

Federal Response to Crime Victims:

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)

Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP)

Today's Presentation

- Overview of ATF
- Statutory Obligations and Compliance
- How VWAP assists Victims and Witnesses
- Case Examples of Working with Partners
- ATF Specialized Programs

ATF Overview

ATF's responsibilities include the investigation and prevention of federal offenses involving the unlawful use, manufacture, and possession of firearms and explosives; acts of arson and bombings; and illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products. The ATF also regulates, via licensing, the sale, possession, and transportation of firearms, ammunition, and explosives in interstate commerce.

Many of ATF's activities are carried out in conjunction with task forces made up of state and local law enforcement officers, such as Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN).

ATF Specialized Programs

- National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN)
- Certified Fire Investigators (CFI)
- ATF U.S. Bomb Data Center
- National Center for Explosives Training and Research (NCETR)
- K9 Center

ATF Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP)

Our mission: to provide direct assistance to victims and witnesses of Federal crimes throughout the criminal justice process while minimizing re-victimization and trauma.

The VWAP is responsible for facilitating crime victims' rights and services as required by Federal law and the *Attorney General Guidelines for Victim and Witness Assistance*. The VWAP provides a link between investigative agents and crime victims. The overall goal of the program is to ensure the safety of federal crime victims and witnesses. The VWAP is a means to increase the capacity of crime victims and witnesses to cooperate in the case investigation and in the prosecution.

ATF VWAP GUIDELINES

- Victim Rights and Restitution Act (VRRRA), 34 U.S.C. § 20141 (formerly 42 U.S.C. § 10607) Services to victims
- Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2004 (CVRA), 18 U.S.C. § 3771
- Attorney General Guidelines 2011
- Victims of Crime Act of 1984

VWAP Composition

- Supervisory Program Manager
- Three Regional Victim Witness Specialists:
 - East, Central & West
- One Victim Specialist/Training Coordinator
- One VNS Contractor

ATF Field Division Locations

- Atlanta
- Baltimore
- Boston
- Charlotte
- Chicago
- Columbus
- Dallas
- Denver
- Detroit
- Houston
- Kansas City
- Los Angeles
- Louisville
- Miami
- Nashville
- New Orleans
- New York
- Newark
- Philadelphia
- Phoenix
- Saint Paul
- San Francisco
- Seattle
- Tampa
- Washington

Regions

- Field Operations – Western
 - 15 states plus Guam
- Field Operations – Central
 - 18 states
- Field Operations – East
 - 17 states plus Puerto Rico

VWAP - What We Do

- Ensure compliance with statutes and U.S. Attorney General Guidelines.
- Work with case agents/Task Force Officers (TFOs) to ensure crime victims are provided their rights and services.
- Provide direct victim services.
- Provide victims with resources & referrals.
 - Assist in securing available funding options to provide security for victims and witnesses.
- Monitor DOJ Victim Notification System (VNS), provide ATF victims with case status notifications.
- Respond to critical, crisis and mass casualty events.
- Liaison between ATF and victims.
- Liaison between ATF and Federal, State and local partners.
- Assist in providing death notifications.
- Assist with notifications in cold cases (applicable in many NIBIN cases).
- New agent training.
- Continuously provide victim related training for Special Agents, IOI's and TFO's.
- Conduct presentations to our state and local partners.

Victims We Serve

- Arson
- Robbery
- Shooting
- FFL's
- Explosives
- Human Trafficking
- Child Exploitation
- Murder-for-Hire
- Law Enforcement
- Other victims
 - DV
 - Carjacking
 - Sexual Assault
 - Human Trafficking

VWAP Partnerships

- Law Enforcement (Federal, State, Local)
- Prosecutor/District Attorney/AUSA
- Victim/Witness Service Providers (Federal, State, Local)
- Community Services
- Community Members

Assisting Our Partners

- If ATF is assisting in the investigation, the VWAP program can respond to the crime scene by request.
- VWAP can assist victims with emergency funds if ATF has an open case.
- The VWAP program is obligated by the Attorney General to assist any and all service providers at their request, regardless of the status of an ATF investigation.

Case Examples

Austin, Texas Bombings

- March 2018
- 3 package bombs: 2 killed, 2 injured
- 1 Tripwire explosive: 2 injured
- Responded to Command Center
- Coordinated services with Austin P.D. Victim Services
- Met with victims at hospitals/homes
- Provided direct services to victims: for ex. emergency funds for temporary shelter, replacement clothing, car keys and phone etc.

Marshall County, Kentucky School Shooting

- Jan. 23, 2018
- Marshall County High School, KY
- 15 year old student/shooter
- 16 students shot
- 2 killed
- KY School Protocol
- Family Resource Center
- Organized Re-Opening of School
- Law Enforcement Interview of Students

Oakland, California Shooting

- 2013 gang shooting
- 6 individuals shot
- One 2 year old boy deceased
- One 14 year old boy shot in the back and paralyzed
- The RVWS coordinated with several local organizations including:
 - School system
 - Local DA's office
 - USAO V/W staff
 - State victim's compensation
- ATF Special Agents and local law enforcement worked together to ensure the families were taken care of, transporting victims as needed.
- NIBIN linked the shootings

NIBIN

- In 1999, ATF established the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) to provide local, state and federal law enforcement partner agencies with an automated ballistic imaging network.
- NIBIN automates the imaging of the unique identifiers of cartridge casings fired from firearms and stores the digital images into a database.
- Once entered into NIBIN, the markings are compared to all other ballistics in the system to see if that firearm was used in a previous crime.

NIBIN & Victims

- With the identifiers being provided, cold cases are being solved and justice being served for victims of gun crime.
- Shootings are no longer single event cases for investigators, prosecutors, and victim/witness specialists.

Virtual Command Center (VCC)

- The VCC is a secure, internet-based situational awareness/crisis management tool available to agencies around the world that are involved in law enforcement, first response, criminal justice, anti-terrorism, intelligence, and related matters.
- Real-time updates.
- Can be used by Federal, State and Local.
- Can be tailored to victim services.

Benefits of Working Together

- Families are cared for
- Victims and communities are served
- Community empowerment
- Confidence in the CJ system and LE
- Cooperative witnesses
- Cases brought to trial/justice served
- No overburdening of one group

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”
-Helen Keller

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