

“Harmless” .22 calibre Rabbit Rifles Kill More People Than Any Other Type of Gun

Contrary to their popular image as low-powered “bunny guns,” .22-calibre rimfire rifles are commonly used in multiple shootings. In seven recent mass⁽¹⁾ killings involving .22 rifles in Australia and New Zealand alone, 54 people died by gunfire

Multiple Shootings With .22 Rifles, 1971-1997:

Data from police and coroners’ records

Mass shootings in Australia & New Zealand in which the primary weapon was a .22 rifle:

Date	Place	Perpetrator(s)	V	P	K	Primary Weapon
20/06/94	Dunedin, NZ	David Bain	5	0	5	Semi-auto .22 rimfire rabbit rifle
31/03/93	Cangai, NSW	Leabeater & Steele	5	1	6	2 x .22 rifles
24/09/81	Campsie, NSW	Fred Daoud	5	1	6	Semi-auto .22 rifle, 10-shot mags
06/09/71	Hope Forest, SA	Cliff Bartholomew	10	0	10	.22 rabbit rifle

Mass shootings in Australia & New Zealand in which a .22 rifle was a secondary weapon:

Date	Place	Perpetrator(s)	V	P	K	Secondary Weapon
13/11/90	Aramoana, NZ	David Gray	13	1	14	Remington semi-auto .22 rifle
09/08/87	Hoddle St, VIC	Julian Knight	7	0	7	Ruger 10/22 semi-auto .22 rifle
19/06/87	Top End, NT/WA	Josef Schwab	5	1	6	Brno .22 rifle

Known Overseas Mass Shooting in which a .22 rifle was used:

Date	Place	Perpetrator(s)	V	P	K	Weapon
25/09/95	Toulon, France	Eric Borel	11	1	12	.22 hunting rifle (only weapon)

Key	V: Victims Shot Dead	P: Perpetrators Shot Dead	K: Total Killed
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Serial Killer Ivan Milat Also Used Two .22 Rifles

In the 1989-1992 Belanglo Forest backpacker murders, serial killer Ivan Milat also used an Anschutz .22 calibre rifle and a Ruger 10/22 semi-automatic .22 rifle to kill three of his seven young victims. This was not a “mass shooting,” and is not included in the tables above.

The .22 Rifle is the Most Commonly Used Gun in All Firearm Homicides

For every victim of a mass shooting which grabs the headlines, nine more Australians and New Zealanders die in less newsworthy gun murders. Most of these are domestic killings in which licensed male gun owners typically shoot members of their own family.^(2, 4, 6)

Again, several studies show that the ubiquitous .22 rimfire rifle, the largest-selling firearm and the gun readily at hand in many homes,⁽³⁾ is also the gun most commonly used in suicide, homicide and accidental shootings.

Research Studies, Australia and New Zealand

- In Brisbane, .22 calibre rifles were used in 66% of gun suicides and 55% of gun homicides ⁽⁴⁾
- In New South Wales, 76% of all guns used in suicide were .22 calibre rifles ⁽⁵⁾
- Throughout Australia, .22 calibre rifles were used to kill 43% of firearm homicide victims, making this the gun most commonly used in murder and manslaughter shootings ⁽⁶⁾
- In Auckland, New Zealand, .22 calibre weapons were used in 46% of all gun deaths -- more than any other firearm ⁽⁷⁾
- Throughout New Zealand, 32.5% of firearm homicide victims were killed with a .22 calibre rimfire rifle; 20% with a semi-automatic .22 rifle and the remaining 12.5% with a single-action .22 rifle. Guns of this calibre were the most common type used in murder and manslaughter ⁽²⁾

Conclusion

These figures suggest that to allow .22 calibre "bunny guns" to escape firearm restrictions would be to exempt the most common agent of gun death and injury.

The registration of individual firearms (in addition to owner licensing) is a proven public safety measure in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. As a direct result of tight control and owner-accountability for each handgun and restricted weapon (machine guns, etc.), these have always been the firearms least frequently used to kill in suicides, accidental shootings and crime. Of the four comparable countries, all but New Zealand now register every type of firearm. In New Zealand, sporting rifles and shotguns -- the guns most commonly used to cause death and injury -- remain the only firearms exempt from registration.

Notes and References:

- 1) A mass murder is defined as one in which five or more victims died by homicide in proximate events in a civilian setting, not counting serial killings or the suicide or justifiable homicide of any perpetrators.
- 2) Alpers P, Morgan B. Firearm Homicide in New Zealand: victims, perpetrators and their weapons 1992-94. A survey of NZ Police files presented to the National Conference of the Public Health Association of New Zealand. Knox College, Dunedin, 28 June 1995.
- 3) Among all firearms, by far the biggest seller is the semi-automatic .22 rimfire rifle (Robert Brewer, secretary of the Firearms Traders Association of Victoria. The Age, 11 May 1996); In New Zealand, the most common firearm is the .22 calibre rimfire rifle, probably involved in more incidents each year than any other firearm type (Forsyth, C I H. Firearms in New Zealand. NZ Mountain Safety Council Manual #19. July 1985, p. 4); Victoria Police figures show the .22 calibre rifle is the most commonly owned rifle in the state (Melbourne Herald Sun, 9 May 1996).
- 4) Cantor, C H, Brodie J & McMillen J. Firearm Victims: Who Were They? Medical Journal of Australia, Oct 1991; 155:7:442-446. This study examined all 587 firearm deaths in Brisbane, 1980-1989.
- 5) Vinson, T. Intentional Shootings. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research, Statistical Report 2, Series 2. May 1975, pp. 1-3. A survey of 97 gun suicides in NSW, July 1973 to June 1974.
- 6) Data on Firearms and Violent Death. Brief prepared for the Commonwealth Police Ministers' meeting of 10 May 1996. Australian Institute of Criminology. Canberra, May 1996.
- 7) Firearm-Related Deaths by Type of Firearm, Auckland Coronal District 1978-87. Unpublished data set. Section of Forensic Medicine, Dept of Pathology, University of Auckland School of Medicine, 1990.

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