate silencers is merely the latest attempt by the gun lobby and firearms industry, in the wake of declining household gun ownership, to market yet another military-bred product with little concern for its impact on public safety.⁴ In fact, because the “Hearing Protection Act” would allow silencers to be sold under the same standards as traditional hunting rifles, this would allow the gun industry to manufacture firearms with integral silencers, creating a whole new class of firearm that could be marketed to the general public.



Barrett, manufacturer of 50 caliber anti-armor sniper rifles and AR-15-style assault rifles, also manufactures silencers

The gun lobby’s effort gained new strength following the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Not only was Trump the National Rifle Association’s favored candidate (in 2017 Trump was the first president to address the NRA at its annual meeting since 1983 and has returned every year since) but his son, Donald Trump, Jr., has been a vocal advocate for easing civilian access to silencers. In a September 2016 promotional video from Utah-based SilencerCo posted on YouTube, the president’s son, wearing no hearing protection, fires a pistol with an integral silencer and exclaims, “That thing is *awesome*.”⁵ Later, in an interview with SilencerCo CEO Joshua Waldron, Trump Jr., promises that his father would sign a silencer bill if it passed Congress, arguing, “It’s about safety” and later adding, “It’s purely a health and safety issue.”

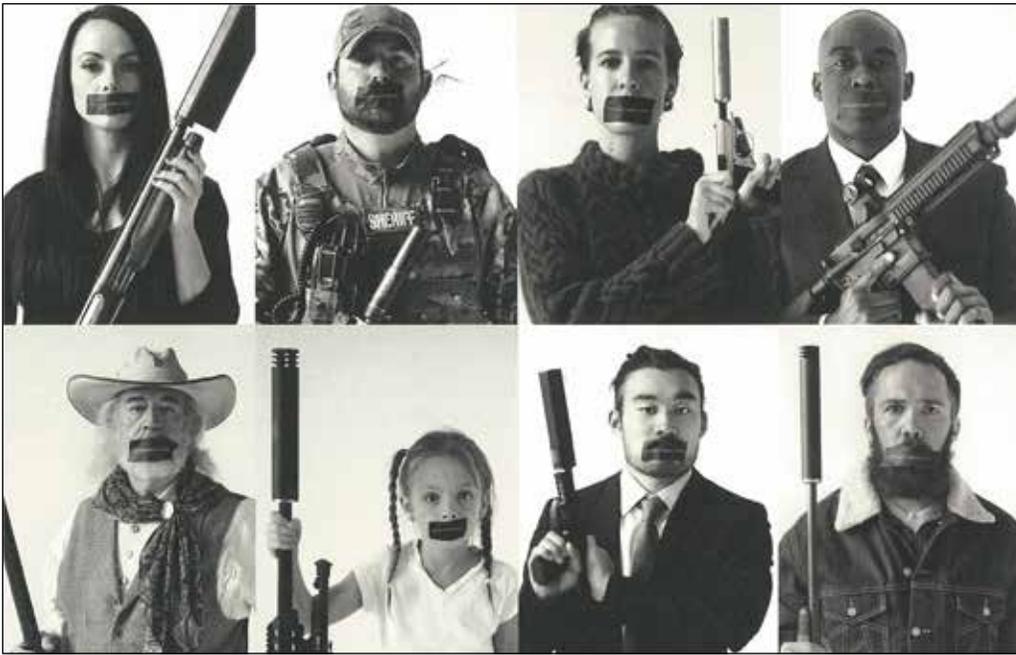
In its 2017 catalog, SilencerCo states:

We’re at the outset of a major movement. #FightTheNoise gives us all a chance to speak out against the oppression of a burdensome system and a public that accepts an inherent falsehood. Guns do not need to be loud, and those that enjoy the right to bear arms have the responsibility to stand up and call for decreased regulation and increased protection. Visit fightthenoise.org to find out how you can join the suppressed.⁶

4 See *A Shrinking Minority: The Continuing Decline of Gun Ownership in America*, Violence Policy Center, May 2015 (<http://www.vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf>).

5 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_LOxq6j4FM.

6 Visitors to the now-defunct fightthenoise.org website were greeted with a video that included numerous scenes of protest throughout time from around the world presumably from news reels interspersed with shots of firearms equipped with silencers, as well as a graffiti tagger, apparently intended to make the point that those in support of silencers are part of an oppressed protest movement.



SilencerCo 2015 catalog, back cover

SILENCERS HAVE BEEN USED IN CRIMES

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) reports that it traced 1,004 silencers in 2017.⁷ But silencers—both legal and illegal—have been involved in serious and sometimes deadly crimes that graphically illustrate the threat to public safety that making them widely available to the general public would represent.

MASS SHOOTING AT VIRGINIA BEACH MUNICIPAL CENTER

In May 2019, a disgruntled public works employee, DeWayne Craddock, killed 12 people and wounded six others in a mass shooting at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center. The shooter used two 45 caliber semiautomatic pistols and a silencer, all of which were purchased legally.⁸

FATHER AND SON DRUG TRAFFICKING CONSPIRACY

In February 2017, Justin Graham and his father Gary Graham were arrested by Rhode Island authorities on drug charges related to the importation and distribution of MDMA. Investigators also seized seven guns including an M-4 machine gun, a silencer, and three body armor vests. Both had prior criminal histories.⁹

TWO SEPARATE ROBBERIES AT WALGREENS

In February 2017, an armed robber using a silencer targeted a Walgreens in Orlando, Florida. The robber posed as a customer and stole a pack of disposable razors, a can of shaving cream, and a Hershey's Special Dark chocolate bar.¹⁰ In December 2014, Jin Ackerman used a gun equipped with a silencer to rob another Walgreens in Las Vegas, Nevada and shoot to death a clerk who had previously worked with the shooter. While committing the robbery, Ackerman said to the clerk, "Sorry Tony, but you know me," before pulling the trigger.¹¹

7 See <https://www.atf.gov/docs/undefined/typesbystatecy2017xlsx/download>, Firearm Types Recovered and Traced in the United States and Territories, 2017.

8 "Suspected Virginia Beach shooter used legally-bought gun suppressor," *ABC News*, June 4, 2019; "Gunman, 12 victims identified in Virginia Beach shooting," *CBS News*, June 1, 2019.

9 "R.I. father and son charged with drug trafficking," *Providence Journal*, February 9, 2017.

10 "Man uses gun with 'silencer' to rob Orlando store, police say," *clickorlando.com*, February 21, 2017.

11 "Armed robber shoots dead former co-worker during Walgreens robbery telling him, 'Sorry Tony, but you know me,'" *DailyMail.com*, December 30, 2014.

MULTI-STATE DRUG TRAFFICKING RING

In January 2017, a task force of local and federal law enforcement agencies completed an investigation of a multi-state drug trafficking organization focusing on the distribution of methamphetamine and the possession and transfer of firearms in northwest Montana. Investigators noted that the large amounts of weaponry possessed by the conspirators was unique. As part of a plea agreement, 68 weapons and firearm accessories were forfeited to the government including assault rifles, a grenade launcher, and two silencers.¹²

ATTEMPTING TO PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT TO ISIL

In August 2016, Justin Sullivan was charged with communicating with a leader of the Islamic State in furtherance of an attempt to provide material support to a terrorist organization. Sullivan told an undercover law enforcement agent that he wanted to obtain an AR-15 assault rifle and silencers to use in assassinations and mass shootings. Sullivan believed he could kill as many as 1,000 people in attacks on concerts, bars, and clubs. The undercover agent provided Sullivan with a silencer. Sullivan was also charged with murder for killing his 74-year-old neighbor.¹³

ARMED ROBBERY AND POINTING A FIREARM AT A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

In July 2016, Kevin Higgins was fatally shot by officers from the Sheboygan Police Department when the officers responded to a report of a robbery in progress at a bar. The suspect was dressed in camouflage clothing and armed with a DPMS A-15 assault rifle equipped with a silencer and a 30-round magazine. The suspect was killed as he brought the butt of the assault rifle to his shoulder and raised the muzzle of the gun toward the officer.¹⁴

ILLEGAL MANUFACTURE OF ASSAULT WEAPONS

In June 2016, Michael Giannone was charged in Connecticut with multiple counts related to the illegal manufacture of assault weapons out of his home including three counts of possession of silencers. He had previously been arrested on charges of firearm trafficking and assault weapon-related counts. Giannone had a business card reading, "No names, no numbers, no witnesses." After his first arrest, Giannone was seen on the grounds of a local school in possession of a firearm. A search of his home uncovered many firearms as well as tools to manufacture AR-15 assault rifles in his workshop.¹⁵

SUSPECT ATTEMPTS TO BUY SILENCERS IN FURTHERANCE OF TERROR PLOT

In January 2016, Samy Mohamed Hamzeh was arrested and charged after acquiring automatic firearms and a silencer in furtherance of a terror plot to commit a mass shooting at a Masonic Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. According to the FBI, Hamzeh explained, "We want two machineguns, you now have one, so we want two more, and we need three silencers, that's it. Find out how much all together these will cost, then we will march...each one has a weapon, each one has a silencer gun, the operation will be one hundred percent successful. **I am telling you, to go without silencer gun, you will be exposed from the beginning.**" [emphasis added] Hamzeh's goal was to kill at least 30 people believing this would inspire other terror attacks in the United States, or in his words, "I am

12 "Federal meth bust ends western Montana trafficking ring," *kxlf.com*, January 13, 2017; *United States v. Neal Allen Maddox*, United States District Court for the District of Montana, Plea Agreement filed May 25, 2016.

13 "U.S. terror suspect awaiting trial for murder charged again for ISIS connection," *washingtontimes.com*, August 19, 2016; *United States v. Justin Nojan Sullivan*, United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina, Superseding Indictment filed August 16, 2016.

14 "Sheboygan Co. D.A. reveals officer-involved fatal shooting at Union Ave. Tap was justified," *fox6now.com*, July 29, 2016; *Report of Investigation Officer Involved Death of Kevin S. Higgins, Sheboygan Police Department Criminal Investigation Case Report, Case Number C16-13843*.

15 "New Fairfield man arrested for making and selling illegal assault style weapons," *fox61.com*, June 21, 2016; "Man accused of making illegal assault weapons in his home faces judge," *newstimes.com*, August 15, 2016.



Liberty Suppressors 2017 catalog

telling you, if this hit is executed, it will be known all over the world...all the Mujahedeen will be talking and they will be proud of us...such operations will increase in America, when they hear about it. The people will be scared and the operations will increase...This way we will be igniting it. I mean we are marching at the front of the war.”¹⁶

GANG-RELATED MURDER

In October 2015, gang member Xia Lin was convicted of murdering restaurant owner Quin-Jin Fang who was gunned down inside his car in the garage of his home in Alhambra, California. According to the prosecutor, Fang was shot three times in the head and twice in the chest with a .22 handgun equipped with a silencer. The motive is believed to have been related to an extortion scheme against Fang in which he was unwilling to pay.¹⁷

WHITE SUPREMACISTS PLOTTING ATTACKS ON BLACK CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES

Ronald Chaney III, Charles Halderman, and Robert C. Doyle were all white supremacists who plotted to shoot and bomb congregants at black churches and synagogues. In an effort to acquire weapons to use in the attacks, Chaney and Doyle met with an undercover FBI agent they believed to be an arms dealer and handled and inspected silencers in October 2015. They then placed an order for a machine gun, explosives, and a pistol equipped with a silencer. All pleaded guilty in 2016 and were sentenced to prison terms ranging from eight to 20 years.¹⁸

UNLICENSED “GHOST GUN” SILENCER OPERATION

In October 2015, eight men were charged in a federal indictment in Sacramento with unlawfully engaging in the business of manufacturing and dealing in firearms, including assault rifles and silencers lacking serial numbers. Undercover agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives bought 67 guns and 38 silencers from the suspects. Another 71 guns and 62 silencers were seized following the execution of a number of search warrants and subsequent arrests. One of the defendants was also charged with distribution of MDMA, a controlled substance, according to court documents. At a news conference announcing the charges, ATF Special Agent in Charge Jill Snyder said, “Think about where those guns would be now if the buyer had not been an agent. The streets of Northern California are safer today.” U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner added, “These are some of the most lethal weapons criminals can get their hands on. Manufacturing and selling them for profit, without complying with federal licensing rules, is both a serious crime and a serious threat to public safety.”¹⁹

16 *United States v. Samy Mohamed Hamzeh*, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, Criminal Complaint, January 26, 2016.

17 “Gang member convicted of killing restaurant owner in his Alhambra home’s garage,” *mynewsLA.com*, October 22, 2015.

18 *United States v. Robert C. Doyle*, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Criminal Complaint filed November 9, 2015; “Last defendant sentenced for plotting white supremacist attack on churches,” *wtvr.com*, July 13, 2016.

19 “Indictment charges 8 Sacramento-area men with making illegal guns,” *Sacramento Bee*, October 15, 2015.

CALIFORNIA WINERY MURDER-SUICIDE

In March 2015, Robert Dahl fatally shot and killed Emad Tawfilis, an investor in his Napa Valley winery, with a handgun outfitted with a silencer. Dahl was involved in a series of lawsuits, including a claim by Tawfilis that Dahl had misappropriated a \$1.2 million loan from him. According to the Napa County coroner, Tawfilis was shot five times, twice in the head and three times in the upper body.²⁰

ILLEGAL WEAPONS POSSESSION AND SOLICITING THE MURDER OF FEDERAL OFFICERS

Gun and explosives dealer and former president of the Alaska Machine Gun Association Chris Guy Mannino of Fairbanks, Alaska was in federal custody in 2016 after being found guilty of felony charges that included unlawfully possessing and transporting a machine gun equipped with a silencer when he was indicted on additional charges of soliciting the murder of federal officers. An FBI Special Agent investigating the case said, “[Mannino] had a hit list. He wanted to kill the FBI agent, the main witness in the weapons case, and the individual he initially hired as a hit man. He also wanted to kill a bankruptcy attorney and both ATF agents who investigated his case.”²¹

CHRISTOPHER DORNER ATTACKS ON SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LAW ENFORCEMENT

In February 2013, Christopher Dorner, a former police and naval officer, targeted Southern California law enforcement officers and their families in what the Police Foundation described as “one of the most bizarre and violent acts of vengeance against law enforcement officers this country has experienced.” Dorner murdered four people and wounded several others and used silencers to help accomplish his deadly mission. According to a Police Foundation analysis of the attacks, Dorner killed Monica Quan and Keith Lawrence in a “gang-style hit” while they sat in their car in a parking structure.

Police were initially puzzled as to why no neighbors heard the 14 shots that were fired from a semiautomatic handgun. They later learned that Dorner had used a silencer on his 9mm Glock pistol. In the course of the manhunt, Dorner fired 29 shots at officers in a patrol car using an AR-15 assault rifle equipped with a silencer “to keep them from hearing the shots before they were hit.” When police finally tracked Dorner to a mountain cabin, Dorner fired at law enforcement with a silencer-equipped assault rifle, making it more difficult for responding officers to pinpoint the origin of the gunfire. Dorner had acquired the silencers in Nevada using a “gun trust” to evade the restrictions of the National Firearms Act.²²



Liberty Suppressors 2017 catalog

20 “Murder-Suicide leaves fate of winery, lawsuits in question,” *Napa Valley Register*, March 26, 2015.

21 “Murder for Hire: Alaska Man Wanted Federal Agents Killed,” www.fbi.gov, August 17, 2016; *Federal Prisoner in Fairbanks Indicted for Soliciting the Murder of Federal Officers*, press release, United States Attorney’s Office, District of Alaska, November 21, 2014.

22 *Police Under Attack: Southern California Law Enforcement Response to the Attacks by Christopher Dorner*, Police Foundation. For more information on “gun trusts,” see the Violence Policy Center backgrounder on the topic at http://www.vpc.org/fact_sht/NFA_trusts.pdf.

SERIAL KILLER USES SILENCER TO TARGET VICTIMS

Israel Keyes, a confessed serial killer who murdered up to 12 victims, used a gun with a silencer to kill at least one of his victims, Bill Currier, in Vermont in June 2011. Currier was killed in a brutal home invasion and kidnapping in which his wife Lorraine was also killed after being sexually assaulted. Following his arrest, Keyes also confessed to planning to kill a couple in Alaska with a rifle outfitted with a silencer. He told police that he watched a young couple sitting in a car at night, but then a police officer approached, appearing to tell the couple that the park was closed. Keyes told investigators that he “[a]lmost pulled the trigger, even with him there,” but when another officer arrived he abandoned his plan. “As soon as his backup showed up, I decided I better call it a night and got back on my bike and took off,” Keyes said. Keyes killed himself in 2012.²³

ANTI-GOVERNMENT MILITIA CONSPIRACY TO MURDER A FEDERAL JUDGE

In 2011, anti-government militia member Lonnie Vernon and his wife Karen Vernon conspired to murder the Alaska district court judge who was presiding over a civil tax case filed against them in federal court seeking unpaid taxes. The Vernons also conspired to kill an IRS employee. In furtherance of the conspiracy, the government alleged that Lonnie Vernon possessed a pistol with a silencer. According to a federal indictment, Vernon and Alaska Peacemakers Militia leader Francis Schaeffer Cox engaged in a conspiracy to obtain destructive devices, including grenades, as well as unregistered silencers. Vernon and Cox were each sentenced to more than 25 years in prison.²⁴

WORKPLACE SHOOTING IN OHIO

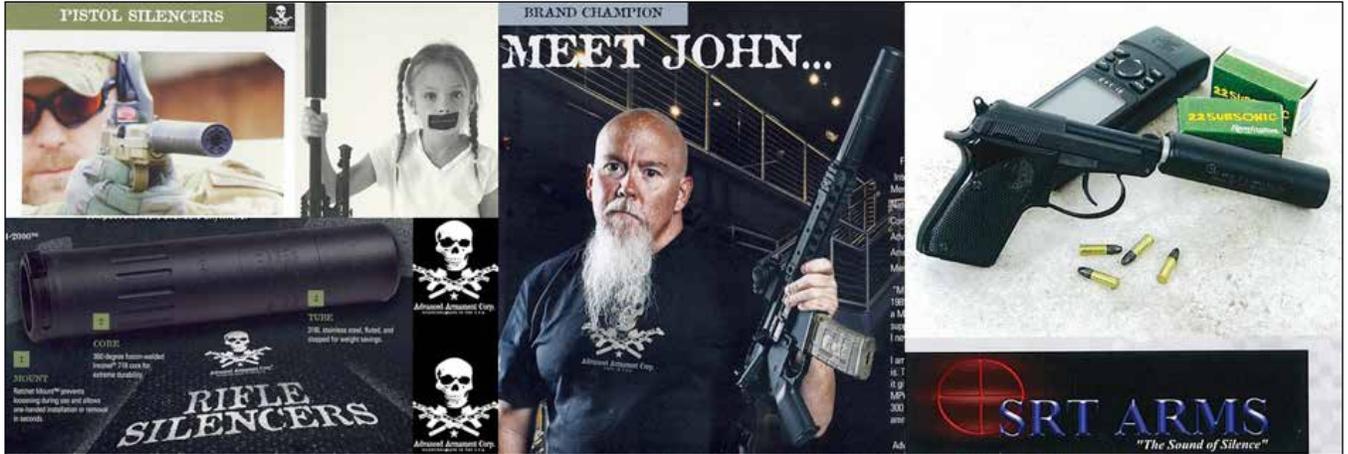
In January 2011, concealed carry permit holder Mark Langlois fatally shot 65-year-old Jim Schueler, Jr. as he sat eating his breakfast in his office at Forklifts of Toledo in Ohio where the two worked. Schueler was shot with a 9mm handgun at point-blank range. No one at the facility heard the gunshot and Schueler’s co-workers originally assumed he had died of a heart attack. Police later surmised that the killer had used a silencer. Police determined that Langlois, who was convicted of murder, had legally registered multiple silencers with ATF.²⁵

23 “Israel Keyes targeted couple on Anchorage trail, police say,” *www.mcclatchydc.com*, December 11, 2012; “U.S. Attorney Coffin: Currier Couple ‘Fought to the End’ Against ‘a Force of Pure Evil,’” *Sevendaysvt.com*, December 3, 2012.

24 “Alaska Couple Sentenced for Conspiracy to Murder Federal Officials,” Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, Highlights 2013 Archive, February 5, 2013; “Fairbanks Residents Sentenced for Conspiracy to Murder Public Officials and Weapons Violations,” press release, U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Alaska, January 9, 2013; “Foul-mouthed Alaska militia member gets a near-life sentence,” *Alaska Dispatch News*, January 7, 2013.

25 *State of Ohio v. Mark Langlois*, No. L-11-1313, Ohio Ct. App. Nov. 22, 2013; “Langlois found guilty in boss’ fatal shooting,” *Toledo Blade*, November 19, 2011.

GUN INDUSTRY AGGRESSIVELY MARKETS SILENCERS



A collage of silencer catalog images

The gun industry, always looking for new marketing opportunities in the wake of declining household gun ownership, has embraced the manufacture and marketing of silencers for virtually any firearm imaginable. Firearm manufacturers are also producing silencer-ready guns. For example, Arsenal, Inc. offers a silencer-compatible AK-47 pistol. Other manufacturers, such as Glock and Beretta, also offer guns designed to accept silencers.

Silencers are also touted as a means to allow young children—who often are put off by the noise produced by firearms as well as the recoil generated when the weapon is fired—to use and possess guns.²⁶ The 2017 catalog for Advanced Armament Corporation explains:

By reducing turbulence as the bullet exits the barrel and reducing sound and recoil-spawned user flinch in the process, silencers work to help tighten your shot groups. For new or younger shooters, using a silencer means being able to focus on marksmanship fundamentals and enjoy the overall shooting experience with considerably more comfort.

And as Donald Trump, Jr. acknowledged to SilencerCo CEO Joshua Waldron, one benefit of silencers was “getting little kids into the game, it greatly reduces recoil.”

Silencers are also marketed for self-defense in the home. The 2017 catalog from Liberty Suppressors promises for one silencer model, “If there was ever a suppressor that is perfect for the nightstand, the Centurion would be it.”

Present day manufacturers, however, are not the first to tout reduced recoil and noise as silencer attributes. Prior to enactment of the National Firearms Act of 1934 the exact same marketing claims were made by silencer



26 For more information on the gun lobby and firearm industry’s marketing of weapons for children, please see the 2016 Violence Policy Center study “Start Them Young”—How the Firearms Industry and Gun Lobby Are Targeting Your Children (<http://www.vpc.org/publications/start-them-young/>).

manufacturers. A 1920 ad from *Popular Science* for The Maxim Silencer Co. promised to make shooting more enjoyable for women.

Another ad from the same era urged, "Maxim Silencer...For His Christmas Gift," and also promised to make shooting less noisy.



Maxim Silencer

Attaches Easily to Any Rifle.



For His Christmas Gift

If HE owns a gun, there is nothing that will interest him so much or continue to interest him so long, as a Maxim Silencer. It will make him a better shot because —

It prevents report noise and reduces the tendency to flinch when shooting. Enabling him to shoot without noise, he can set up a target in the yard and enjoy a hundred short-time opportunities for practice not now utilized.

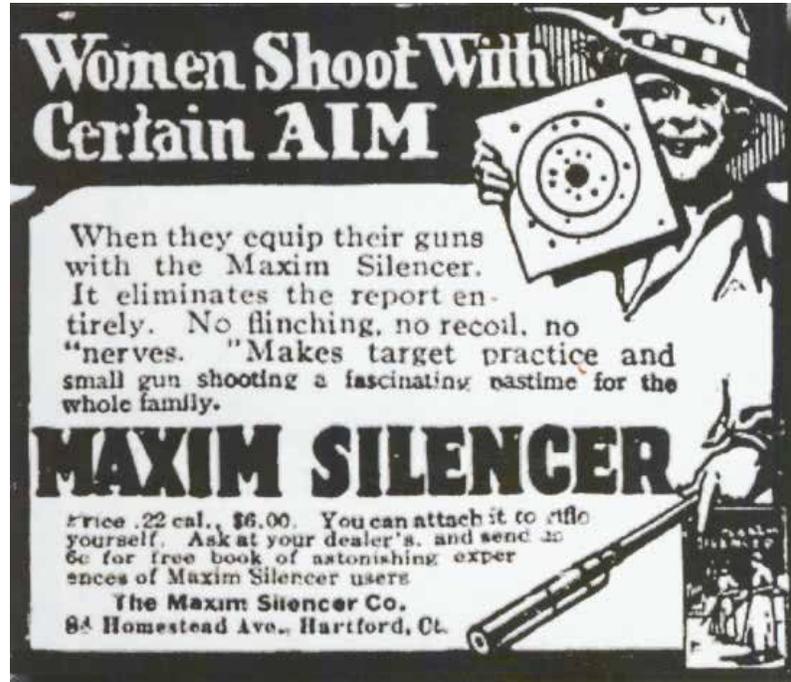
Yes, if he loves a gun, give him a Maxim Silencer. See how delighted he will be. It is the invention that has attracted the notice of the whole civilized world.

.22 calibre Silencer, packed in an attractive Christmas box, sent upon receipt of \$5

If preferred, write for interesting Catalog and full information about the Silencer.

Maxim Silent Firearms Co. 4 Colts Armory
Hartford, Conn.

Sold by most sporting goods dealers. Dealers not handling the Silencer should write for prices and terms.



Women Shoot With Certain AIM

When they equip their guns with the Maxim Silencer. It eliminates the report entirely. No flinching, no recoil, no "nerves." Makes target practice and small gun shooting a fascinating pastime for the whole family.

MAXIM SILENCER

Price .22 cal., \$6.00. You can attach it to rifle yourself. Ask at your dealer's, and send us 6c for free book of astonishing experiences of Maxim Silencer users.

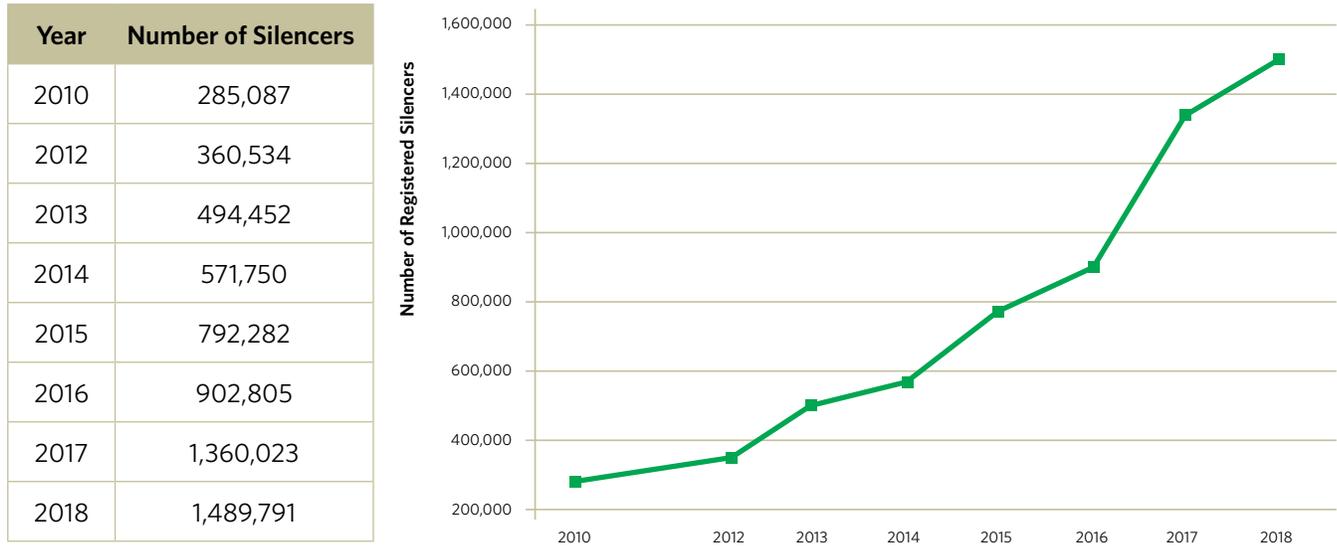
The Maxim Silencer Co.
84 Homestead Ave., Hartford, Ct.

Despite the cheery tone of the ads, silencers were tightly restricted under the NFA in an effort to crack down on weapons used by gangsters.

THE BOOM IN FIREARM SILENCERS

In 2010 the number of legally registered silencers in U.S. was 285,087. By 2018 this number had grown to 1,489,791—an increase of 423 percent.²⁷

NUMBER OF REGISTERED SILENCERS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010 – 2018²⁸



SILENCER BOOM'S ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES (ATF)

The massive increase in the number of silencers registered in the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record (NFRTR) has put a tremendous burden on the resources of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the agency charged with processing the applications to make and transfer silencers and other firearms regulated under the National Firearms Act.

ATF describes the impact on the agency's workload and resources in its FY 2020 budget request to Congress. "Keeping pace with the unprecedented increase in the volume of NFA weapon applications that has resulted largely from changes in state laws regarding silencers and other NFA weapons" is a "challenge," according to the agency. The budget document further details the burden associated with regulating silencers:

The growth in firearms commerce is an external challenge that has strained ATF's ability to meet the needs of the firearms industry and the citizens of the U.S. The significant workload increases are due, in large part, to changes in many state laws that directly affect ATF's regulatory workload. For example, from FY 2012 to FY 2016, ATF experienced a 260 percent increase in NFA weapon applications receipts. ATF's goal, reported to DOJ quarterly, is to process all NFA requests within 90 days. Only 2.6 percent of NFA tax paid applications met this standard

27 Source: Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Includes all states as well as "Other U.S. Territories." Totals for "Other U.S. Territories" are: 18 in 2018; 18 in 2017; 18 in 2016; 18 in 2015; 16 in 2014; 16 in 2013; 16 in 2012; and, 15 in 2010. No data was posted by ATF for 2011.

28 Source: Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

in FY 2018. NFA application receipts have far outpaced the number processed, leading to backlogs. One of the primary drivers for this increase is the changes in state laws that allow for the use of silencers (a NFA-regulated weapon) for hunting and sporting purposes. Even with the support of redirected industry operations personnel resources, ATF continues to struggle to meet performance targets, and wait time remains significant...

Market demand for NFA services continues to set annual records, which has resulted in a dramatic increase in workload over the past several years. In FY 2018, ATF received approximately 339,278 NFA registration applications and processed 322,692 NFA registration and transfer applications. Much of the increase from prior fiscal years can be attributed to changes in several state laws that allow for the use of gun silencers for hunting purposes.²⁹

“BENEFITS” OF SILENCERS THREATEN PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE LIVES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Although proponents of deregulating silencers assert that hearing protection is their goal, silencer manufacturers, such as Advanced Armament Corp., tout numerous other “benefits of silencer use”—usually with an anti-personnel or law enforcement application:

- “By virtually eliminating muzzle flash, silencers prevent ‘blooming’ of night vision equipment and help preserve unaided night vision.”³⁰
- “A silencer helps a shooter maintain command and control by enabling team members to communicate during live fire exercises or in combat.”³¹

The “benefits” most commonly cited by silencer manufacturers, however, remain sound reduction and increased accuracy and rate of fire by the shooter as the result of reduced recoil and improved stability of the weapon when firing.

In the 2019 Advanced Armament³² catalog, text for the company’s Jaeger 30 silencer (“not just a silencer, a hunt enhancer”) states:

Silencers do more than provide the comfort of shooting without hearing protection. Reduced recoil. Enhanced accuracy. The elimination of muzzle-jump and flash that delivers quicker target acquisition for faster follow-up shots. Silencers eliminate sound to a whisper and help strike a perfect balance between keeping a rifle as light as possible and dealing with heavier recoil found with long-range, magnum cartridges.³³



29 Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Congressional Budget Submission, Fiscal Year 2020, March 2019.

30 Advanced Armament Corp. product catalog, 2013.

31 Advanced Armament Corp. product catalog, 2013.

32 Advanced Armament Corp. calls itself “The Silent Authority.”

33 Advanced Armament Corp. product catalog, 2019.



In another section of the catalog, a silenced pistol is below the headline “Rimfire Silencers: We Believe a Rimfire Should be Seen and Not Heard.” The text reads:

Highly accurate, affordable and comfortable to shoot, 22 LR is the most popular cartridge in America for good reason. Ideal for whisper-quiet use with an AAC rimfire silencer, it’s the ideal, cost-effective introduction to suppressed shooting. All AAC rimfire silencers are user-serviceable and externally rated for 22 LR, with additional rimfire options including 22 WMR, 17 HMR, and 17 Mach 2. Individual AAC rimfire silencer ratings will vary by model.

Or as silencer manufacturer Gemtech Suppressors (owned by the same company as Smith & Wesson) summarizes:

Suppressors reduce percussion, noise, and recoil. This reduction results in a comfort level where the shooter can better focus on shooting fundamentals and achieve consistent shot placement.³⁴

To enhance the effect of silencers, manufacturers market subsonic ammunition. Subsonic ammunition travels at speeds below the speed of sound to avoid the “crack” produced by a supersonic bullet. In the words of one silencer maker, “For the ultimate in discreet shooting, it is necessary to use subsonic ammunition with your silenced 9mm Luger host. Some ammunition manufacturers are now marketing ammunition specifically for suppressed use that is designed to be subsonic.”³⁶



Silencers can also create the impression that gunfire is coming from the opposite direction which could create a significant hazard for law enforcement and other first responders.

An article in *Tactical Weapons* describes the phenomenon:

If you’re being shot at and you can’t hear the actual gunshot because it’s suppressed and the only thing you hear is the ballistic crack, you’ll think the fire is coming from exactly opposite from where it is. In the sandbox, this has caused Taliban to run towards the incoming fire, right at our guys, with obvious negative consequences for Hajji (soldiers’ term for an Iraqi insurgent).³⁷

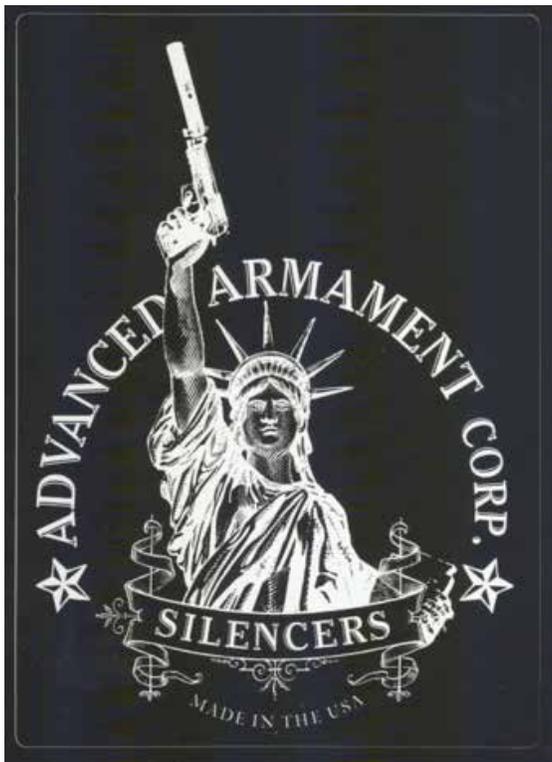
In a civilian context, these “benefits” could help enable mass shooters and other murderers to kill a greater number of victims more efficiently.

34 Advanced Armament Corp. product catalog, 2019.

35 Gemtech Suppressors product catalog, 2019.

36 Advanced Armament Corp. (AAC), product catalog, 2019.

37 “The Science of Silencers,” *Tactical Weapons*, March 2011.



Advanced Armament Corporation 2017



CONCLUSION

A ban on silencers for civilian use would enhance public safety. The explosion in the popularity of silencers has significantly increased the likelihood they will be used in crime. The advantages of using silencers, including reduced noise and increased accuracy, make them attractive to mass shooters, terrorists, and common criminals. In addition, the administrative burden placed on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives diverts resources from the agency's more important regulatory and law enforcement responsibilities. Conversely, silencers serve no sporting purpose.



Violence Policy Center

1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 1210

Washington, DC 20036

WWW.VPC.ORG