



## MICROSTAMPING MYTHS DEBUNKED

Microstamping is a powerful tool that can help law enforcement solve gun crime and reduce firearm violence. Unfortunately, opponents of microstamping spread misinformation and myths about the technology to mislead the public and undermine progress in passing legislation requiring this life-saving technology.

### What is Microstamping?

Microstamping is a ballistics identification technology that can allow police to quickly link cartridge casings found at crime scenes to a specific firearm. Microscopic identification codes are engraved into the firing pin of each firearm. When the gun is fired these codes are stamped onto each cartridge case. The codes correspond with the firearm's serial number, allowing law enforcement to link spent cartridges to the firearm used in the shooting, and develop potential leads within hours.

**Myth:** *Microstamping is not durable, the codes will wear off as the firearm is used.*

**Reality:** Multiple studies have demonstrated microstamping is incredibly durable. Two studies found that even after thousands of test fired rounds the microstamped codes were legible using a microscope over 95% of the time.<sup>1 2</sup> The fact microstamping can sustain thousands of rounds demonstrates that it is durable and reliable in a real-world setting.

**Myth:** *Microstamping would lead to astronomical increases in the price of handguns.*

**Reality:** The developers of microstamping have testified that it would cost manufacturers between \$0.50 and \$1.00 per handgun to incorporate the technology. Laser Light Technologies Inc. corroborated this estimate noting that “even in the worst case scenario” the price per handgun would range between \$0.50 and \$3.00. Laser Light Technologies Inc. stated that the technology needed to produce microstamped firearms is the same technology they use to mark millions of products for manufacturers like 3M. They concluded by stating that “the task of processing the firearm components will be both uncomplicated and cost effective.”<sup>3</sup>



# THE COALITION TO STOP GUN VIOLENCE

**Myth:** *Microstamping technology can be easily tampered with by criminals.*

**Reality:** Criminals do not typically alter guns that are used in crime. One study of crime guns collected off the streets of Chicago found that less than 5% of crime guns had altered or removed firearm serial numbers.<sup>4</sup> Altering the firearm serial number on the body of the gun is much simpler than altering the internal components of the firearm. An individual would need intimate knowledge of firearms and microstamping, plus the appropriate tools, in order to render microstamping technology ineffective.

**Myth:** *Microstamping will have little impact because there are so many crime guns already in circulation.*

**Reality:** While the passage of microstamping laws today will not immediately lead to the recovery of microstamped cartridge casings at crime scenes, the impact of microstamping technology could increase significantly within a few years. Studies of recovered firearms find that a significant portion of guns used in crime are relatively new. For example, in 2018 the ATF traced 8,483 crime guns in California that were purchased new from a dealer within the past three years<sup>5</sup> This suggests that within a few years of implementing microstamping requirements, law enforcement could expect to collect microstamped evidence at a significant number of shootings. Implementing microstamping requirements today will help solve murders and save lives in the near future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lizotte TE, & Ohar O. (2008). Forensic firearm identification of semiautomatic handguns using laser formed microstamping elements. *SPIE*.

<sup>2</sup> Ohar OP, & Lizotte TE. (2009). Extracting ballistic forensic intelligence: microstamped firearms deliver data for illegal firearm traffic mapping – technology, implementation and applications. *SPIE*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Assemblyman Feuer: AB1471. (2007) Laser Light Technologies, Inc. Available at: <https://nyagv.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Cost-Estimate-Letter.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Cook PJ, Harris RJ, Ludwig J, & Pollack HA. (2014). Some sources of crime guns in Chicago: Dirty dealers, straw purchasers, and traffickers. *J. Crim. L. & Criminology*.

<sup>5</sup> Data Source: Firearms Tracing System. [Time to Crime Rates for Firearms with a California Recovery](#) (2018). ATF.