

Permit to Carry report shows decrease in applications

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The Minnesota Department of Public Safety's new permit to carry report shows a significant drop in permit applications, with numbers falling off after a strong 2018.

Across the state, the number of permit applications fell by 23%. Most counties in the region had similar drops, although Nicollet County's applications fell by nearly a third, while Le Sueur and Waseca County only saw drops of around 10%.

The large majority of permit applications were ultimately approved, with only a limited number of permits denied, suspended or revoked. Under state and federal law, persons convicted of violent and severe crimes may forfeit their gun rights, at least for a period of time.

Aside from those shifts, Minnesota Association of Sheriffs Executive Director Bill Hutton described the report as "pretty unremarkable." Hutton said that many of those shifts likely occurred because a large number of gun owners needed to renew their permit.

Under Minnesota law, gun owners must reapply every five years and pass an annual background check to retain their right to carry. Currently, just over 300,000 Minnesotans have a permit to carry.

A number of applications were left pending by the end of the year, either due to ongoing legal action or processing issues. Still, Rice County Sheriff Troy Dunn, who's currently serving as president of the Minnesota County Sheriffs Association, said that the system is working well.

"I was happy to see that our numbers on the denials were relatively low, and I hope it continues," said Dunn. "It shows that people are being responsible."

Under state law, Counties are required to respond to all gun permit applications within 30 days. Most respond much more quickly, especially in the region. However, the process may take closer to 30 days if issues are discovered during the initial background check.

According to Waseca County Sheriff Brad Milbrath, in most permit applications tend to be processed within 10 days or less. Even though only a small number of people procure the

background check, it's a quick process providing the person doesn't have significant issues that pop up.

"We tend to be pretty efficient here," he said. "There's very few that get denied."

A 2017 analysis from the Pew Research Center found that more than a third of Minnesotans own firearms. While many southern and western states have high gun ownership rates, in the Midwest only North Dakota has a higher rate of gun ownership than Minnesota.

On the other hand, Minnesota has relatively restrictive gun laws. The libertarian-leaning CATO Institute found the state ranked 37th in the nation for gun freedom, while EveryTown for Gun Safety found the state has already enacted 42 important gun control provisions.

According to EveryTown, a nonprofit organization devoted to reducing gun violence, 36,383 Americans die from gun violence each year, including 422 in Minnesota. Minnesota's rate of 7.5 gun deaths per 100,000 people is the sixth lowest of any state.

EveryTown's statistics show that the number of Minnesota gun deaths rose 17% from 2008 to 2017. More than three quarters of Minnesota gun deaths are from suicide, compared to about 60% nationwide.

The state's Permit to Carry report documents other crimes committed by Minnesotans with a permit to carry, which are much more common than gun violence. About 60% of those 1,891 crimes committed in 2019 by permit owners were DWIs and other traffic violations.

Few topics are more controversial than gun legislation. Some legislators have fiercely advocated for stricter gun laws, while others favor fewer. Since the DFL regained the House majority in 2018, it has focused attention on tightening gun laws.

In 2019, the House advanced bills Universal Background Checks and Red Flag Laws, with a focus on keeping guns out of the hands of those who may pose a danger to themselves or those around them. Neither were acted on by the Senate.