

Residents, committee getting 'Fed Up'

Date: 8/01/2008

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The Post and Courier

Ninth Circuit Solicitor Scarlett Wilson plucked a gold-finished .50-caliber Desert Eagle handgun from a table of firearms Thursday during a news conference to announce a state and federal initiative to combat gun violence.

"This gun is about looking cool," she said.

Not so cool: doing federal time for having a firearm if you're prohibited by law from doing so.

"The message we want to get out is if you have a gun, you're done," Wilson said as she stood with U.S. Attorney W. Walter Wilkins and local law enforcement officials to announce the initiative she dubbed "Operation Fed Up."

Residents are fed up with people who have been convicted of violent crime and yet continue to "plague our community," Wilson said. The 9th Circuit encompasses Charleston and Berkeley counties.

Operation Fed Up is an attempt to refocus efforts that began in 2002 under Project CeaseFire, a program to reduce gun violence. By 2006, more than 2,000 offenders had been locked up through CeaseFire, according to federal statistics.

Operation Fed Up offers advantages the state system doesn't have, such as harsher penalties and a federal grand jury that has the authority to investigate cases, Wilson said.

A coordinating committee reviews gun cases to determine if they should go through the state or federal judicial system. Wilkins said four assistant U.S. attorneys have been designated to work with Operation Fed Up. The committee already has identified cases that are expected to be presented to a federal grand jury in August, Wilkins said, though he didn't say how many cases.

Hanahan police Lt. Mike Fowler said his agency has sent a case to the committee for review. It originated from a suspicious-person call, he said. The suspect, a convicted felon, tossed a gun, but officers found it underneath a car.

If the suspect were prosecuted by the state and convicted, he'd probably get probation. If he were prosecuted in federal court and convicted, he could receive a maximum penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

"The beauty of it for us is it gets these guys off the street longer," Fowler said.