

Does it make sense to destroy guns?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Here in Chicago, reporter Rob Wilderboer found [a compelling story](#) last week:

The Chicago Police Department throws out about \$2 million every year. It's money that is forfeited by the city when police destroy the guns they seize rather than sell them to licensed firearms dealers. The decision is made for emotional, political and ideological reasons.

Wilderboer sets it up as a simple choice: money for the CPD/other City services? Or the satisfaction of destroying weapons, even though manufacturers are more than happy to replace them with new ones in the supply chain? Only emotions, politics and ideology would cause anyone to choose the latter.

Now, it's not at all clear that a new chunk of money for the City to play with would lead to better well-being for Chicago residents generally, much less for the mostly poor and nonwhite residents of our violence-plagued neighborhoods. This, after all, is a place where the all-powerful Democratic ruling class spends much of its energy [moving public money from poor neighborhoods to rich ones](#) and semi-privatizing everything in sight ([schools](#), [highways](#), [parking meters](#), [transit cards](#)).

More to the point, Wilderboer's dichotomy seems awfully dismissive of the power and seriousness of emotion. He goes on:

I've talked to a number of gun control advocates who are happy the city of Chicago destroys seized guns, but their views seem rooted in a general aversion to firearms. It seems like a knee-jerk reaction of some sort. They couldn't point to any benefits the city gets other than 'it's one less gun on the streets.'

Maybe that's because he's asking only about tangible, quantifiable benefit. Gun violence has killed or physically harmed many Chicagoans in recent years; it's also left families, communities and neighborhoods emotionally scarred. And while law enforcement requires a measure of cold calculation and a whole lot of money, social

change finds a lot of its currency in emotional investment—which we all know can be intimately connected to specific physical objects.

Chicago's victims of gun violence haven't been terrorized with the abstraction of guns generally. They've been terrorized with specific guns. So it's fitting for those guns to be destroyed. Better yet, we could take [a cue from the biblical prophets](#) and transform these instruments of death into useful, life-giving tools. That would be so emotional, so totally irrational—and so useful for the symbolic and inspirational work that goes into building a better world.

Of course, if we took every confiscated gun in Chicago and beat it into a plowshare for use on one of our urban farms, along with having no measurable effect on gun supply we'd probably create a glut in the rather niche-y plowshare market. What a ridiculous, emotionally motivated, powerful witness that would be.