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1. Introduction

1.1 Scope of this guidance

Our books of guidance are the main reference material for people in the Department. All HMRC formal procedures and work systems are outlined in these books which give managers and staff the Department's rules and guidance and general advice on interpreting them.

The guidance is aimed at HMRC staff and should not be relied upon by importers in liability to obtain import licences and permits. It is divided into three parts C2.25A, C2.25B and C2.25C which give an overview of the requirements for imported firearms, detailed processing procedures and reference documents for further reading.

This book is for you if you are involved in the control of imported firearms and ammunition. It contains guidance on:

- the procedures for importing firearms and ammunition;
- the supporting documents required;
- and the control of traders who deal in firearms.

1.2 Release of information: Freedom of Information Act

In this book of guidance the information detailed in parts 1.14.3, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.3, 6.6.2 and 6.6.3 and C2.25B and C2.25C are exempt for release under the Freedom of Information Act and must not be released to the public. These have been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls. All other information contained in this guidance may be released on request.

1.3 Background

The illegal possession of firearms is a threat to society. Criminals and terrorists frequently use firearms diverted from legitimate channels.

Maintaining an effective control on the legitimate movement of firearms is essential in addition to prevention of the illicit trafficking in firearms.

Protection of society from the dangers posed by illicit firearms by enforcing the UK restriction on both private and commercial imports of firearms and ammunition, and the transfer controls applicable to intra-EU movements by ensuring import controls are adhered to and that Registered Firearms Dealers (RDF) are correctly controlled is essential.

The Government is committed to creating a safe, just and tolerant society and is taking a number of steps to address UK violent gun crime. HMRC and the Police are key to the successful delivery of this target.

1.4 Law

Imported firearms and ammunition are controlled by the following legislation:

- The Import of Goods (Control) Order 1954 (as amended), made under section 1 of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939, which prohibits the import of all goods into the UK except under the authority of a licence granted by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).
- The Schedule to the Open General Import Licence (OGIL) dated 4th December 1987 which requires that all firearms falling within Tariff Chapter 93 must be accompanied by a valid DTI Import Licence, EU Transfer Licence, UK Firearm/Shot Gun Certificate/Permit, as appropriate.
- The Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997. Domestic firearms law is different in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man where the possession and use of firearms is subject to separate legislation.
- Council Directive No. 91/477/EEC laying down procedures on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons which is implemented by the Firearms Acts (Amendment) Regulations 1992.

1.5 Object of controls

The object of firearms controls are to:

- ensure that the importer is entitled to import the firearm(s) concerned;
- ensure firearms are not diverted from the licit to illicit market; and
- protect society from the dangers posed by illegally imported weapons.

1.6 Basis of control

The system of control is based on:

- scrutiny/validation of DTI paper and electronic import licences and other required documents;
- physical examination of consignments;
- frontier and inland clearance anti-smuggling checks developed through local or centrally supplied intelligence; and
- inland controls at premises of Registered Firearms Dealers (RFDs) carried out by Firearms and Explosives Officers (FXOs).

1.7 Responsibility of Prohibitions and Restrictions Policy Group (P&R Policy Group)

P&R Policy Group is responsible for:

- formulating import policies and procedures for the administration of firearms controls;
- consulting with the Home Office, DTI and other Government agencies on whose behalf firearms controls are administered;
- obtaining relevant assurance and management information in relation to the work of FXOs; and
- issuing guidance to officers on the procedures to follow for imported firearms and ammunition.

The Prohibitions and Restrictions Policy Group are located at:

Room 69 Lower Ground

100, Parliament Street

City of Westminster

London SW1A 2BQ

Tel: 0207 147 0544

Fax: 0207 147 0131.

1.8 Responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

The DTI is responsible for issuing electronic and paper import licences to commercial importers of firearms and ammunition. Specific licences are issued for imports subject to a quantitative and/or type restriction. Open Individual licences (OILs) are issued for Section 1 and 2 firearms (and very rarely for Section 5 firearms) where there is no restriction as to the number of firearms that can be imported against the licence. CHIEF allows for the processing of licences whether they have been issued electronically or not.

You should address queries concerning details of particular import licences and confirmation of licensing requirements for particular firearms to the DTI at:

Import Licensing Branch

Queensway House

West Precinct

Billingham

Cleveland TS23 2NF

Tel: 01642 364 343/348

1.9 Responsibility of the Home Office

The Home Office is responsible for formulating and reflecting government policy in light of legislation on firearms controls. They also are responsible for the issue of authority to possess firearms and ammunition classified under Section 5 of the Firearms Acts. You should address queries concerning details of particular Section 5 authorities at:

Home Office

Public Order & Police Cooperation Unit

Firearms Section

5th Floor

Fry Building

2 Marsham Street

London SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0207 7035 1785

“Firearms Law – Guidance To The Police” has been placed on the Home Office internet site www.homeoffice.gov.uk >Police website >Operational Policing >Firearms >Firearms Law: Guidance to the Police 2002. It deals in detail with England, Wales and Scotland legislation and procedures on firearms.

1.10 Responsibility of the Regions

The responsibilities of the Regions are:

- to allocate sufficient resources to administer the controls on licit importations of firearms;
- to operate controls in such a way as to maximize the detection of irregularities; and
- to devise control procedures to detect illicit imports of firearms.

1.11 Responsibility of the Firearms and Explosives Officers (FXOs)

Each Region has its own Firearms and Explosives Officer (FXO). FXOs are responsible for a wide range of pro-active firearms control functions including developing awareness, expertise, intelligence and communication.

1.12 Role of Criminal Investigation

The role of Criminal Investigation: Customs ‘A’ is to:

- investigate all significant illicit importations of firearms into the UK;
- maintain and update a database of all RFDs who import or export firearms;

- liaise with FXOs, the Police, NCIS National Firearms Tracing Service and other law enforcement agencies to enhance control functions;
- receive immediate notification of any illicit firearms seizure and to give advice accordingly; and
- liaise with Intelligence regarding strategic and trend intelligence.

1.13 Enforcement Policy

The department has responsibility for:

Anti-smuggling checks

- carrying out selective, risk-based anti-smuggling checks on both intra-EU and third country means of transport, containers, passengers and their baggage, crew members and postal packages.

Regulatory checks

- operating routine regulatory checks on third country commercial importations as reflected in current CHIEF national and local profiles and on third country private imports of declared firearms.

Compliance checks

- making risk-based verification visits to Registered Firearms Dealers (RFDs) whose trade involves the movement of "Section 5" weapons within the EU, and
- undertaking risk assessment visits to RFDs ensuring prior liaison with the police.

1.14 Seizure, restoration and offence action

Detections of firearms where any appropriate period of detention (pending production of authorisation of import, etc) has expired are to be dealt with as follows:

1.14.1 Seizure

All detected illicit firearms are to be seized. Restoration is only to be offered when all the following conditions are met:

- the seized firearm(s) was declared; and
- the importer unwittingly failed to comply fully with the correct procedures or there are mitigating circumstances; and
- the appropriate approval (EU Transfer Document/Import Licence/police) has been obtained.

1.14.2 Restoration

Restoration is conditional upon the importer producing the relevant police firearm/shot gun certificate, police permit, visitor's firearm/shot gun permit or import licence. Small amounts of ammunition may be restored with the firearm(s)/shot gun(s). If an importer cannot obtain the relevant import licence or police authority, a request to re-export the item(s) may be allowed provided that the relevant export licence is produced. Restoration amounts should take account of the nature both of the error/irregularity and of the relevant restriction.

1.14.3 Offences

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

1.14.4 Appeals and complaints

Appeals are to be dealt with as detailed in accordance with normal procedures as well as complaints. Please refer to Notice 100A.

2. General principles

2.1 Explanation of law relating to firearms

A firearm is a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or missile can be discharged and includes:

- prohibited weapons;
- component parts of a lethal or prohibited weapon; and
- accessories designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by firing the weapon.

The Firearms Acts categorize firearms in three sections: Sections 1, 2 and 5 whereas the EU Weapons Directive categories weapons into four categories.

2.2 Section 1 firearms

Section 1 of the Firearms Act covers:

- bolt, lever, Winchester and Martini single action rifles;
- self loading rifles chambered for .22 rim-fire cartridges;
- pump-action or semi-automatic shot guns with a barrel length of not less than 24 inches (60 cms) and a magazine capacity of more than two rounds;
- guns designed to be loaded at the muzzle end of the barrel or chamber with a loose charge and a separate ball or other missile (e.g. reproduction black powder muskets, pistols and revolvers);
- air and compressed carbon dioxide (CO₂) powered rifles designed to be fired from the shoulder with a kinetic energy of more than 12 foot pounds (16.3 joules); and flares incorporating a barrel, other than pen launchers.

2.3 Section 2 firearms

Section 2 of the Firearms Acts covers:

- double and single barrelled shot guns fitted with a barrel not less than 24 inches (60 cms); and
- semi-automatic or pump action shotguns with a magazine capacity of no more than two cartridges.

2.4 Section 5 firearms

Section 5 of the Firearms Act covers:

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- most hand guns (but not those loaded at the muzzle end of the barrel or chamber);
- air and carbon dioxide (CO₂) powered hand guns which on discharge from the muzzle have a kinetic energy in excess of 6 foot pounds (8.15 joules);
- stun-guns (electric shock weapons);
- self-defence sprays;
- pump-action or semi-automatic shotguns with a barrel length of less than 24 inches (61 cms) or, excluding any detachable, folding, retractable or other moveable butt-stock, is less than 40 inches (102 cms) in length overall;
- assault rifles;
- sub-machine guns;
- machine guns;
- ammunition designed to explode or expand on impact; and
- rocket launchers and mortars.

2.5 Documents required for imported firearms

The import of firearms and ammunition into the UK is controlled by the following documents depending on the circumstances involved:

- UK Firearm/Shot Gun Certificate or Permit to possess firearms under Sections 1 and 2 issued by the UK Police force for the area in which the importer lives.
- Authority to purchase or acquire firearms and ammunition issued by the UK Police force for the area in which the importer lives as an extension to their Firearm Certificate.
- A DTI document referring to an electronic Open Individual Import Licence (OILs) or Specific Import Licence for commercial imports of firearms and ammunition from non-EU countries.
- Deactivation Certificate for deactivated firearms issued by the London or Birmingham Proof House.
- Authority to possess weapons under Section 5 issued by the Home Office.
- British Visitor's Permit (BVP) for Section 1, 2 and 5 firearms, as the case may be, and ammunition issued by the Police for the area in which the importer's UK sponsor lives.

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- European Firearms Pass (EFP) to accompany all movements of firearms between Member States by private individuals issued by the relevant authority in the importer's Member State. For UK residents the issuing authority is their local Police force.
- European Transfer Licence for consignments of firearms and ammunition issued in the Member State from where the firearms are being transferred.
- Paper DTI Specific Import Licence for imports of Section 5 firearms from EU countries.
- Specific Import Licence for a 'one-off' commercial import of Section 1 and 2 firearms.
- Specific Import Licence for commercial imports from EU Member States that have not fully implemented the EU Weapons Directive.

Importers requesting issue of any of the above documents should be referred to the DTI, Home Office or Police as appropriate.

3. Import of firearms from outside the EU

3.1 Scope of firearms controls

The controls apply to all firearms covered by Sections 1, 2 and 5 of the Firearms Acts 1968-97.

3.2 Documents required for an accompanied import of a firearm from a non-EU country by UK residents.

3.2.1 Private individuals

Private individuals require one of the following documents:

- UK Firearm Certificate, or
- Shot Gun Certificate.

In the case of a newly acquired firearm the importer must have entered details on the Certificate and, in the case of a firearm, the Certificate must be pre-authenticated by the Police giving prior authority to acquire or purchase the type of firearm being imported. The Police Firearms Licensing Manager for the importer's UK address must be notified of all importations.

3.2.2 Section 5 authority

Home Office authority to possess Section 5 weapons is not normally issued to private individuals. However, no Section 5 authority is required where the person is authorized by their Firearm Certificate to have a prohibited firearm where it is to be used in animal welfare, starting races at athletic meetings, or is of historic interest.

3.3 Documents required for import of firearms from a non-EU country by RFDs.

3.3.1 Commercial importations

RFDs importing firearms from outside the EU to free circulation, temporary importation relief regime, Customs warehousing or under Inward Processing Relief require the following licences **at the time of importation**:

- (a) Section 1 and 2 firearms:
 - an Open Individual Import Licence, or
 - a Specific Import Licence.
- (b) Section 5 firearms:
 - a Specific Import Licence.

3.3.2 DTI import licences

Since 14 April 2003 most licences issued by the DTI have been issued electronically. Paper licences issued before that date are still valid. CHIEF allows for the processing of licences whether they have been issued electronically or not.

3.3.3 Trader Unique Reference Number (TURN)

For licences covering firearms, their component parts and anti-personnel mines, importers are required to supply their Trader's Unique Reference Number (TURN) as part of the application process to DTI, ILB. Importers without a TURN or Pseudo TURN must apply to HMRC Swansea TURN Team at the following address to obtain a TURN before applying for a National Restriction DTI import licence.

HM Revenue and Customs

TURN Team

Customs House

Pier Head

Kings Road

Swansea

Wales

SA31 1BT

Phone: 01792 634 005/ 006/ 007

Fax: 01792 634 022

Email: turn@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk

3.4 Temporary imports of firearms by non-EU residents

Private individuals temporarily importing firearms from outside the EU require the following:

- a British Visitor's firearms Permit (BVP); or
- a British Visitor's shot gun Permit (BVP)

issued by a UK police firearms Licensing authority.

4. Movement of firearms between EU Member States

4.1 Scope of EU firearms controls

The controls apply to all firearms covered by Sections 1, 2 and 5 of the Firearms Acts 1968-97.

Importers holding the correct documents are not required to declare the firearms to HMRC. However, importers must produce the documents when requested by a Customs or Police Officer.

4.2 Documents required for import of firearms from another EU Member State by private individuals

Private individuals importing firearms from another EU Member State require the following documents:

4.2.1 UK residents returning from another Member State.

- UK European Firearms Pass (EFP); and
- UK Firearms/Shot Gun Certificate issued by the Police for the area in which the importer lives.

4.2.2 UK residents returning with a firearm purchased in another Member State or being sent to them by mail order.

- Firearms/Shot Gun Certificate issued by the Police for the area in which the importer lives; and
- Transfer Licence issued in the Member State of purchase.

Firearms may be imported against police authority to acquire or purchase noted in the importer's Firearm Certificate.

4.2.3 EU residents temporarily importing a firearm:

- European Firearms Pass (EFP) issued in the importer's Member State of residence; and
- British Visitor's Permit (BVP).

When a BVP is applied for details will be entered on the visitor's EFP at the time the BVP is granted by the police.

4.3 Documents required for import of firearms from another EU Member State by RFDs.

RFDs importing firearms from another EU Member State require the following documents:

Section 1 and 2 firearms:

- EU Transfer Licence (or document referring to it) issued in the Member State of despatch.

Section 5 firearms

- EU Transfer Licence (or document referring to it) issued in the Member State of dispatch; and
- a Specific Import Licence issued by the DTI.

5. EU Transfer licences.

The following should be shown on all EU transfer licences.

1. The names and addresses of the person selling or disposing of the firearm and of the person purchasing or acquiring it or, where appropriate, of the owner.
2. The address to which the firearm is to be consigned or transported.
3. The number of firearms to be consigned or transported.
4. The particulars enabling the firearm to be identified and also an indication that the firearm has undergone a check in accordance with the Convention of 1 July 1969 on the Reciprocal Recognition of Proof marks on Small Arms.
5. The means of transfer.
6. The date of departure and the estimated date of arrival.

Note:

- Where a transfer takes place between dealers then items 5 and 6 need not be supplied.
- The licence must accompany the firearm until it reaches its destination. It must be produced when so required by the authorities of Member States.
- Each Member state may grant dealers the right to effect transfers of firearms from its territory to a dealer established in another Member State without prior authorization (EU Transfer Licence), but it will issue an authorization valid for no more than three years, which may at any time be suspended or cancelled by reasonable decision. A document referring to that authorization must accompany the firearm until it reaches its destination, it must be produced whenever so required by the authorities of the Member State.
- Not later than the time of transfer, the dealer must communicate to the authorities of the Member State (in the UK the Home Office by means of a fax copy of the transfer authorisation) from which the transfer is to be effected all the particulars (numbers 1 – 4 minimum) listed above.
- These conditions also apply to transfers following a mail order sale.

6. Special situations

6.1 National Aviation Security Programme

At UK airports HMRC and airport police exercise control over the handling of firearms and ammunition. Aerodrome managers and aircraft operators are responsible for complying with the measures for the carriage of firearms set out in Section 16 of the National Aviation Security Programme (NASP) which is provided by TRANSEC and held by the Airport Security Managers. Any local Protocols must first be agreed with the Senior Business Manager responsible for HMRC firearms import/export controls and procedures.

6.2 Firearms carried by airline security personnel in foreign registered aircraft

6.2.1 General

HMRC and the police exercise control over firearms and ammunition on board aircraft entering the UK. Captains of aircraft are required by HMRC to make a declaration about firearms on board their aircraft and either secure the weapons on board or give them into the custody of police or HMRC while the aircraft is on the ground in the UK.

6.2.2 Sky marshals

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.2.3 Aircraft Commanders

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.2.4 Aircraft operators

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.3 Firearms carried by UK Aircraft Protection Officers (APOs) in UK Registered Aircraft

Firearms carried by APOs are exempt from the relevant provisions of the Air Navigation Order 2000 and from the Air Navigation (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 2002 by virtue of an exemption issue by the CAA. The exemption applies to all United Kingdom registered aircraft, their operators and commanders and any constable acting in the course of their duties as an APO, to the extent necessary to enable any such constable to carry arms and ammunition for the protection of persons on board an aircraft. The exportation and importation of service issued firearms and ammunition are covered by a DTI Open Individual (Police) Export and Import Licence.

Some information in this area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.4 Firearms carried by UK warrant carrying police officers in UK Registered Aircraft

UK police officers escorting members of the Royal Family, Government Ministers and other persons meriting personal protection, are authorised to convey firearms, ammunition and CS spray on UK registered aircraft, under the terms of exemptions from the Air Navigation Order 2000 and the Air Navigation (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1994, issued by the CAA. In all cases, police officers carrying firearms, ammunition and CS spray are, in addition to informing the aircraft operator concerned, must advise the designated office within HMRC responsible for firearms controls, the aerodrome manager and the local police authority at the airport of their presence.

The exportation and importation of service issued firearms and ammunition are covered by a DTI Open Individual (Police) Export and Import Licence.

Some information on this area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.5 Firearms carried by French Customs/Police in the Channel Tunnel zones

The Treaty and Protocol between the United Kingdom and France regarding the Channel Tunnel border controls provide for French officers to carry service weapons through the British sector of the Channel Tunnel and within the control zones at Ashford, Cheriton and at Waterloo International Station. Uniformed officers of the French Customs and Direction Centrale de la Police aux frontières of the French National Police are permitted to carry only their service issue hand gun and 12 rounds of ammunition. The French Customs and Police are not permitted to carry their firearms outside the control zones.

6.6 Firearms carried by EU law enforcement surveillance officers

6.6.1 The Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 and Article 40 of the Schengen Convention

EU law enforcement officers (police officer or customs officer) keeping a person under surveillance in their own country can act in an observer or advisory capacity should the person under surveillance cross the border into another State. EU surveillance officers are able to travel armed with their service issue firearm by sea or rail to the United Kingdom, but not by air.

6.6.2 Pre-planned surveillance

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.6.3 Urgent surveillance

This area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

6.7 Firearms carried by diplomats

There are no waivers for diplomats or foreign dignitaries. Imports of firearms by such persons are subject to normal import controls and must be accompanied by the relevant documents.

6.8 Maritime Security

The TRANSEC (Department for Transport's Maritime Security and Contingences Directorate) Circular No. 2/02 sets out guidance for harbour authorities and operators for dealing with legally held firearms carried by foot passengers through ports or in vehicles. Whilst all non EU imports must be declared to Customs, firearms movements covered by the EU Weapons Directive (Council Directive 91/477/EEC) need only be produced to a Customs or Police officer at an internal frontier if the person in possession of the firearms is asked to do so.

However, as port operators etc will not necessarily know whether an EU movement is lawful within the terms of the Weapons Directive, subject to any local protocols made with HMRC, those who encounter or have knowledge of an inbound movement of a firearm must inform HMRC of that movement to enable risk based checks on the lawfulness of the movement to be carried out.

6.9 Importations by Government Departments

Detailed procedures for imports made by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Armed Forces and Government organisations are contained in C2-29A (UK Govt. importations).

Re-imported small arms originally supplied by the army to a Government Department via the Quartermaster-General are to be entered to CPC 61 22 01.

Importation of non-service weapons acquired as operational memorabilia by UK Military Units are controlled and may be permitted subject to controls set out in C2.25B.

6.10 Personal imports by members of HM Armed Forces

There is no concession allowing members of the Armed Forces to import firearms and ammunition as souvenirs or war memorabilia. Non-service weapons acquired in operational theatre in circumstances permitted by the MoD imported by members of the Armed Forces are subject to normal import controls. Most firearms will be prohibited Section 5 weapons for which the importer will not be granted a Home Office authority. Such weapons therefore must be deactivated and certified by the London or Birmingham Proof House before being released out of HMRC control.

6.11 Importations by Visiting Forces

X-44 (Visiting forces) gives details of the procedures to be followed for importations by Visiting Forces and NATO.

6.12 Firearms on board vessels

6.12.1 UN Convention

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides for the right of innocent passage so long as it is not prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal State. The UK treatment of firearms held on board ships depends on whether they are a commercial vessel or pleasure craft, UK or foreign registered, whether the firearms are to be landed and the perceived threat such firearms represent in the circumstances they are held on board a ship.

Historically it has been maritime practice to keep firearms on board, although the use of firearms for personal protection or protection of a ship is strongly discouraged by the Department for Transport for UK registered vessels.

6.12.2 Commercial vessels

For control purposes when a commercial vessel, as opposed to a pleasure craft, arrives in the UK from a foreign country (non UK) the Master declares on form C 94 (IMO FAL form 1 General Declaration), C95 (IMO FAL form 3 Ship's Stores Declaration) or C96 (IMO FAL form 4 Crew's Effects Declaration), as appropriate, whether any firearms are carried on board. In the case of Section 1 and 2 firearms held as part of the ship's equipment, the vessel need not generally be boarded for firearms control purposes alone. It being accepted that the firearms should and are secured in the Master's safe, ship's gun cabinet or armoury and will remain so whilst the vessel is in UK waters.

Foreign registered vessels carrying Section 5 weapons held under the personal responsibility of the Master are to be boarded and, provided none of the weapons are stun guns (electric shock devices) and are proportionate to the vessel's perceived needs, the weapons maybe allowed to remain on board in secured storage, under HMRC seal, if deemed necessary.

UK registered commercial vessels and pleasure craft must hold Section 5 authority to possess prohibited Section 5 weapons if they enter UK waters.

6.12.3 Pleasure craft

Foreign registered pleasure craft temporarily visiting UK waters having arrived directly from a non EU port must declare any firearms held on board on form C1331. Although vessels arriving directly from a EU port are not required to complete form C1331 they must report any firearms held on board. In the case of foreign registered vessels provided any firearms held on board are lawfully owned abroad they may remain on board, under HMRC seal in secured conditions, e.g. metal gun cabinet lockable and bolted to the fabric of the vessel. The vessel must have a 24 hour security watch, its contents not left unsupervised and boarders challenged. If these conditions are or cannot be met the firearms are to be detained and removed into safe custody, namely a Queens Warehouse(QW), local police station or firearms dealer or other suitable secure armoury. Any charges arising out of such temporary storage and transportation should be billed to the person in charge of the vessel. The firearms are only to be returned to the vessel when it is commencing a non-UK voyage and on condition that should the vessel call at any UK port, report of the firearms must be made again to Customs.

6.12.4 Extended stays

Where a temporarily imported foreign registered commercial vessel or pleasure craft is authorised to remain in UK waters for a purpose or period longer than originally intended or declared, the firearms are to be removed into HMRC custody for safekeeping under detention procedures.

6.13 Antique firearms

Firearms more than one hundred years old are treated as antique at importation and may be imported without a DTI import licence or valid Firearm/Shot Gun Certificate. However, the word “antique” is not defined in domestic firearms law and it is for the applicable chief officer of police to consider each case on its merits, taking account of factors such as whether the gun is chambered for an obsolete cartridge. You should notify the Firearms Licensing Manager for the importer’s UK address of any imported firearms over 100 years old where you have any doubts that the firearm is being imported for any purpose other than being held as a curiosity or ornament.

6.14 Deactivated firearms

Deactivated firearms which are accompanied by a valid UK deactivation certificate and bear a mark from the London or Birmingham Proof House may be imported without a UK Firearm/Shot Gun Certificate or a DTI import licence, as appropriate.

6.15 Imitation and replica firearms

6.15.1 Readily convertible

The Firearms Act 1982 established the criteria for determining whether an imitation or replica firearm is readily convertible (to fire a shot bullet or missile). A firearm is regarded as “readily convertible” if:

- it can be converted or adapted without any special skill on the part of the person converting it, and
- the work involved does not require equipment or tools other than those in common use by persons carrying out works of construction or maintenance in their own homes.

Many of the European specification imitation firearms offer much greater potential for ready conversion into firearms and are available from Europe by internet/mail order or direct purchase.

6.15.2 UK Specification Imitation Blank Firearms

Imitation and replica firearms designed and chambered to fire blank ammunition without a projectile have been legitimately available for sale in the UK without any requirement for firearm certification for many years. Typically such firearms will be realistic in appearance but constructed of base metals and alloys. The hot gases produced by firing a blank cartridge in the chamber would typically be vented through an aperture close to the chamber and set at an acute angle to the axis of the bore of the barrel. The barrel would usually be fully blocked. This configuration for a UK marketed blank firing replica is arrived at in order to comply with the Firearms Act 1982 which established the criteria for determining whether an imitation firearm is readily convertible (to fire a shot bullet or missile).

6.15.3 European Specification Imitation Firearms

Blank firing imitation or replica firearms marketed and sold overseas, particularly in Europe, and not intended for the UK market are generally not manufactured to comply with the provisions of the UK Firearms Act 1982 for the following reasons:

- (a) the barrel is threaded to accept a muzzle attachment designed to launch a mini-flare projectile. Such muzzle attachments resemble a metal cup threaded at the base to attach to the muzzle of the replica and may be considered to constitute a barrel. In this way these mini-flare compatible blank firing pistols would be considered to be “firearms” under the definition provided by Section 57 of the Firearms Act 1968. Such firearms designed as signalling apparatus would be controlled under section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 and are subject to Firearm Certification.
- (b) the mini-flare attachment described above uses hot gases created by the discharge of a blank cartridge in the chamber to launch a flare. Imitations which are designed to be compatible with these flare launchers invariably vent forwards down the axis of the bore. The bore may have a partial obstruction but this is still designed to allow hot gasses to vent past it. Forward venting imitation firearms may be considered to be “readily convertible” to discharge a shot bullet or missile by either completely removing the partial obstruction in the barrel or by placing a projectile forward of the blockage. In some instances “dust” shot may even be fired past any obstruction without modification. Subject to examination by an accredited expert, such forward venting imitations may be deemed to satisfy the definition of a “Firearm” under Section 57 of the Firearms Act 1968, and in the case of a firearm with a barrel length less than 30cm or an overall length less than 60cm, this would establish such a firearm within the prohibition under Section 5(1)(aba) of the Firearms Act 1968 as amended by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997.

- (c) forward venting, blank firing, imitation firearms are designed to be compatible with CS gas cartridges. These cartridges are freely available in some European countries and are particularly common in 8 & 9mm. CS cartridges will chamber and fire in just about any imitation with that chamber dimension (including UK spec. blank firers). However, certain European manufactured imitations are specifically designed to be compatible (normally forward venting, some with a nozzle or mesh in the bore). Any weapon of whatever description designed or adapted for the discharge of any noxious liquid, gas or other thing is classified as a prohibited weapon in the UK under section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968 - 1997. Any ammunition containing, designed or adapted to contain, any such noxious thing is classified as prohibited in the UK under Section 5(1)(c) of the Firearms Act.

Some information on this area of the guidance has been withheld because disclosure would prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

7. Safe handling procedures

7.1 General rules

When dealing with firearms it is essential that you always treat firearms as if they are loaded and follow the established safety procedures.

7.2 Weapon safe carrying bag

The Weapon Safe Carrying Bag (WSCB) is designed for the safe carriage of semi-automatic pistols, revolvers, sub-machine guns, shot guns and bolt action or lever action rifles using standard ball ammunition. Bullet resistant ceramic plates are very resilient to degradation and need only be considered for replacement if they exhibit cracking or disintegration.

7.3 Making safe detected firearms

You should arrange for firearms to be made safe at the earliest opportunity. Firearms must only be made safe by an officer trained to do so or a suitably trained police officer or member of the armed forces.

7.4 Storage of firearms and ammunition

You should store firearms and ammunition in accordance with the following procedures:

- store firearms initially at the office of detection and later at the Queen's Warehouse (QW);
- keep firearms and ammunition separately in two gun cabinets;
- keep a register showing dates of receipt and dates the firearms are sent to the QW;
- confirm with the QW that the firearms have arrived;

The QW should:

- have an alarmed store-room for firearms, with two gun cabinets or cages and a central register showing the number of firearms and ammunition held;
- nominate one officer who has completed the firearms safe-handling course for key-holding and register keeping duties; and
- keep a register of firearms and ammunition in sequential order and allocate each item a reference number.

Unaccompanied officers must not be allowed into the store.

Local police Crime Prevention officers may be able to give additional advice on the best measures required to taken.

8. Entry procedures

8.1 Entry

All imports of firearms and ammunition must be accompanied by the relevant documents. Where an electronic licence has been issued different licence status codes will need to be used to reflect this, and the licence will be subject to additional validation and processing by HMRC electronic import/export declaration data capture and processing system CHIEF.

8.2 Action in Entry Processing Units (EPUs)

Detailed CHIEF EPU procedures are outlined in C2-25B which has been withheld because disclosure would be prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

8.3 Imports by private individuals

Import procedures for firearms and ammunition imported by private individuals where the person making the import can present their UK domestic authority (UK Firearm or Shot Gun Certificate or UK police issued Firearms/Shot gun Visitor's Permit) are detailed in C2-25B which has been withheld because disclosure would be prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.

8.4 Postal and Merchandise in Baggage (MiB) imports

The procedures for dealing with electronic licences for postal and MiB imports which require completion of a SAD (C88) import declaration are the same as those for other imports entered on CHIEF. However, postal imports below £2,000 and eligible MiB imports below £600, that are not subject to Customs Procedures with Economic Impact (CPEI) controls, do not require a SAD (C88) import entry. There are alternative arrangements in place to validate and decrement the electronic licence details on CHIEF. This procedure requires close liaison between DTI, ILB and HMRC. Detailed procedures for processing Postal imports of firearms and ammunition are covered in C2-25B which has been withheld because disclosure would be prejudice operational procedures and assist in the avoidance of operational controls.