

HANDGUN BAN

A Ban on Handguns

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Washington

Attorney General Edward Levi, reversing a six-year administration stand against tougher gun controls, called yesterday for banning handgun possession outside a person's home or business in high crime areas of the nation.

Levi's proposal also would make it illegal to sell or transfer handguns and ammunition in the high crime areas as well as to import them there.

Declaring that "the handgun has become the denominator of much of the violence that besets us," Levi told a narcotics conference of police officials here that state, local and federal laws have proven to be insufficient.

Levi's detailed proposal is likely to increase the prospects for adoption of gun control legislation in the current session of Congress.

Levi's suggestion seemed to go significantly further than President Ford's stance on gun control, expressed as recently as March 23 in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. He said then that the only proposal "that looks at all like the right one is one that would ban so-called Saturday night specials" — cheap handguns that figure prominently in violent crimes.

But administration sources said Levi's speech had been "run through" the White House.

Levi's proposal called for the handgun ban to be triggered by a local violent crime rate "significantly higher" than the national average or by a high local rate that had climbed significantly over a one-year period.

Such a regional mechanism, Levi said, "strikes only in places where the need for handgun control has been clearly demon-

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strated by a critical level of violence."

If the law had been in effect in 1972 and had required a violent crime rate 20 per cent higher than the national average of one ten per cent higher than the national average and five per cent higher than the 1971 local rate, 12 metropolitan areas would have been affected. Levi said. These would have included Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, Washington, D. C., Chicago and Baltimore.

In the covered areas, a handgun owner "would be required to obtain a special permit of extremely limited duration if he wanted to transport his weapon outside his home or business for a legitimate reason," Levi told his law enforcement audience.

To be effective, Levi said, the ban would have to be imposed "for a period of years since crime in a metropolitan area reached critical levels."

Levi said the law could operate with a three-part pen-

alty structure. First-time violators could be subject to "a high civil penalty plus confiscation of the weapon, a punishment that Levi said some law enforcement officials had advised him would be insufficient because prosecutors would not take seriously "such a mild sanction.

But Levi said that judges would not hesitate to impose a non-jail penalty on first-time gun violators who were otherwise law-abiding citizens.

The two-time violator could be subject to "a short prison term, while a third offense or any violation of the laws gun-running provisions could be liable to "a stiff criminal penalty, Levi said.

The Attorney General said his regional handgun ban would cover not just central cities, but also their suburbs.

"More than half the murders in America — perhaps 10,000 in 1973 — are committed by persons using handguns, Levi said.

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