



Violence Policy Center

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SKS ASSAULT RIFLES—A MENACE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

SKS assault rifles, such as that reportedly used to kill one police officer and critically wound another in Ceres, California, on Sunday, January 9, 2005, are “the rifle model most frequently encountered by law enforcement officers,” according to a 2002 report by the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The ATF report also notes that “these high capacity rifles pose an enhanced threat to law enforcement, in part because of their ability to expel projectiles at velocities that are capable of penetrating the type of soft body armor typically worn by the law enforcement officers.” Despite the hazard this assault weapon poses to police and the public at large, the rifle was not covered by the federal assault weapons ban, which expired on September 13, 2004.

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SKS Assault Rifles Traced to Crime Scenes by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, 1995 Through 2000¹

Year	Traces	Year	Traces
1995	1,264	1998	2,210
1996	1,574	1999	2,433
1997	2,031	2000	2,079
		Total	11,591

¹ Tracing data for 2002 through 2003 is unavailable because of Congressionally imposed restrictions on information release.

On August 18, 2004, an SKS assault rifle was used to kill an Indianapolis, Indiana, police officer and wound four others. In June 2004 three Birmingham, Alabama, police officers were shot and killed in one incident with an SKS assault rifle. Two other Alabama officers were killed earlier in January 2004 with an SKS. According to a Violence Policy Center analysis of national Federal Bureau of Investigation data (*"Officer Down"—Assault Weapons and the War on Law Enforcement*, <http://www.vpc.org/studies/officecont.htm>), for 1998 through 2001,² across the country, one out of five law enforcement officers slain in the line of duty were killed with assault weapons. Of these, eight were killed with SKS assault rifles (see chart below).

Law Enforcement Officers Killed in the Line of Duty by SKS Assault Rifles, 1998 Through 2001

Year	State	Manufacturer	Model	Caliber
1998	Oregon	Norinco	SKS	7.62mm
	Florida	Unknown	SKS	7.62mm
	Colorado	Unknown	SKS	7.62mm
	Indiana	Norinco	SKS	7.62mm
1999	Indiana	Norinco	SKS	7.62mm
2001	Michigan	Unknown	SKS	7.62mm
	Texas	Norinco	SKS	7.62mm
	Utah	Norinco	SKS	7.62mm

The events surrounding two of these eight shootings are detailed below.

Other Incidents of Law Enforcement Officers Killed in the Line of Duty by SKS Assault Rifles

Date: January 27, 1998

Location: Portland, Oregon

Assault Weapon: Norinco SKS 7.62mm rifle

On January 27, 1998, one police officer was killed and two were wounded with a Norinco SKS 7.62mm rifle. The officers, working on a drug investigation in Portland,

² 2001 is the most recent year for which complete data is available.

entered the home of Stephen Douglas Dons and were met with gunfire. Colleen Waibel, a six-year veteran, was hit with multiple gunshots, becoming the first female officer killed in the line of duty in Portland. Kim Keist, a 15-year veteran, was wounded in the chest and arm despite wearing a bullet-proof vest. A third officer was treated for a gunshot wound to the hand. A neighbor reported that Dons was known to have a large arsenal of weapons and that police had been called to the house weeks before on a complaint of weapons being fired.

Lauren Dodge, "Three Portland Officers Ambushed at House; One Dead, Two Wounded," *Associated Press*, January 28, 1998.

Date: May 29, 1998
Location: Cortez, Colorado
Assault Weapon: SKS 7.62mm rifle

On May 29, 1998, one police officer was killed and two were wounded with an SKS 7.62mm rifle. Officer Dale Claxton stopped a truck that had been reported stolen the day before. As Officer Claxton was checking the stolen truck's license plate, a passenger in the truck fired approximately 40 rounds through the front of Claxton's police cruiser. Montezuma County Sheriff's Deputy Jason Bishop responded to the radio call of an officer being shot, and was wounded as his cruiser was hit with approximately 40 more rounds from the SKS. Minutes later, Deputy Todd Martin was wounded in the left arm and right leg. The three suspects, described by authorities as "anti-government, end-of-the-world-fearing survivalists," escaped. Two of the suspects were later found dead, while the third, Jason Wayne McVean, is still at large.

Greg Burton, "Posse Scours Badlands for 3 Cop Killers," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 31, 1998; Julie Cart, "Answers Vanished Along With Four Corners Outlaw," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1999.

For more information, please contact Violence Policy Center Legislative Director Kristen Rand at 202-822-8200 x102 or krand@vpc.org.

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The Violence Policy Center is a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury in America. For more information, please visit www.vpc.org.

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