

Guns a big seller on Black Friday

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Toy and electronics stores weren't the only businesses racking up big sales numbers on Black Friday.

For area gun shops, the weekend after Thanksgiving is typically one of the busiest of the year. They saw even more sales this year after the re-election of President Obama, continuing a trend that occurred after he was first elected president.

"California is following pretty much the national trend," said Michelle Gregory, spokeswoman for the California Department of Justice, which keeps a record of dealer sales.

Gun sales typically increase after elections, and whenever gun lobbying groups suggest the possibility of gun control legislation.

This year, Black Friday gun sales were up 59 percent over from the same day a year ago, she said. The figure for transactions in November also showed a 49 percent increase over November 2011.

Adam Fahlbusch, manager of the Big Horn Gun Shop in the El Dorado County community of El Dorado, said the spike in sales during the past month exceeded those following the 2008 presidential election and Y2K, the beginning of the new millennium, when some people feared that computer crashes could lead to civil unrest.

He attributed the increase during the past month to a number of factors, including the presidential election, the economic climate, dwindling law enforcement and fallout from the

state's prison realignment, as well as a proposed United Nations arms treaty.

The Arms Trade Treaty is intended to regulate global conventional arms trade. U.S. officials have said it would apply only to exports and have no effect on domestic gun sales and ownership.

But some gun enthusiasts fear it could lead to a reduction in firearms from overseas being sold in the United States.

Meanwhile, gun-control advocates have expressed disappointment that Obama hasn't pushed gun-control legislation. The issue received little attention during his first term and this year's presidential campaign. The 1994 ban on sales of certain types of semiautomatic weapons expired in 2004 and hasn't been reauthorized by Congress.

In California, handgun sales increased by 113,231, or 63 percent, from 2007 to 2011, according to dealer sales tallied by the state Department of Justice. Long gun sales increased by 117,373, or 62 percent, during the same period.

Handgun purchases and violent crime rates peaked statewide during the early 1990s. In 1993, California residents bought 433,822 handguns, compared with 293,421 purchased last year.

But postelection fears and holiday shopping fervor appear to have combined to give gun dealers a boost this year.

When Fahlbusch posted the day's sales with the Department of Justice on the Saturday before the Nov. 6 election, statewide firearms transactions for the 24-hour period were about 1,500, he said. For the following Saturday, the figure was more than 3,300, and for the Saturday after Thanksgiving, he said, approximately 9,700 transactions had been reported by 6pm.

"And they were open for another six hours," Fahlbusch said, explaining that the Department of Justice extended its hours

until midnight Nov. 23-25 in anticipation of the higher than usual number of transactions.

Fahlbusch said about 75 percent of his customers have been purchasing firearms for personal and home protection.

Glen Ward, owner of Action Guns, in Rancho Cordova, however, said sales at his shop had remained pretty steady, with customers purchasing handguns for self-protection and recreation.

"They enjoy the art of shooting guns," he said.