

# Tracing firearms used in multiple incidents

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Practice note: Linked Series analysis of discharged guns

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I've worked in Merseyside Police in the intelligence arena since 2004. I now work in a dedicated firearms intelligence team alongside colleagues in the serious and organised crime section.

The number of Merseyside illegal firearm discharge incidents has fluctuated over the years, peaking with 125 in both 2007 and 2012. Since the Firearms Investigation Team (FIT) was implemented in January 2020, numbers of discharges have notably decreased. There were just 43 incidents in 2021, the lowest number recorded for 21 years. The impact of COVID-19 and Operation Venetic (EncroChat investigations) are likely to be contributing factors here. However, given the increase in incidents in neighbouring forces at this time, as well as fatal discharges occurring early during the lockdown period, there may be other explanations.

Our collaborative 'One Team' approach involves the whole force in the effort towards addressing firearm incidents, and is thought to have had an impact on reducing discharges. The FIT investigates all discharge incidents and most firearm recoveries. The monthly in-force strategic firearms governance meeting, chaired by the Head of Investigations, is attended by staff and officers across the force, as well as partner agencies. The aims and objectives are clearly expressed, with an emphasis on the 4P framework (pursue, protect, prepare and prevent).

Investigating the use of a specific firearm in multiple incidents enables us to build a clearer intelligence picture, providing additional forensic and investigative opportunities. This has also enabled us to identify a downstream supply network, by charting Linked Series of a particular firearm type and highlighting nominal association links.

For the purposes of this article, a Linked Series firearm relates to a lethal barrelled firearm that has been identified as being discharged in multiple shots fired incidents, following examination of ballistic items by the National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS).

This has led to international liaison coordinated by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Europol, and has been a breakthrough in understanding the movement of firearms across the force area and the UK, with the findings continually verified.

After being notified of a Linked Series by the NABIS, we follow the following process.

1. An initial intelligence assessment is written regarding potential ownership, supply and use. This is shared with key individuals in force and with partner agencies.
2. A detailed assessment is written. The Linked Series is scored red, amber or green (RAG), with a management of risk in law enforcement (MoRILE) assessment. These are included in the monthly Strategic Firearms governance meeting presentation.
3. The Linked Series is discussed at the governance meeting and prioritised based on threat, risk and harm (TRH), combining the score with professional judgement. (For example, a lower score could be prioritised over a high score because of short-term risk, any prior serious injuries and the behaviour of the suspect.)
4. Linked Series activity is directed for the next month, using all available resources and assets from a local and central level, with covert assets also considered.
5. An in-depth Linked Series document and briefings are produced and circulated.

Linked Series intelligence summaries and documents consist of, but are not limited to, the following.

- An intelligence assessment based on all incidents and nominals involved, including investigative findings (CCTV footage, vehicles involved, telecoms) and forensic results. Prison data is also researched, as firearms movement has been linked back to prison alliances.
- Association charts, as the increased movement of firearms – within and across force boundaries – evidences a tangled web that a pictorial representation helps to illustrate.
- Open land opportunities based on the address of the suspect (and their family and associates), intelligence, previous firearm recoveries and areas of operation.
- Identifying addresses of people who may be open to exploitation for the storage of commodity (for example, due to vulnerabilities such as alcohol or drug dependency).
- The areas where the nominals operate their criminal enterprises and the locations they frequent are mapped. Vehicles are highlighted to provide stop-check and intelligence gathering

opportunities.

- Forensic identification databases are researched to identify any additional potential disruption opportunities. Suspects are highlighted for comparison.

The ultimate goal is to recover the Linked Series firearm and bring those responsible to justice. The One Team approach has resulted in significant arrests and sentencing, as well as the recovery of firearms, ammunition, drugs and other commodities. Investment, liaison and joint working with partner agencies is invaluable. For example, the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit, NABIS, forensic service providers, the NCA, European Firearms Supply Operations Group (EFSOG).

Understanding the use, movement and supply of Merseyside Linked Series firearms will help inform the regional, national and international firearms supply network, as well as the overall picture.

- This article was peer reviewed by Darren Barber, Temporary Lead Analyst, Metropolitan Police Service

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