

Beat: News

Violent Fourth of July weekend in Chicago: 82 shot, 14 killed

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USPA News - More than 80 people were shot, fourteen of them fatally so, in a surge of gun violence in the city of Chicago over the long Fourth of July weekend, police said on Monday, calling on Illinois lawmakers to pass legislation that allows for tougher punishment. Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy said the department had prepared for the holiday weekend by putting hundreds of additional officers on the streets, especially surrounding the fireworks displays that attracted thousands of people.

He said the effort was largely successful from Thursday evening through Saturday night, but a surge in shooting incidents occurred on Sunday. "Ladies and gentlemen, it's Groundhog Day here in Chicago. I come here every week, we slowed it down because you (journalists) all stopped showing up, quite frankly, because I think you got tired of hearing it," McCarthy said. "Everybody asks me what's different about New York and Chicago. I can tell you very simply: proliferation of firearms." Chicago, already known for its high levels of gang and gun violence, experienced a more violent holiday weekend than expected. Between late Thursday afternoon and early Monday morning, 82 people were shot, of whom 14 people were killed. The figure includes eight incidents in which officers either discharged their firearms or were fired at by suspects. Chicago has cracked down on illegal firearms over the past year, seizing nearly 4,000 firearms since the beginning of 2014, including more than 100 firearms over the holiday weekend alone, but the majority of suspects get off with little to no jail time. McCarthy criticized current Illinois laws that enable criminals to quickly return to the street after being arrested for illegal gun possession. "Something I've learned over the course of the last three years is that there's a greater sanction for the gang member to lose that firearm from their gang than there is to go to jail for possession of that gun," McCarthy said. "When I chased people in New York, they used to throw the guns away. We chase people here in Chicago, they keep the guns, and they turn on our officers. These offenders need to be held fully accountable for violent behavior to prevent them from ending up back on the streets to soon to cause more violence." The police superintendent noted that possession of a loaded firearm, for sentencing purposes, is not considered a violent felony in the State of Illinois. "Which is why you see the revolving door, which is why you see people getting arrested with guns over and over again. It's really that simple. Something's got to change," he said. In one incident he cited, which occurred on early Friday, officers responded to reports about a group of armed persons. One person who was arrested with a firearm after a foot chase turned out to be a convicted felon who is a suspect in both a murder case and in a second shooting. He also had 21 prior arrests. "This individual should not have been on the street," McCarthy said. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel also condemned the violence, saying the shootings and murders over the holiday weekend were "simply unacceptable." He said the solution does not just include more policing, but also providing young people with alternatives to the street to prevent them from joining gangs. "This violence is unacceptable wherever it occurs in our city and all of us need to take a stand," he said. Despite the violent holiday weekend, however, Chicago last year experienced the lowest numbers of violent crimes since the mid 1960s when records began. Police figures show the city's murder rate stood at 185 by Monday, down by 11 murders when compared to the 196 murders by July 7 last year. Overall shooting incidents, however, are up by 46 so far this year. "It all comes down to these guns. There's too many guns coming in and too little punishment going out. Our officers would not be forced to use their weapons if the offenders were not armed with illegal weapons," McCarthy said. "But we're going to keep building on our strategy. We're taking it apart and trying to figure out what it is that happened this weekend."

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