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Firearm Security: Notes for Guidance



Section 1 and 2 firearms

Introduction

[These notes on the safekeeping of firearms have been prepared by way of guidance to those concerned in the administration of firearms legislation, but may also be made available to the persons to whom advice is being offered. It is helpful for both the police and the gun owner to have a clear, common understanding of good security practice.

The notes summarise the main security considerations which will apply to most certificate holders. More detailed information and technical data can be found in the Firearms Security Handbook, which when complete will also include guidance on more specialised areas such as dealers premises, museums etc.]

1. The most recent figures for stolen firearms show a continuing broad trend downwards, and whilst this is encouraging, there is no room for complacency.
2. Unless exempted, anyone who wishes to possess a firearm needs to apply for and be granted a Firearm or Shotgun Certificate. Sections of the Firearms Rules 1998 deal with the safekeeping of firearms including shotguns. These Rules make it clear that:

'Firearms and shotguns to which this certificate relates must be stored securely at all times (except in certain circumstances) so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the guns by

unauthorised persons'

3. The Rules do not however prescribe the form of safekeeping or security. As with all aspects of crime prevention, **the police must look at the *individual* circumstances of each case and at the overall security arrangements which will be in place. The level of security should be proportionate to the risk and each case must be judged on its merits. Advice should be balanced and reasonable as well as comprehensive.**

4. The Home Office issues published Guidance to assist Chief Officers of Police in maintaining a measure of consistency in the matter of firearms legislation and this document is intended to expand on those general principles. It is purely *advisory*, as each officer must decide the appropriate level of security and advise the customer according **to the merits of each case.**

5. It is not the intention of the Government to reduce the number of firearms held by certificate holders. The misuse of firearms mainly involves those in unlawful possession of them. A firearm is like any other property which needs protecting from the burglar or thief.

6. There are many factors which will require consideration, which may include the following:

1. A risk assessment based on the levels of property crime in the area. This might be obtained from police officers working locally. These may be subject to sudden temporary changes and it is helpful to look at the longer-term trends of property crime in an area, which is a more important factor;
2. The remoteness or otherwise of the premises, and the potential response to calls for assistance, either by police or neighbours;
3. The manner in which the property is overlooked and/or illuminated. These are significant factors in deterring burglars;
4. The extent to which the property is occupied or left unoccupied;
5. The location of storage points within the property and where appropriate the distribution of firearms within each secure point;
6. The attractiveness of the type of firearms to criminals. For example, modern multi-shot handguns may be more attractive to criminals than shotguns, which would in turn be more attractive than rifles or older types of gun. Muzzle-loading firearms, whether original or reproduction, are not generally considered attractive to criminals;
7. The number of firearms held.
8. Whether it is generally known that firearms are stored on the premises.

7. Perhaps the most important time when security questions are raised is when applications are made for the grant of a Firearm or Shotgun Certificate. At such times the applicant will be seeking advice about the best security arrangements and this will provide a valuable opportunity to provide sensible, well reasoned advice in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. If there is any doubt about the adequacy of security the Chief Officer may take this into account before issuing a certificate.

8. Renewals or variations of Firearm Certificates, or the renewal of a Shotgun Certificate provide further opportunities to assess security and safety. **In practice there should be no need for significant change if the recommendations made at the time of the grant were accepted and there has been no subsequent change in circumstances.**

9. The shooting sports have one of the lowest incidents of accidental injuries of all sports in the UK. It is therefore important to bear in mind when called upon to give security advice that any careless or off the cuff remarks about the shooting community may be offensive to those who, because they already realise the importance of firearm security, are motivated in the first place to seek your advice. Remember that - particularly at renewals - the certificate holder may have considerable experience in the area of firearms and have considered the issue of security seriously.

10. Remember that any patronising, illogical or ill-considered comment may bring discredit upon the police force. You will experience a willingness to co-operate from the

shooting community, providing the advice you give is reasonable, realistic and commensurate with the risks involved.

11. Your advice should be a demonstration of the type of good quality customer care being pursued by the police service. An open minded, realistic and pragmatic approach when giving crime prevention advice to shooters will go a long way to breaking down any barriers of distrust.

General Information

12. This Guidance should be applied with a view to the *individual* circumstances and the type and location of the premises subject to recommendations. This summary relates to the situations relative to firearm or shotgun certificate holders.

13. It is important that the proposals in each case take into account the safety of the occupants of the premises; in particular, attention is drawn to the provisions of the Fire Safety Acts, building regulations and the Occupiers Liability Act.

14. Your attention is also drawn to the building regulations in respect of provisions for emergency escapes from buildings including dwellings. For security purposes in this document, no requirement can be made in respect of a window or other opening which has been provided as an emergency escape that will in any way prevent the immediate and unobstructed use of that escape route.

15. If there is reason to believe that there is a conflict between the need for security for firearms and any regulations appertaining to the safety of persons in that building, then advice must be sought from the agency responsible for the regulations.

16. Some situations and locations are such that these general principles cannot or do not provide the security commensurate with the risk. The security provisions in these cases *can be* appropriate even though they do not accord with this Guidance. Every case *must* be judged on its individual merits, with this document providing general guidelines rather than strict rules.

17. The term 'unauthorised access' has been held to include the constructive possession that can occur where persons other than the Certificate holder have access to the keys for security devices, as well as access gained by criminal entry to the premises etc. Thus any keys to any security device should be kept secure, with access limited to authorised persons. This is especially important if children are in the house.

18. Under most circumstances, it is preferable that firearms should be secured within the occupied structure of a dwelling. Separate, detached buildings, or those attached but having only external access eg outhouses, garages etc should not be used unless the levels of security warrant it. If used, these could also be protected by an intruder alarm linked to the household.

19. In some modern houses, thermal block is used for the inner skin of main walls. This does not provide as substantial an anchorage point for security devices as those that can divide integral garages from living areas, for example. (Integral garage means those built within the dwelling and providing internal door(s) to the other living areas). Whilst not usually a suitable location, if a garage is secured to the level of recommendations made later in this document then this option should be considered. It should be considered as an option after reviewing all other locations within the inhabited part of the premises.

20. If the certificate holder's dwelling is a mobile home or static caravan, a different set of security concepts should be adopted. Details will be found in the Security Handbook. These are primarily concerned with the anchorage of the structure. That structure's capability to store items securely may well require that an extra layer of security is need to 'target harden' the unit. It is unlikely that a gun room can satisfactorily be constructed within such a dwelling or unit of this type.

21. As with any other valuable articles, the security of firearms should be considered in layers:

- **The Outer Layer.** The protection of the surroundings etc which are necessary for particular situations or risks. Exterior lighting, approaches overlooked etc;
- **The Secondary Layer,** a protection of the surrounding structure (the building or part of a building) which contains the immediate or core layer for the firearms;

- **The Immediate or Core Area**, which will secure the firearms directly and allow access only by those who are authorised to have possession of those firearms.

22. In most circumstances, the immediate and secondary layers are likely to be all that need to be addressed. However, conditions which affect either the ability of the outer structure to provide a defensive level commensurate with the particular risks, or any constraints upon the occupier, (eg crime level, property style or type of construction, constraints in tenanted property etc) may require adjustments to either layer.

23. If the occupant can show that the house has been designed and built to the requirements of BS8220 (the 'secured by design' model, introduced in 1996) or has doors to BS PAS 24 and windows to BS7950, then those parts of the dwelling can be taken to have satisfactory security in respect of the secondary layer above.

24. It may also be helpful to think of security in terms of broad 'levels' to be applied according to the circumstances of each case. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to provide guidance on what might be considered proportionate in each case.

Level 1

25. The security of firearms, ammunition and shotguns within a dwelling can in most cases be achieved by the provision of a cabinet designed for this purposes. New cabinets should conform to the requirements of BS7558. Further information on the design of cabinets can be found in the Security Handbook. The cabinet should be fixed to the structure of the building and suitably located to frustrate or obstruct the points of attack or identification by persons visiting the premises. BS 7558 was introduced in 1992, **but many older cabinets will be built to perfectly satisfactory standards and, if satisfactory, need not be replaced.**

26. As an additional level of security, ammunition and easily removable component parts - such as rifle bolts etc - ought to be stored separately from the firearms they fit. This could be either by use of a detached storage container fitted elsewhere in the dwelling, or one built into or onto the firearms cabinet.

27. There is a need to consider other alternatives for unusual firearms such as puntguns, cannon etc. In these cases, such items may be secured in buildings other than the dwelling. Suitable securing points may be required where the situation or construction of such buildings make it necessary. Where possible any removable part that would render the gun inactive should be stored separately.

28. When only one rifle or shotgun is held and a low level of risk is involved, gun clamps or similar devices or arrangements may be adequate. Other considerations in that dwelling might be:

- a) Final exit doors of good construction secured with good quality locks and/or other types of deadlocking facilities;
- b) Suitable locks/securing devices on ground floor windows and French/patio windows;

29. In the cases of more modern houses, the above requirements will be met in properties with PVCu doors or specialist doors by a multi-locking system, gear or bar link operated, which is secured by a deadlock. These requirements will also be met in properties with PVCu or specialist windows by a similar style of internal mounted system, gear or bar link operated, secured by a keyed lock, either handle or independently mounted.

30. If you give advice to fit locks to PVCu doors and/or windows it must be stressed that the manufacturer/supplier should be consulted about which locks would be appropriate, as the fitting of non specified locks may cause damage to the article and invalidate the product warranty.

Level 2

31. Where the individual circumstances are such that additional considerations for security might be made (eg high crime location, building regularly unoccupied, substantial number of firearms on the premises, repeat victimisation etc), in addition to the provision of a suitable cabinet, gun room or safe, the following may be considered:

- a) The exit door locks should be to BS3621 or equivalent and any French

windows/patio doors should have an integral locking system or be provided with supplementary locks to frustrate forcible opening, together with anti-lift blocks if applicable.

b) Windows on the ground floor and those accessible from flat roofs etc should be fitted with an appropriate type and number of locks which are self-latching or active-key operated. These should ensure casement-to-frame locking along the length of the opening edge.

c) An audible intruder alarm to the appropriate standard protecting either the whole of the premises or those parts of the premises deemed necessary

d) Splitting the risk by dividing up the number of guns between several secure locations

32. For these purposes, a 'substantial' number of firearms should be measured with regard to the type of firearms, their potential danger if misused and their likely attractiveness to criminals. At the lower end the number might vary between six and ten, depending on the type of firearm concerned, whilst anything over ten would rarely, if ever, be lower than level 2. For these purposes, sound moderators, spare barrels, spare cylinders and component parts should not normally be considered as part of this total.

33. If the certificate holder provides a different form of security which equates to that provided above (such as providing a reinforced gun room or other area), this may also be accepted as suitable. The comments made in reference to PVCu and other specialist products are also applicable.

Level 3

34. If the risk is assessed as being greater than the previous level (for example by virtue of a high crime rate, certain high profile certificate holders, large numbers of firearms held etc), then the following should be considered as well as the previous level of security.

a) Dividing the risk, for example by the provision of separate cabinets, perhaps in different locations within the premises, to break down the number of firearms per enclosure;

b) Additional target hardening of the storage (cabinet with individual gun locks, or extending to a gun room);

c) Installation of an audible intruder alarm to protect the whole of the premises. If there is a particular risk attached to the property or its area, then a system with signalling should be sought. The provisions of the ACPO intruder alarm policy of 1995 should be considered if a signalling system is to be installed.

35. For these purposes, 'large numbers of firearms' may be taken as meaning more than twelve guns. For these purposes, sound moderators, spare barrels, spare cylinders and component parts should not normally be considered as part of this total.

Ammunition

36. As a matter of best practice, ammunition for section 1 firearms ought to be kept secure apart from the firearm. Although secure storage of shotgun cartridges is **not** a requirement of the Firearms Acts, it is sensible to recommend that these should be locked away for both security and safety, especially where there are children in the house.

37. Although ammunition is not generally a serious fire hazard, in advising on the location of any ammunition container, ensure that it is not in an area exposed to a risk of fire. It is also not advisable for an ammunition container to be located in the area of an escape route from a room where there is a fire risk (eg kitchen). If there is any doubt on the safety or method of intended storage, the Explosives Liaison Officer may be consulted. This is also recommended in the case where a private Certificate holder intends to keep reloading articles such as gunpowder, primers or large quantities of cartridges etc.

Siting and fixing of devices

38. Any firearm security cabinet etc should be sited out of view from people both inside and outside the building. Securing to suitable building walls within built-in furnishings, i.e. wardrobes, cupboards, lockers etc can prove effective. Rooms such as lofts and cellars for example, that are unlikely to be visited by casual visitors, are an option. However, when recommending such places, it is important to consider whether the environment is suitable. Extremes in temperature, dampness, condensation etc may militate against such use, as not only could it result in damage to the firearms and ammunition but particularly in damp areas, it may cause erosion of the fixings or the cabinet material, thus reducing its security.

39. In addition, the ease and convenience of access to such places is important. If this is difficult there may be a tendency for the certificate holder to delay putting his or her firearms away upon return to the dwelling. Police research has shown that a number of losses have involved owners not immediately securing their weapons and suffering their subsequent theft.

40. In advising on the location of any security cabinet, remember that most steel gun cabinets have a high weight-to-footprint ratio. The average floor loading for a suspended floor on timber joists is 56lbs. A 9-gun cabinet with a 24" x 12" (608 x 304 cm) footprint can be in the order of 126 lbs. which equates to more than a safe average suspended floor loading. Obviously, any fixing to a wall will reduce this loading. Joist ends are a more suitable fixing location than joist runs.

41. In a loft installation for a cabinet, care needs to be exercised. Not all lofts have joists calculated to include weight loading other than that of the ceiling below. It is not uncommon for joists in lofts to be 40% smaller in cross sections than joists carrying floors. Full use must therefore be made of the support from structural walls carrying such joists. If there is any doubt, the applicant/certificate holder should obtain proper structural advice.

42. Fixings for security devices form an important part of the overall resistance to attack. Fastening to timber studded walls should be avoided, unless some additional anchorage can be provided. Floor or roof joists (subject to the previous comments) are acceptable. Walls of brick, concrete or masonry are usually the best bonding materials. It is important that the fixing bolts chosen are correct for that material (eg: expanding bolts, chemical anchors, toggle bolts etc). With modern building materials, particularly breeze and thermal block walls, the materials are not particularly suited to normal fixing devices.

43. When cabinets are being fitted, consideration should be given to varying the method of fixing. For example, in buildings with only partition internal walls and modern insulation block lining or random stone walls, it can be perfectly acceptable to fix cabinets horizontally, as long as appropriate fixing devices are used.

44. This will also assist when fastening into suspended wooden flooring, as it spreads the load more evenly. In this case, coach screws of at least 3/8" (8mm) diameter and not less than 2.5" (75mm) long will provide a suitable anchorage. Such fixings must of course be made into joists and not simply to the floor boarding.

45. Another consideration should be the size and weight of the larger form of gun cabinet or commercial safe. Due to their very weight or size, fixing may be unnecessary in these cases, but they should be located in such a position that would further frustrate removal.

Consideration for certificate holders transporting firearms in vehicles

46. While carrying firearms in a vehicle, the following steps are considered to accord with the duty to ensure the safe custody of the firearms and/or ammunition.

47. Any guns should be hidden, preferably in the locked boot or other secured load carrying area of the vehicle where practicable. Vehicles used frequently for transporting firearms should ideally have an immobiliser and/or alarm fitted.

48. If the vehicle is left unattended for any reason, firearms should be concealed, preferably in the locked luggage compartment and (where practicable), an essential component such as the bolt or forend removed and kept in possession of the responsible person. Where possible any ammunition should be stored separately from the firearm and this too should be concealed from view. The vehicle should be locked, and any immobiliser or alarm should be set. If possible, the vehicle should be parked within the sight of the responsible person.

49. In the case of an estate, hatchback or similar vehicles, the following recommendations should be considered:

- The responsible person should ensure that the lid or cover of the load carrying area is in place and /or that the guns are so covered or concealed to prevent their identification;
- Whenever possible the guns and ammunition should not be stored together. Where the boot or load carrying area is the most practical place, ammunition should be secured in an appropriate container, ideally secured to the vehicle - if practicable;
- Wherever possible, the bolt, magazine or other vital operating part should be separated from the gun and either carried on the person or secured or hidden in the vehicle, or kept in a locked container, ideally secured to the vehicle if practicable;
- If firearms are regularly carried in such a vehicle, provision should be made for securing the firearms to the vehicle's structure. Eg security cases, cage, cable or clamp.

50. When firearms and ammunition are being carried on a journey which involves them being kept away from their usual secure storage, the responsible person should ensure that they are, as far as reasonably practicable, secure. Consideration when firearms are being taken to venues involving overnight or longer accommodation might include:

- Obtaining accommodation which provides secure facilities (many country hotels offer this service);
- Separating and retaining possession of integral parts of the firearm to prevent it being used, or;
- Using portable security devices, such as security cords.

Annex A - Conditions of Security

- Conditions of Security- Conditions of Security
Firearms Act, 1968, Amendment Acts 1988 & 1997

The Firearms Rules, 1998 state *"firearms or shotguns to which a certificate relates must be stored securely at all times so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the guns by unauthorised persons."*

A registered firearms dealer certificate is conditioned to require that *" Reasonable measures shall be taken to maintain the safekeeping of all firearms and ammunition dealt with or kept in the course of the registered firearms dealer's business."*

Auctioneers, carriers and warehousemen are required by the Firearms Amendment Act, 1988 to *" take reasonable precautions for the safe custody of the firearms and ammunition in his or his servants possession in the course of his business."*

Conditions on an Authority of the Secretary of State for the holding of weapons etc to which Section 5 of the 1968 Act applies, include *"that the prohibited weapons are stored at no place other than the company premises at [] under secure conditions as agreed with and satisfactory to the chief officer of [] police"*, and *"that the prohibited weapons are transported under secure conditions agreed with and satisfactory to the chief officer of [] police."*

One of the conditions for Home Office approved rifle and muzzle loading pistol clubs requires that *"the security arrangements for the storage of club firearms and/or ammunition are to the satisfaction of the chief officer of police for the area or areas in which the firearms and/or ammunition are stored."*

The requirements for a museum firearm licence include that: *"the Secretary of State shall not grant a licence unless, after consulting the chief officer of police for the area; he is satisfied that the arrangements for exhibiting and keeping firearms and ammunition in question are or will be such as not to endanger the public safety or the peace. A licence*

shall be subject to such conditions specified in it as the Secretary of State thinks necessary for securing safe custody of the firearms and ammunition in question."

Annex B - Security- general construction & standards

These specifications are an indication of the relative construction/fabrication of items that would provide the resistance sought in their given application. It is quite possible to produce an acceptable level using alternative strategies, materials or their application.

The test is whether the alternatives on balance provide resistance which can equate to that provided by the contained specification. The Standards quoted in this document should provide a base line for these. Certain of these standards provide testing measures for resistance or deterrence against which the overall prevention of the theft of the firearm(s) can be assessed. Summaries of the appropriate standards are found in Appendix E of the Firearm Security Handbook.

Certain recommendations in this section involve structural adaptation. You should be aware that there is a need to ensure that any recommendation made will not cause any problems in relation to load bearing of floors or walls that may cause damage. It is important that applicants are advised that professional advice should be sought before embarking on projects of this nature.

When proposing security for domestic and commercial premises, no requirements can be implemented that compromise the provisions for safe exiting from such premises, required in both the Building and Fire Safety controls.

The style of security required must be reasonable for each situation.

ILLUSTRATIONS (Annex C):

The illustrations provided with this document are not necessarily to scale, but are produced to give visual information on the items to which they relate.

Cabinets:

Cabinet which may be considered to be suitable for the security of the firearms, shotguns and ammunition should be expected to provide the resistance equal to:

A cabinet manufactured and fitted as certified to comply with BS7558:1992

Or

A cabinet fabricated to the following:

Sheet steel body of not less than 2 mm (14 swg), formed by either folding, continuous welding or a combination of these methods

When fabricating the body, the door case should be constructed to provide a continuous rest plate the length of the opening edge to prevent the through insertion of hacksaw blades to attack the lock bolts

The door frame may be formed by return bending of the body steel or the provision of a bar or angle frame, welded to the carcass with sufficient relief to the edges to provide for door locking and hanging. The frame should be designed so that the door, when closed, can resist attempts to force it inwards
(See Illus I)

Doors should be formed from the same material with either bent, folded or post formed edges, or the provision of a bracing frame of bar or angle steel, or ribs welded to the inside of the door to prevent the flexing or bending of the door when closed.

Doors hung on: (See Illus II)

Hinges internally fitted.

Hinges externally fitted, with either hinge bolts, anti-bar plates or interlocking formed door edge along the hanging edge of the door.

Swivel bars or rods with return fold anti-bar plate. The frame should be fabricated to prevent, so far as possible, the insertion of tools to cut the pins.

At least two steel pins of 12 mm dia or full width welded steel foot plate not less than door thickness - for slot in type doors.

Secured by:

Locks to BS3621 or 7 lever safe locks with not less than 38 mm x 9 mm cross section steel bolts.

Locks in the approved list under HELA Tech Doc 26/5.

Locks specified above should be mounted on steel brackets or pockets, providing strength equal to that of the door and welded to the door (*see Illus III*).

Padlocks not less than grade 4 of the draft CEN 12320:1997. Close shackle should be selected on open ring or plate staples.

Hinged full length doors for rifles/shotguns, should be fitted with two locking devices fitted at points to divide the locking edge into equal parts.

On slide in, fully braced doors, the number and location of the lock(s) will be determined by the degree of absence of flexing in the door.

Padlocks should have steel staples, hasp/staple, or padbars fabricated to equate to the protective strength of the lock.

Provision of at least 4 fixing holes to take not less than 10 mm diameter fastening devices. The holes to be spaced to provide maximum binding of cabinet to structure.

When ammunition or firing mechanisms are to be kept separate from the weapons, a smaller cabinet of similar construction or a separately lockable container, either as an extension of the cabinet, or internally fabricated, can be manufactured.

For key points in a typical firearms cabinets construction the composite illustration at Annex C may be of assistance

Safes

Commercially manufactured safes may be considered suitable for the securing of firearms. Even early models, if tight and in good condition can provide physical protection that would be above that expected on a cabinet constructed to BS7558. The following considerations should be applied as appropriate:

Safes weighing less than 20 cwt should be secured to the floor in accordance with the manufacturers instructions, or in the case of one already possessed, that from a manufacturer or safe engineer.

Safes have a considerable floor loading implication. Advice must be sought for any proposal to fit a safe on other than a solid ground floor.

To protect those safes with thinner plate backs, they must always be installed with the back against a solid wall or be built into a wall or recess to prevent attack at the rear.

Where the safe is secured by driven boltwork, a single key lock or dial lock (either combination or digital) is often provided. Unless there is some particular requirement, double locking would not be necessary.

Clamps :

Clamps which may be considered to be suitable for the security of a single firearm or shotgun should be:

Steel plate construction, not less than 2 mm (14 swg), all external joints to be seam welded or of bend construction.

Secured by a lock to BS3621; 7 lever safe locks with not less than 38 mm x

9 mm cross section steel bolts; a lock on the HELA Tech doc 26/95; security padlocks not less than grade 4 of the draft CEN 12320:1997.

Configured to enclose firearm action and trigger(s).

Provided with at least two fixing points to allow fixing devices not less than 10 mm diameter being used.

Fixed in such a location to frustrate attack on the fixings.

Information on other security provisions are contained in the Firearm Security Handbook

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