



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROJECT CEASEFIRE
**PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS PROVING EFFECTIVE IN
FIGHTING GUN CRIME LOCALLY, NATIONALLY**

*Attorney General John Ashcroft Announces Record Increase in Federal Firearms
Prosecutions*

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, today joined Attorney General John Ashcroft in applauding the record of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and communities who are working together through Project Safe Neighborhoods to prevent and prosecute gun crime.

“Newly released data shows record-levels of federal prosecutions of gun crime,” said Attorney General Ashcroft at a Washington, D.C., press conference. “Gun criminals are paying unprecedented penalties, and law-abiding Americans are enjoying unprecedented safety. Under President Bush’s leadership, Project Safe Neighborhoods is making a tremendous difference in ensuring that gun crime means hard time.”

Project Ceasefire is Kansas City’s local Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative and has contributed to the national success of the gun crimes program.

“The national numbers released today regarding Project Safe Neighborhoods are very encouraging,” said U.S. Attorney Graves. “We are pleased to see that the nation as a whole is finding the same success with prosecuting gun crimes as we have in the Western District of Missouri. Our office and law enforcement partners look forward to continuing this commitment to public safety.”

A Record of Increased Prosecutions. In the past three years, federal gun crime prosecutions have increased by 68 percent. Between FY 2002 and FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased nearly 24 percent.

Since FY 2000, there has been a 62 percent increase in defendants charged with firearm-related crimes. Project Safe Neighborhoods first set a record in FY 2002 for increasing the number of defendants charged with gun-related crimes in one year by 20.2 percent. During FY 2003, Project Safe Neighborhoods set a new Justice Department record with nearly 23 percent more defendants charged with gun crimes in one year.

Federal offenders are being sentenced to significant jail time. In FY 2003, 93 percent of defendants were sentenced to some prison time, and about 72 percent of offenders were sentenced to prison terms greater than three years.

A Drop in Violent Crime Victimization. The increased emphasis on prevent and prosecution of gun crimes makes our communities more safe by ensuring that those who abuse firearms are not free to prey on our citizens. Between 1999-2000 and 2001-2002, the violent crime victimization rate plunged 21 percent. Approximately 130,000 fewer Americans were victims of gun crime in 2001-2002 than in 1999-2000.

National Scope, Local Impact. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an unprecedented partnership between all levels of government to implement a national strategy to attack gun crime with focus and intensity. While national in scope, each community's PSN task force is working to design and implement a local approach to combat the unique gun crime problem that the area faces. Project Safe Neighborhoods relies on a seamless network of law enforcement professionals, working in concert with local communities, who are utilizing a strategy of cooperation and coordination to prevent illegal gun use, as well as punishing violators and putting criminals who use guns behind bars. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes. Community partners, through services and resources provided by PSN, work to prevent gun violence before it occurs through such efforts as aggressively educating their constituents and at-risk youth about the consequences of gun crime.

Local Statistics. The Western District of Missouri filed 37.8 percent more cases in FY 2003 than it did in FY 2002. The district filed charges against 330 defendants in FY 2003 and 255 defendants in FY 2002. During the same time period, the district's conviction rate also increased 3.2 percent. A total of 223 defendants were convicted in FY 2003 compared to 216 that were convicted in FY 2002. Sentencings in the district also increased 3.9 percent from FY 2002 to FY 2003. A total of 213 defendants were sentenced in FY 2003 and a total of 205 were sentenced in FY 2002. Of those sentenced in FY 2003, 139 defendants were sentenced to more than three years in federal prison without parole.

Local Partners. The Project Safe Neighborhoods/Project Ceasefire initiative has several contributing partners that also have played a role in the program's success in the Western District of Missouri. The Kansas City Crime Commission, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and several local police departments and sheriff's departments all are involved in the program.

“ATF’s joint efforts with our state and local law enforcement partners, as well as, the United States Attorney’s Office in the Western District of Missouri, has proven Project Safe Neighborhoods to be a continuing success,” said Special Agent in Charge Mark S. James, Kansas City Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow