### **NSSF®** FAST FACTS

#### WHAT IS A SUPPRESSOR?

Firearm suppressors, or "silencers" as they are legally called in the National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934<sup>2</sup> and Gun Control Act (GCA) of 19683, are devices that, when attached to the end of a firearm's barrel, help reduce the report (noise) of gunfire to a hearing-safe level. They do not "silence" firearms. They are nothing more than containment systems with a series of baffles which help contain and redirect the expanding gases that exit the end of the firearm's barrel when they are discharged. Suppressors are like car mufflers, which were, in fact, developed in parallel by the same inventor in the early 1900s. Using suppressors can make shooting firearms safer, more enjoyable and help make shooting ranges more neighborly.

Suppressors have been available for more than 100 years, are legal in 42 states, and can be used when hunting in 41 states. At the end of 2024 there were over 4.5 million suppressors registered in the NFA. NSSF estimates that over 3.14 million suppressors are in consumers' possession, approximately 1 million are in possession of manufacturers and retailers, and the remaining few hundred thousand are registered to the government.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice established "the government's view is that the Second Amendment protects firearm accessories and components such as suppressors." This declaration reinforces what many in the firearm industry already know — suppressors improve accuracy on almost every firearm, are excellent hearing protection for hunters, reduce recoil for all shooters and overall enhance the experience of hunters and sport shooters.

### **HEARING PROTECTION ACT**

- Firearm suppressors reduce the noise of gunfire to a hearing-safe level. They do not "silence" firearms.
- Legal in 42 states and to use when hunting in 41 states, suppressors are rarely used by criminals. Rather, they are important safety devices for hunters and target shooters. They also help reduce noise complaints against ranges.
- The Hearing Protection Act (H.R. 404 / S. 364), introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Ben Cline (R-VA) and U.S. Senate by Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID), would not deregulate suppressors. Instead, the purchase of a suppressor would follow the same non-NFA purchase rules, including an FBI NICS background check.
- The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (P.L. 119-21), enacted on July 4, 2025, reduced the \$200 tax on suppressors, short-barreled firearms, and Any Other Weapon as defined in 26 U.S. Code § 5845(e) to \$0.

#### THE HEARING PROTECTION ACT

To purchase a suppressor, an individual must locate a federally licensed firearm retailer (FFL) that is regulated as a NFA Class III dealer, complete an ATF Form 4 with the model and serial number of the suppressor, and obtain two passport photos and submit duplicate fingerprint cards from a local police department or complete a fingerprint kit at home. The local chief law enforce-

check used for firearm purchases at the time of suppressor transfer (ATF Form 4473), the customer can take ownership of their suppressor from the NFA Class III retailer. It is important to note that both the ATF Form 4 and Form 4473 checks are identical and run through the FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which uses three main databases: the Interstate Identification Index (III), the National

"Given the lack of criminality associated with silencers, it is reasonable to conclude that they should not be viewed as a threat to public safety necessitating NFA classification, and should be considered for reclassification under the GCA." - Ronald Turk, Former Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosive (ATF) Associate Deputy Director<sup>1</sup>

ment official must receive a completed copy of the application. Then the form, photographs and fingerprints must be sent to ATF to process the paperwork while the FBI completes the background check upon request of the ATF. Upon approval of the Form 4 transfer application and undergoing a second background

Crime Information Center (NCIC), and the NICS Indices.

The Hearing Protection Act (H.R. 404 / S. 364), introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Ben Cline (R-VA) and U.S. Senate by Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID), would remove suppressors from the NFA but



would not deregulate suppressors. They would remain regulated under the GCA. FFLs would still maintain detailed sales records subject to an ATF audit and conduct the same ATF Form 4473 NICS background check, just as they do now before the transfer.

## THE ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL ACT

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act<sup>5</sup> (P.L. 119-21), signed into law by President Donald J. Trump on July 4, 2025, reduced the tax on suppressors, short-barreled firearms, and "Any Other Weapon" as defined in 26 U.S. Code § 5845(e) to \$0.6 Prior to the law's enactment, purchasers were required to submit a \$200 check with their ATF Form 4 application. The \$200 tax for machineguns and destructive devices remains unchanged. While the provision in P.L. 119-21 is short of the preferred NSSF-supported Hearing Protection Act, which remains a priority of NSSF, it's important to recognize the historic progress that was made in lessening the burden of obtaining firearms and firearm safety devices lawful under federal law.

#### **HEARING LOSS**

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), any exposure to noise over 140db causes immediate and irreparable noise-induced hearing loss.<sup>7</sup> Unsuppressed firearms generally create a muzzle report well above this threshold. Gunfire noise is a "preventable" occupational risk and an unnecessary liability. A suppressor can help protect against noise-induced hearing loss, a documented problem facing target shooters and hunters and those repeatedly exposed to gunfire, both operationally and in a training environment.

# SAFETY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Firearm suppressors have many practical benefits for civilians. One of the "ten commandments" of firearm safety is for shooters to wear eye and ear protection. A suppressor solves the need for ear protection for shooters who would normally be affected by the noise of the gun shot. This makes for more effective firearms training. Shooters can communicate without shouting at each other and hear and comply with instructions and range safety commands.

It is important to note that many shooters who use suppressors still choose to wear some type of hearing protection for extended time on the range. Depending on the cartridge, firearm, and target that is being impacted the noise exposure risk can still be present when shooting is suppressed. As noted, while suppressors reduce the report of the firearm to hearing-safe levels, they do not make them "Hollywood quiet".

One of the most common problems for shooters is poor accuracy due to the shooter's anticipation of the gun's loud report and recoil. This anticipation causes shooters to "flinch" before the gun even goes off, to experience slight tremors in the hand from nervousness, and even to close their eyes or blink right before they pull the trigger. These issues cause the gun to move from the intended target area. The use of a suppressor dramatically increases the shooter's accuracy because of the reduced muzzle report, reduced recoil, and decreased muzzle rise.8 In addition to the psychological benefits, adding a suppressor to a firearm, like a hunting rifle, adds mass to the firearm and controls the flow of exhaust gases from the cartridge upon firing. This mechanical reduction of recoil further adds to the accuracy increase experienced by suppressed shooters.

# HELPING MAKE RANGES BETTER NEIGHBORS

Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the modern firearm suppressor invented the suppressor in 1902 to solve the noise pollution complaints of his neighbors. In Maxim's book, Experiences with the Maxim Silencer, he explains why he developed the suppressor: "to meet my personal desire to enjoy target practice without creating a disturbance. I have always loved to shoot, but I never thoroughly enjoyed it when I knew the noise was annoying other people."

Over 100 years after his invention, noise pollution is still a problem. Shooting ranges throughout America are increasingly being sued by neighbors or are being shut down due to noise complaints. Suppressors can help to reduce noise complaints against ranges.

#### **HUNTING**

As demonstrated by the 41 states that have legalized use of suppressors when hunting, suppressors are useful when it is not practical to wear ear plugs all day to maintain awareness of one's surroundings, allowing hunters to effectively track their prey and take shots without having to first apply additional hearing protection. A recent study, NSSF's "Suppressor Owner Study"9 highlights the growing popularity of suppressors in hunting. It was found that hunting was the second most primary reason for purchasing a silencer, surpassed only by recreational shooting. Also, as the suppressor reduces recoil and muzzle rise, one can get into position for a follow-up shot more quickly because there is less muzzle movement, and the

crosshairs stay closer to the target. Adding to the importance of suppressors, the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck surgery "endorsed the use of firearm suppressor as an effective method of reducing the risk of hearing loss, especially when used in conjunction with conventional hearing protective measures".<sup>10</sup>

### LAWFUL USE OF SUPPRES-SORS DOES NOT INCREASE CRIME

There are unfounded concerns raised by anti-gun groups that suppressors are often used in crimes.

While law-abiding citizens have owned suppressors since 1902, suppressors have very rarely been used in crimes. In the Western Criminology Review 2007 "Criminal Use of Firearm Silencers" article, researchers studied criminal use of suppressors in California and nation-wide between 1995 and 2005, the researcher found 153 federal criminal cases involving suppressors, only 15 of which involved the actual use of the suppressor in the commission of a crime. Less than 0.1% of homicides in federal court, an infinitesimally low 0.00006% of felonies in California and a mere 0.1% of armed robberies involve a

suppressor. Suppressed firearms are not the choice for criminals. They do not "silence" firearms like in Hollywood movies, they are ineffective on revolvers, they prevent the proper function of most semi-automatic handguns without the addition of a special piston system, and they make firearms longer and heavier, which makes them more difficult to conceal.

Removing suppressors from the NFA will not pose a threat to public safety. What it will do is reduce ATF's workload and allow the agency to direct more resources to reduce violent crime, rather than process paperwork.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://thereload.com/analysis-silencer-sales-are-about-to-explode-member-exclusive/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "National Firearms Act" Public Law No. 73-474, 48 Stat. 1236 (1934)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Gun Control Act of 1968" Public Law No. 90-618 Oct. 22, 1968

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> United States v. Peterson, No. 24-30043 (5th Cir.), Dkt 129-1 at 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> H.R.1 – One Big Beautiful Bill Act (2025) - https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text

<sup>6</sup> ID.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/noise/prevent/understand.html

<sup>8</sup> https://www.themeateater.com/hunt/firearm-hunting/everything-you-need-to-know-about-hunting-with-a-suppressor