



ATF's NIBIN Program

NIBIN Branch, Firearms Programs Division, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
August 2004

Through its National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) Program, ATF deploys Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) equipment into State and local law enforcement agencies for their use in imaging and comparing crime gun evidence. This equipment allows firearms technicians to acquire digital images of the markings made by a firearm on bullets and cartridge casings; the images then undergo automated initial comparison. If a high-confidence candidate emerges, firearms examiners compare the original evidence to confirm a match. By minimizing the amount of non-matching evidence that firearms examiners must inspect to find a confirmable match, the NIBIN system enables law enforcement agencies to discover links between crimes more quickly, including links that would have been lost without the technology. In funding and supporting this program, ATF provides State and local law enforcement agencies with an effective intelligence tool that many could not afford on their own. The system also makes it possible to share intelligence across jurisdictional boundaries, enabling State and local law enforcement agencies to work together to stop violent criminals.

The NIBIN Program currently has 232 sites that have received IBIS equipment. There are 180 agencies participating in the Program. When the deployment is complete in all 16 multi-state regions, IBIS technology will be available at approximately 235 sites, covering every State and major population centers. NIBIN represents the joining together of two Federal programs deploying ballistic imaging equipment, as ATF and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agreed to collaborate in deploying IBIS technology nationwide.

NIBIN partner agencies and ATF work together in partnership against violent crime. ATF purchases IBIS equipment for deployment, and provides for regular upgrades and service, as well as administering the network over which it communicates. Also, ATF provides a weeklong training course for new users of the system. In return, NIBIN partners agree to support the program with adequate staffing and resources, to enter as much crime gun evidence as possible into their IBIS systems, to share evidence and intelligence information with other law enforcement agencies, and to abide by ATF regulations for use of the NIBIN system.

Though no investigative tool is perfect or will be effective in every situation, the availability of an open-case file of many thousands of exhibits, searchable in minutes instead of the lifetimes that would be required for an entirely manual search, provides invaluable information to law enforcement authorities. Since ATF and its partner agencies began using this technology, over 826,700 pieces of crime scene evidence have been entered and over 10,000 "hits" have been logged, many of them yielding investigative information not obtainable by other means.