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Report: Guns in bars have little impact on crime

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RICHMOND

The number of gun crimes at Virginia bars and restaurants declined slightly during the first year of a new state law that allows people with permits to carry concealed firearms into establishments that serve alcohol, a newspaper reported Sunday.

According to the Richmond Times-Dispatch (<http://bit.ly/qq6Keh>), 145 such incidents were reported in fiscal 2010-11, compared to 153 the previous year — a 5.2 percent decrease.

Virginia State Police compiled the statistics at the newspaper's request.

The newspaper's analysis found that most of the incidents were relatively minor, and few appeared to involve people with concealed-carry permits.

Phillip Van Cleave, president of the pro-gun Virginia Citizens Defense League, said the results aren't surprising.

"The numbers basically just confirm what we've said would happen if the General Assembly changed the law," said Van Cleave, whose group strongly lobbied for the law's change that made Virginia one of 43 states to allow concealed guns in restaurants that serve alcohol.

"Keep in mind what the other side was saying — that this was going to be a blood bath, that restaurants will be dangerous and people will stop going. But there was nothing to base the fear-mongering on," Van Cleave said.

State Sen. A. Donald McEachin, D-Henrico, who strongly opposed the law, said it's not clear what conclusions can be drawn from just a year's worth of data.

"Most folks obey the law, and that's a good thing," said McEachin. "But I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out that just like drinking and driving doesn't mix, guns and drinking don't mix."

David Rittgers, an attorney and decorated former Army special forces officer who is now a legal policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, said the growing number of states that are adopting concealed-carry measures like Virginia's have seen no appreciable rise — and in some cases a decline — in violent crime.

"The worst that you can say about these laws is that they are statistically value neutral" in terms of impacting the crime rate, Rittgers said.

State police pulled from their computerized database all major crimes at bars and restaurants reported by local law-enforcement agencies across Virginia for two successive fiscal years. The Times-Dispatch then contacted more than a dozen police departments in Virginia for more detailed information on all aggravated assaults, homicides and sexual assaults involving firearms at those businesses.

Reported robberies were not analyzed because they tend to involve premeditated crimes by perpetrators openly displaying guns, and many of the affected businesses are chain restaurants that don't serve alcohol.

Only two fatal shootings occurred during the last fiscal year — one outside a Petersburg nightclub and the other at a Radford restaurant — but neither involved concealed-gun permit holders. And only two of the 18 aggravated assaults reported could be linked definitively to concealed-carry holders.

Several other cases appear to have involved hidden guns, but the suspects either didn't have a concealed permit, or they fled the scene before they could be identified and arrested.

Aside from the two homicides, the only assault that resulted in a person being shot occurred [in February outside a Virginia Beach restaurant and bar](#). The shooting followed an altercation inside the restaurant. Several unknown men were asked to leave, and the victim was shot and wounded as he walked toward a male in an adjacent parking lot, police said.

But because the suspect was never identified and arrested, police don't know whether the shooter was carrying a concealed gun or whether he had a permit to carry it.