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Police chief to join gun debate

Kerlikowske taking part in N.Y. forum

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Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske thinks having more guns in the community doesn't deter crime, and he plans to argue that Tuesday night in a New York City debate.

Kerlikowske will appear with leading researchers and advocates on both sides of the gun issue during the debate at Rockefeller University in New York City.

The debate is sponsored by National Public Radio as part of its "Intelligence Squared" program -- a series of debates intended to provoke discussion of public issues. An edited version of Tuesday's debate will air later this week at www.npr.org, and video will be made available on YouTube.com, a spokeswoman said.

Joining Kerlikowske are five others, including Paul Helmke, the director of the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, as well as Stephen Halbrook, the National Rifle Association attorney who successfully challenged Washington, D.C.'s ban on handguns, which the U.S. Supreme Court overturned in a historic decision this year.

"It's a little different forum for police chief to be in -- at Rockefeller University in New York City in an 'Oxford style' debate," Kerlikowske said from his hotel room.

"I think they just wanted a practitioner. I think they wanted a little more color added to it, a little more practical viewpoint."

Under Oxford-style rules, two teams will be asked to argue for and against a motion, which in this case is the statement "Guns reduce crime." The debate is expected to center on what effect personal gun ownership has on deterring or increasing crime rates.

Kerlikowske said research is "clear" that the more guns in the community, the more that are in circulation for criminals to get their hands on.

"When there are more guns, there are more guns used in suicides, and more guns used in domestic violence. And where there are more guns in more homes, there are more accidental shootings, including shootings by children," he said.

But John R. Lott Jr., a University of Maryland research scholar and author of "More Guns, Less Crimes," who is slated to debate against Kerlikowske's team, disagrees. He said most academic studies show that in areas where more residents have permits to carry concealed weapons, crime rates are lower.

"About 30 percent of (studies) find no effect. But no one claims there is a bad effect," he said.

In 2004, Kerlikowske was one of several big-city police chiefs urging Congress to renew the federal assault weapons ban after it expired. At the state level, he joined Mayor Greg Nickels in urging lawmakers to require background checks on sales at private gun shows.