

Obama announces new steps to curb gun violence

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In this April 28, 2016 file photo, President Barack Obama speaks in the Brady Press Briefing Room in Washington. President Barack Obama is announcing new steps to reduce gun violence, mainly by helping manufacturers understand what law enforcement agencies need from so-called smart guns. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster, File)

President Barack Obama announced new steps Friday to help curb gun violence, including by identifying the requirements that "smart guns"

would have to meet for law enforcement agencies to buy and use them as well as sharing mental health records with the federal background check system.

Smart guns use various technologies to prevent an accidental shooting or help track down a missing gun.

"These common-sense steps are not going to prevent every tragedy, but what if they prevented even one?" Obama wrote in a Facebook post. "We should be doing everything we can to save lives and spare families the pain and unimaginable loss too many Americans have endured."

As Obama unveiled a plan last January to expand federal background checks for gun purchases, he directed the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and Justice to conduct or sponsor research into smart-gun technology. Obama also instructed the agencies to regularly review the availability of such technology and to promote its use.

In response, the National Rifle Association said Obama should focus on fighting terrorist threats.

"President Obama's obsession with gun control knows no boundaries," said Jennifer Baker, director of NRA-ILA Public Affairs. "At a time when we are actively fighting terrorists at home and abroad, this administration would rather focus the military's efforts on the president's gun control agenda."

In a report released Friday, the Justice and Homeland Security departments said they expect to complete the work of identifying the smart-gun requirements by October.

The Defense Department will continue to help manufacturers test smart firearms under real-world conditions at the U.S. Army Aberdeen Test

Center in Maryland. Gun makers could also be eligible to win cash prizes through the program. The federal government will also continue to help state and local governments as smart-gun technology develops, the report said.

"Many gun injuries and deaths are the result of legal guns that were stolen, misused, or discharged accidentally," Obama said. "As long as we've got the technology to prevent a criminal from stealing and using your smartphone, then we should be able to prevent the wrong person from pulling a trigger on a gun."

The president also called for more attention to be paid to the mentally ill. The Social Security Administration will publish a proposed rule to help ensure that mental health records about people who are prohibited from buying a gun are reported to the background check system. The public will have 60 days to comment after the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register.

Obama also said the White House will hold a conference in May on preventing gun violence.

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