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Realistic imitation firearms and airsoft guns

It was also an offence from 1 October to manufacture, import or sell a realistic imitation firearm. However, we recognize there are legitimate uses for realistic imitation firearms and have provided, in addition to the defences specified on the face of the Act in relation to the use of realistic imitations for film, television and historical re-enactment, a defence, through regulations, for airsoft skirmishing. The defence relates to “the acting out of military or law enforcement scenarios for the purposes of recreation” for which third party liability insurance is held.

The Association of British Airsoft (ABA) has put in place arrangements to allow retailers to check that individual purchasers are members of a genuine skirmishing club or site. Under these arrangements, new players must play at least 3 times in a period not less than 2 months before being offered membership; membership cards with a photograph and recognized format will be issued for production to retailers; a central database will be set up for retailers to cross-check a purchaser’s details; and a member’s entry on the database will be deleted if unused for 12 months.

Non-realistic imitation firearms and airsoft guns

We cannot offer views on the particular items which you sent nor can we interpret or enforce the law as this is a matter for the courts and police respectively.

Those who will not meet the requirements specified in the regulations will not be able to acquire realistic imitations but will still be able to buy non-realistic imitation firearms, as will those who wish to purchase paintball markers. The Act states that an imitation firearm is to be considered distinguishable from a real firearm if its size, shape or **principal colour is unrealistic** for a real firearm. Accordingly, to provide business with a degree of certainty about what can be traded in, the regulations specify that imitation firearms with a height less than 38mm and a length less than 70mm would be considered unrealistic. Additionally, imitation firearms which are transparent; **bright red; bright orange; bright yellow; bright green; bright pink; bright purple; and bright blue** are considered non-realistic colours.

Offence to sell an imitation to a person under 18

Imitation firearm" is defined in section 57(4) of the Firearms 1968 as "any thing which has the appearance of being a firearm whether or not it is capable of discharging any shot, bullet or other missile". It will ultimately be for the courts to decide whether any item falls within this definition but it will also apply to non-realistic imitations which nevertheless have "the appearance of being a firearm". This could include some children's toys although many toys will look so different from a firearm they might not be regarded as an imitation at all (for example, some of the more futuristic looking space guns). Where a toy is considered to be an imitation firearm (and where an item is considered an imitation firearm), the purchase will have to be made by a parent or other person aged over 18.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Batt
Offensive Weapons section