

Gun crimes to be prosecuted at the federal level
By Jim Tatum
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Thugs beware: If you're caught with a gun; you're done.

That's the message Ninth Circuit Solicitor Scarlett Wilson, U.S. Attorney W. Walter Wilkins, and the federal, state and local law enforcement community want to hammer home to those who commit crimes with or related to guns.

"We want to get this message out: if you commit a crime with a gun, you are going to prison for a long time," Wilson said in a press conference in Charleston Thursday.

Contrary to some popular misconceptions, federal prison is no "Club Fed," she said. For one, there is no chance for an early parole – a person convicted at the federal level will serve at least 85 percent of the sentence. And federal sentences are generally harsher.

"Federal time is hard time," she said. "There's nothing easy about it."

The initiative, which Wilson calls Operation Fed Up, is an effort that will attempt to refocus and step up work that began in 2002 under Project CeaseFire, a program to reduce gun violence.

The idea is to have intensive case reviews of gun cases to decide whether those cases should be prosecuted at the state or federal level. Advantages exist at the federal level that do not at the state level; for example, federal sentencing guidelines are much harsher and cases can be sent to a grand jury which has investigative powers, Wilson noted.

According to federal statistics, more than 2,000 violent offenders have been sent to prison since Operation Cease Fire started in 2002.

Under the program, if a person is arrested for carrying an illegal gun, in all likelihood that person will not be able to get out of jail because under the federal statute, that person is not entitled to bail. If convicted, the offender can spend up to 10 years in federal prison.

The program is especially aimed at repeat offender convicted felons, fugitives from justice, drug users or addicts, illegal or temporary status aliens, persons committed to mental institutions, persons dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Military, anyone involved in domestic violence



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Solicitor Scarlet A. Wilson, U.S. Attorney W. Walter Wilkins, and representatives from a number of federal and local law enforcement agencies unveiled a new program Thursday aimed at prosecuting illegal gun use at the federal level.

or convicted of misdemeanor violent offenses or threats with deadly weapons.

“Just being in possession of ammunition can get you arrested if you fall into one of those categories,” Wilson said.

People who might not fall into those categories, but who are caught helping someone in those groups obtain a gun, can also be prosecuted, she said.

Convicted drug dealers and violent federal offenders caught with guns will automatically go to federal prison for 30 years, she added.