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## Nationwide Ammunition Shortage Hits U.S.

Posted By [Bob Owens](#) On February 28, 2009 @ 12:00 am In [. Positioning, Gun Control, Politics, US News](#) | [No Comments](#)

If you, like thousands of other Americans, have Googled to find out why we are in the middle of a nationwide ammunition shortage, you would have stumbled across this [2007 blog entry](#) <sup>[1]</sup>.

In it, I corrected a poorly researched Associated Press story by Estes Thompson that claimed the military's consumption of ammunition was responsible for police ammunition shortages here in the United States. Few things could have been further from the truth, but it seems rather apparent, in retrospect, that the goal of that AP article wasn't to find the truth as much as it was to (falsely) lay blame for the police ammunition shortages at the feet of George W. Bush.

The real fact of the matter is that the military got the bulk of its small arms (pistol, rifle, machine gun) ammunition from one contracted ammunition plant, and that plant wasn't even running near capacity. The military's consumption clearly wasn't to blame, and anecdotal evidence and statements from ammunition manufacturers strongly suggested that police departments themselves caused the 2007 ammunition shortage by purchasing far more ammunition than they had in the past.

But what is causing our current ammunition shortages here in 2009?

Much of the demand comes from continued high law enforcement demand, the same demand that led to shortages two years ago. Police agencies around the nation have become more militarized in recent years and two trends within this militarization have led to greater police ammunition demand.

### **An increase in the size and number of paramilitary police units**

Once upon a time, highly trained, heavily armed police units with alphabet-soup acronyms such as SWAT, SRT, SRU, or ERT were generally found as part of large, metropolitan police departments.

Today, law enforcement agencies of every size — including some [university police forces](#) <sup>[2]</sup> — have SWAT-type units armed with some combination of submachine guns, assault rifles, and sniper rifles to add to the traditional compliment of pistols and shotguns. To become proficient to the level expected of these units, each officer must fire thousands of rounds in training every year.

### **An increase in the use of "patrol carbines" in law enforcement**

Some agencies prefer to call them "patrol carbines"; others refer to them as "tactical rifles." But whatever you call them, rifles based upon the AR-15 are becoming increasingly common as a weapon deployed to police officers outside of SWAT units, for some very logical reasons. AR-type rifles extend the range at which patrol officers can engage armed criminals, and because rifles have more practical accuracy than pistols, they can potentially reduce the number of shots fired to neutralize a suspect. Paired with the right kind of ammunition, the .223 Remington/5.56mm caliber rifle also has surprisingly less over-penetration, theoretically reducing threats to civilians who might be downrange. Each of these weapons will also require officers carrying them to fire hundreds of rounds in training each year, and in a city that rotates rifles from one shift to another among their patrol units, this can necessitate tens of thousands of rounds of training ammunition.

### **Fears of draconian gun and ammunition restrictions**

The 2008 elections that saw the Democratic Party extend their power in both houses of Congress and saw Barack Obama elected president made gun owners very nervous, and [with good reason](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.

We have a president that has favored gun bans and who desires to reinstate the horribly flawed 1994 assault weapons ban authored by our rather dim vice president. We also have radically anti-gun majority leaders in both the House of Representatives and Senate, and a Congress quite willing to pass massive, bloated laws without even bothering to read the contents. Fears of encroachment are certainly warranted.

### **Economic instability**

As economies become unstable and people lose jobs, crime rates go up. It is an economic fact of life. Many people who are worried about an increase in crime arm themselves during economic downturns, leading to an increased demand for firearms and ammunition.

As a result of all of these factors, manufacturers of firearms and ammunition saw demand increase to unprecedented levels as civilians have made a run on the kind of firearms they suspect that gun control advocates presently in charge will try to outlaw.

This includes all handguns, all semi-automatic rifles (especially those targeted by the 1994 assault weapons bill that expired in 2004), and most semi-automatic shotguns.

Matt Reams of [Sierra Bullets](#) <sup>[4]</sup> noted that after the 2008 presidential election demand shot up 50%-100% for bullets used by handguns or rifles in military calibers, and says, "Law enforcement has seemed to increase quite a bit the last year or so. The individuals jumped in after the elections and pushed our orders over the top when we were already running in high gear."

[Federal Premium](#) <sup>[5]</sup>/[ATK](#) <sup>[6]</sup> is the largest ammunition manufacturer in the world, running the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant for the U.S. military under contract; it also is a major supplier of law enforcement and civilians. In a statement, the company noted "unprecedented demand" for law enforcement ammunition. While other corporations are presently laying off workers and shutting down operations, ATK is in the middle of capital improvements to further increase production capability.

Rick Shoupe of [PMC Ammunition](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, which has a more civilian-focused market for his company's products, reflected in his explanation:

Shortly before the presidential election the dam broke as far as U.S. gun and ammunition sales are concerned. I believe it is a reaction by the general public because of two main reasons. Number one, the political environment which results from the attitudes about gun control in the majority of Congress and the president himself. They are anti-gun. Number two, the current financial crisis in the U.S. has added to the frenzy, causing again the general public to want some sort of personal protection. Just in case they need it.

We are seeing a bubble in demand like I have never seen before and I have been in this business for 35 years. This demand is in addition to the military and law enforcement that also continues. PMC has expanded production to try and handle as much of the demand as it can before the demand starts to drop. Even so, the first scent of legislation being introduced to Congress will light another candle in the demand for these products. It will not end until the legislation is passed.

Individual shooters are stockpiling thousands of rounds of ammunition because of fears of future punitive taxation or outright bans of certain kinds of ammunition. Law enforcement agencies are also stockpiling ammunition to make sure they have enough on hand to meet training requirements. The shortage we are seeing is the result of both agencies and private citizens hoarding the most sought-after ammunition.

Thus, this shortage is the result of an accordion effect that has developed over the past few years.

Law enforcement agencies have been rapidly increasing their ammunition consumption because of how they are rearming, causing a permanent increase in demand. Just as ammunition manufacturers began to cope with that increase, a second run, based upon a downward-turning economy and rising fears of laws targeting gun and ammunition, dramatically expanded demand yet again.

Shortages of ammunition and firearms can be expected to continue for as long as it appears our overreaching federal government is a threat to our individual liberties, our economy continues to falter, and our police agencies keep militarizing.

It's going to be a long ride.

Stock up while you can.

