

The Sportsman's Association

Of Great Britain & Northern Ireland
FIGHTING FOR FAIR AND EFFECTIVE FIREARMS LEGISLATION



Interim Newsletter 30/10/2024

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Hi Everyone,

This is an interim newsletter, mostly because of the importance of the item below, and a quick update now that the new government is beginning to get to grips with working – hopefully!

TOP VENTING BLANK FIRING FIREARMS – from the Home Office

I am writing to advise you about the legal status of specific types of **Top Venting Blank Firing Firearms manufactured in Türkiye, namely RETAY, EKOL, CEONIC and BLOW pistols.**

By virtue of section 1 of the Firearms Act 1982, an imitation firearm is legal to purchase and possess without a firearms certificate in this country if it is not 'readily convertible' to a firearm. Section 1(6) of the 1982 Act defines what is meant by 'readily convertible' in this context. It means any imitation firearm which can be converted to a firearm without any special skills or specialist equipment or tools. **In its Annual Strategic Threat Assessment 2024, the National Crime Agency noted that criminals are converting blank-firing weapons, such as Top Venting Blank Firing Firearms to fire live or modified ammunition, and this has been assessed as one of the most significant firearms threats.**

The National Crime Agency recently commissioned an accredited expert to undertake forensic examination in Durham Firearms Classification and Examination Laboratory of the different examples of Turkish manufactured Top Venting Blank Firing Firearms to assess their convertibility into live-firing weapons. **This testing has established that models RETAY, EKOL, CEONIC and BLOW are 'readily convertible' within the meaning of section 1 of the Firearms Act 1982, which means that they fall within the controls set out in the Firearms Act 1968. As the models tested fall within the specifications of a handgun they are, therefore prohibited under section 5(1) (aba) of the Firearms Act 1968. Their possession, purchase or acquisition is unlawful in the absence of specific authorisation of the Secretary of State.**

The Home Office is working with the National Police Chiefs Council and the National Crime Agency to ensure that all interested parties are aware that these models of Top Venting Blank Firing Firearms are prohibited under the Firearms Act 1968 and that their possession, purchase or acquisition is unlawful. I hope that you will be able to advise your members of this and any other person or organisation you consider may be affected or have an interest.

The Government wishes to ensure that these weapons are removed from circulation and that current owners have the opportunity to dispose of them safely. It is the intention of the National Police Chiefs Council to hold an amnesty during which owners will be able to hand these items into police stations. **The amnesty will run for four weeks from 3 February 2025 across all police forces in England and Wales.** There will be further details about the amnesty scheme issued nearer the time. It is, however, open to anybody who is in possession of one of these firearms who wishes to dispose of the item before the amnesty begins to contact their local police force to discuss safe disposal. **Discussions are also underway about a similar amnesty in Scotland.**

No compensation will be paid by the Government in respect of firearms that are handed over in the amnesty (or prior to the amnesty) on the basis that they have been found to be illegal and contrary to current legislation.

It is the responsibility of the firearm owner to ensure they are complying with the law.

This is why we are writing to you, and to other organisations who represent groups who might be affected, so you are aware of the position of these specific Top Venting Blank Firing Firearms.

Head of Firearms and Weapons Policy Unit

The Gun Trade Association are challenging the lack of compensation. They have asked for those that are significantly affected to contact them.

Email: enquiries@gtaltd.co.uk - Tel: 01684 291868

The Home Office were asked if the laboratory that did the testing of the blank firers was compliant with forensic testing requirements, otherwise their evidence would not be admissible in court. I have just done a quick search myself and believe in this instance that the laboratory used is duly accredited, but I am not knowledgeable in this area, so if you are, please use the link below to see the accreditation, and advise me accordingly.

<https://www.ukas.com/download-schedule/7945/Testing/>

Firearms Fees

All the work on this has timed out following the general election, and the Home Office have been waiting for the new Ministers to give their views on the consultation and proposed fees. The Labour party had a manifesto commitment to full cost recovery, using Treasury guidelines. The Home Office now considers not just the granting/renewal of a certificate, but also the continuous assessment of a certificate to be part of the process for which funding must be found. Also, that funding of FEO training must be part of the full cost recovery.

However, any licensing authority work post granting/renewal of a certificate would be classed as enforcement, and under Treasury Rules can not be charged to the certificate holder. (Box A6.1A, Manging Public Money, 2023) (Thanks to Bill Harriman for this research.)

A regular increase to firearms licensing fees is also under consideration, one assumes this might follow inflation.

Sound Moderators

The proposal to de-regulate sound moderators has also timed out following the general election. The Home Office say discussions with new Ministers are on-going and it has been pointed out to the Home Office that implementation of this would give more accurate firearms ownership figures, as sound moderators account for a third of the rifle count. There would also be associated time and cost savings by removing them from licence.

S11(4) Guidance

Home Office Lawyers are revising yet another draft of the guidance around the running of a S(11) range, and copies will be shared with interested parties for approval, before the Firearms Act 2023 can come into force via a Statutory Instrument.

Medical Markers

These are now in use at all surgeries in England, but not Wales and Scotland, where they have them in varying format. The Home Office want to see how well the medical marker in England works before doing exactly the same in Wales and Scotland.

This may explain why one of our Welsh members was made to do a medical proforma for his explosive licence, and why police in Dyfed-Powys seem to think a medical proforma only lasts for six months, not the duration of their certificate!

Explosive Licenses

In recent years there have been changes in the UN classification of Pyrodex and Hodgdon, so that they now require an explosive licence. But as the comment in the previous segment shows, and the police admit, licensing authorities do not have the expertise necessary to fulfil their role in the issuing of explosive certificates.

Discussions between Police, Home Office and HSE are ongoing, and the Police are proposing a national meeting between said bodies and user groups to discuss acquisition and storage of explosive and propellant powders.

Border Force Training

Following on from Savvas being detained by Border Force for four hours at the airport, simply because Border Force staff were not knowledgeable enough to identify the exempt from licencing air rifle that Savvas was taking with him, an invitation to Border Force to receive training alongside FEO's has been made to the Home Office, who will take the offer to Border Force and enquire as to what training they currently have.

Well, I hope I have given you the gist of things on-going, and that if you, or people you know, own any of the Turkish manufactured blank firers mentioned, will take the necessary actions to keep yourselves out of trouble.

I have known people argue with the police over the classification of blank firers. In some cases they were right, in others they either conceded they were wrong to minimise the penalty, or have been proven wrong in court, and either suspended, or prison sentences were the result.

The government will be pressed on compensation, but it is not looking likely at the moment.

Regards, Rachel Westlake.