

**CEASEFIRE Oregon  
News Archive**

**Tragic Domestic Violence Shootings in Oregon**

In Oregon in November 2009, there were five murder-suicides in domestic situations and one attempted murder-suicide, resulting in 14 deaths—all by firearms—and four orphans. On Dec. 2, across the river in Vancouver, Wash., two more parents were shot dead in a murder-suicide and another child orphaned. When will the killings stop?

Here is a list of the dead. On November 5, Tameka Medina and her four-year-old son, Ashawn, were found shot to death in their southeast Portland home. Police think that her former partner shot them before killing himself. On Nov. 10, Teresa Besier was killed, and two co-workers injured, when her estranged husband shot her at her workplace, a drug-testing lab in Tualatin, and then killed himself, leaving their two children orphaned. The following day, Varsha Suthar, Mukesh Suthar, and their 9-year-old son, Ronak, were found shot to death in their Bethany home in an apparent murder-suicide. On Nov. 17, a Coos Bay man, a convicted felon, hid in his wife's car while she was meeting with a divorce attorney, only to shoot her and later kill himself. She suffered severe injuries but survived.

On Nov. 27, Steven England, another convicted felon, shot and killed his wife, Cindy England, at their home in Forest Grove and fatally wounded her son, Kevin Coleman, before killing himself. On Nov. 29, Sheena Mendoza was shot to death by her former boyfriend at her workplace, a hair salon in Hillsboro, before he critically injured himself. On the afternoon of Dec. 2, a six-year-old girl returned home in Vancouver to find her recently divorced parents dead; her father, Kyle Epley, had shot her mother, Erin Epley, and then himself.

Our hearts go out to all the families and everyone else affected by these terrible tragedies.

When will this country get serious about preventing gun violence?

Beyond the shock and pain that communities are feeling as these killings are reported, we see the similarity between these cases and what has been learned about gun violence. A study by the National Institute of Justice looked at 591 murder-suicides and found four reoccurring commonalities: a prior history of domestic violence, repeated threats, a prior history of mental health problems and/or substance abuse, and access to a firearm. Ninety-two percent of the murder-suicides involved the use of a firearm. Looking more closely at Oregon, of the 88 deaths attributed to murder-suicide from 2003 through 2007, 78 (89%) were caused by firearms.

Our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones. These tragic deaths are just a few of the 30,000 people killed by firearms in this country every year. As Oregon is shaken by gun violence, the need for citizens and legislators to stand up is great. It is time to stand together to prevent senseless violence and unnecessary death and injury in our state and country. Ceasefire Oregon works to prevent gun violence. Please help us stop the shootings.

## **Police Chiefs Recommend Actions to Reduce Gun Violence**

In September 2007, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) issued a report titled *Taking a Stand: Reducing Gun Violence in Our Communities*. The report is a product of an IACP summit held in April 2007, in which over 180 law enforcement executives and others participated. The recommendations focus on three main areas (quotations are from the report):

“Keeping Communities Safe by improving public understanding about the risks of gun violence, working with community leaders, and reducing easy access to firearms, especially for at-risk individuals.

“Preventing and Solving Gun Crime by stopping the flow of illegal guns, sharing information among jurisdictions, and training officers to respond to gun crimes, including tracing all guns.

“Keeping Police Officers Safe by reducing the firepower available to criminals, providing protective technologies, and improving training and support for officers in handling guns and situations involving guns and their aftermath.”

“Specific recommendations include:

- Requiring judges and law enforcement to remove guns from situations of domestic violence...
- Requiring that all gun sales take place through Federal Firearms License (FFL) holders with mandatory background checks
- Enacting an effective ban on military-style assault weapons, armor-piercing handgun ammunition, .50 caliber sniper rifles and other weapons that enable criminals to outgun law enforcement...
- Repealing the Tiahrt Amendment, which hinders investigation of illegal gun trafficking...
- Mandating safe storage of firearms by private citizens and providing safe facilities where gun owners can store their weapons
- Mandating reporting of lost and stolen firearms”

One of the most important insights to come out of the summit, the report states, “was the realization that law enforcement and the IACP cannot fight this battle alone. Law enforcement leaders need public support; they need partners in every community; and they need elected officials, in Congress and in state legislatures, to stop catering to special interests and instead act in the public interest to reduce the terrible, and escalating, risk of gun violence in America.”

To download a copy of the report, please visit the IACP website, at [www.iacp.org](http://www.iacp.org) and click on "Publications."