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## Obituary for the long-gun registry: 2011 firearms report shows police usage nearly tripled

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OTTAWA — It was a quiet death.

Two weeks ago, with no fanfare and no formal announcement, the federal Conservatives oversaw the end of the long-gun registry.

All that the Mounties kept was information on long guns held in Quebec, until a court challenge by that province to keep the data is settled.

Now, just as quietly, along comes the long-gun registry's obituary in the form of the annual report for 2011 on the firearms program.

Vic Toews, minister of public safety, tabled the document in the last hour on the last day before Parliament rose for the Remembrance Day break. No speech. No announcement. It wasn't posted on either his website or the RCMP's.

Each year, the annual firearms reports became subject to fierce vetting by the public safety minister's office. This one was the slimmest volume yet. It is scrubbed of many of the past references to how useful the registry was to police.

Yet it gives one last glimpse of just that.

It reports that annual police usage of the firearms registry rose steadily since the Conservatives took power. In fact, it nearly tripled.

And despite consecutive amnesties offered by the Conservative government that removed the threat of criminal sanction from those who declined to register their weapons, the number of guns Canadians registered rose.

As of the end of 2011, the overall registry contained data on 7.8 million guns in Canada — most of which were 7.1 million non-restricted rifles and shotguns.

That's 189,522 more non-restricted weapons than the previous year.

The number of daily queries by police also rose.

In 2011, Canadian law enforcement agencies queried the Canadian Firearms Registry Online an average of 17,778 times per day.

Indeed, the latest available statistics that were published for the third quarter of this year on the RCMP's [website](#) show those police queries continued to rise throughout 2012 to an average of 18,555 a day.

The annual numbers suggest police usage grew as the Conservatives actively pursued the registry's legislative death in a bill that passed late last spring.

In 2007, police queried the online firearms registry 2.5 million times. By the end of 2011, that number had reached 6.5 million.

The 2011 report explains these were not automatic queries that were merely the result of casual police checks of the Canadian Police Information Centre or CPIC, as Conservatives often claimed. Rather, they were deliberate queries by frontline officers.

The number of Canadians holding valid firearms licenses — 1.9 million — has remained fairly constant over the past several years, increasing just slightly, the report says.

The Canadian Firearms Centre will continue to screen licence holders.

The 2011 report shows authorities turned down 520 applications for gun licences and revoked another 2,365 licenses because of court orders, concerns about domestic violence, drug offences, mental health issues, or because the individuals were deemed a risk to themselves or others, had lied on their applications or had flouted safe firearms use and storage laws.

The law that killed the registry still faces two big constitutional challenges: one from the province of Quebec which is trying to assert provincial jurisdiction over the data in order to set up its own long-gun registry; the other from a women's clinic in Toronto that argues the destruction of the registry has a discriminatory negative effect on women.

"We remain convinced the new law violates women's Charter rights and we believe we have good evidence to show the increased risk to women from the loss of the registry," said Amanda Dale, executive director of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, which provides counselling services to women who have been victims of violence.

She said the 2011 data come as no surprise to her, but says the real issue is now the impact on women.

"It is clear to us that whatever the motivation for getting rid of the registry it has not been properly considered in light of women's safety and security of the person and their right to equal protection under the law."