

Don't take your guns to town

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

Is it real or fake?
That's a question Halton Regional Police officers can't answer when they're looking down the barrel of a gun - if they take the time to find out, they could be killed.

Halton Regional Police officers are finding they can't tell the difference between real and fake guns which nowadays, are replicas of the real thing, said Sergeant Carey Smith, media relations officer with the police service.

"We're really concerned about the large number of imitation handguns being used to threaten other people," he said. "The toys look so realistic, the officers can't tell from a distance whether they are real, or fake."

Sergeant Smith showed by example how difficult it is to differentiate between the real thing and a toy or pellet gun. He placed five guns on a table, four were imitation and one was a police issued Smith and Weston revolver, and asked passers-by to quickly choose which was the real gun.

Out of five people, no one could quickly identify the real revolver.

Picking up one of the toy replica semi-automatic guns he said "if someone pointed this at me, I'd shoot them."

"Even at close inspection, the guns look real. They feel real. You can't tell whether its real or not until it's fired and by that time, it could be too late," he said.

"Someday, somebody is going

to get shot because all we see is a gun, not whether it's real or not," he said.

In Halton Hills, the most weapon offence charges are laid against people carelessly using pellet guns.

"The majority of our weapon offences involve pellet guns," said Detective Sergeant Keith Woudstra. "Mostly its just kids shooting at each other."

That happened in January of this year when a Georgetown boy was held in a full nelson by three youths while another pointed a pellet gun to his face and released the trigger six times. The gun was empty but the terrified boy didn't know that until the trigger was pulled.

Police later charged a 14-year-old girl with pointing a firearm and assault with a weapon.

In February this year, a boy who was just playing war games had the police service's Tactical Rescue Unit team after him and the roads around his home closed after a passing motorist saw him point and aim a rifle at a passing truck. The area at Steeles Avenue and 9th Line was blockaded for almost three hours for public safety before police determined the young offender was using an inoperable toy rifle. He was cautioned by police.

Police say an Acton boy could have been shot in December 1990 when an officer saw him hiding between a home and garage with a handgun in the waist of his pants. Fortunately, before anyone drew a gun, the suspect was apprehended and was found to have a loaded .177 calibre pellet gun.

He was charged with carrying a concealed weapon.

These occurrences contributed to the seven offensive weapons charges that were laid against residents in Halton Hills during the first six months of this year.

Last year, 17 offenders were given offensive weapons charges in Halton Hills.

In all of Halton, 115 offensive weapon charges were laid, an increase of six over the previous year.

Though pellet guns and toy gun replicas can't be considered firearms unless they are capable of discharging a shot capable of causing bodily injury or death, they are considered a weapon-if they're "used or intended for use in causing death or injury to persons whether designed for such purpose or not," or if they're "used or intended for use for the purpose of threatening or intimidating any person," states the Criminal Code of Canada.

"Under the Criminal Code, a fake gun can come under the same definition as a real gun," said Sergeant Smith who finds it strange that a toy gun can be purchased in many stores for as little as \$25.

For now, the police service is just making a lot of noise about their discontent with the similarity between real and toy guns, said Sergeant Smith, who hopes someday, legislation will be put in place to make toy gun manufacturers make distinguishable changes in their product for the safety of both police officers and toy gun owners.



Sergeant Carey Smith, media relations officer with the Halton Regional Police service dropped by the Herald Wednesday to ask employees which of the above five guns was real. Almost no one could immediately pick out Sergeant Smith's Smith and Wesson revolver (the middle gun on the right). He said toy guns are becoming a big problem for police officers who can't tell the difference between the real thing and the fake. (Herald photo)

FAC applicants facing stricter scrutiny

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT
The Herald

More and more, people are applying for Firearm Acquisition Certificates (FAC) but Halton Regional Police Firearms Registration Officer, Sherrie McAdam, says she's shooting down applicants by the volley.

"Refusals are up 220 per cent over last year," said Ms. McAdam from her Oakville office at Halton Regional Police headquarters.

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, she has the right to refuse any person's FAC application if she receives any negative information about the applicant that leads her to believe he (or she) could jeopardize the public's safety with a firearm. And she does.

"I really worry about the repercussions of my decisions," she admitted. "I go with my gut feeling quite a lot. If it doesn't feel right to me, I dig in their records a little further and a lot of times I come up right."

Her "gut feelings" must be right for in the three years she's been a Firearms Registration Officer with the police service, she has never issued a firearm to an individual who used that firearm in a crime.

"I'm very proud of that track record because it's a point of con-

cern," she said. When processing an application, she has the right to all police files, psychiatric files and other personal information of the applicant.

If she finds out the applicant has a criminal record, is mentally unstable or has a history of violence, she'll often deny the application.

These issues are addressed on the FAC itself. Applicants are required to submit a yes or no answer to questions such as: Have you ... been convicted of an offence in which violence against another person was used, threatened or attempted? Have you ... been treated for a mental disorder associated with violence, threatened or attempted violence?

The FAC is the certificate a person needs to purchase a non-restricted firearm, explained Ms. McAdam. "When you receive the certificate, you can purchase a non-restricted rifle or shotgun the same day."

From January to June of this year, she's received 689 FAC applications which is 89 applications more than last year's total for the same time period.

If a person wants to legally own a restricted firearm, one that can be fired with one hand, or has a barrel length less than 470 mm

and is capable of discharging ammunition in a semi-automatic manner or is less than 600 mm in length total, they must apply for an FAC and a permit.

A restricted weapon user must have a permit to carry his weapon out of his home or another place.

Up until June of this year, Ms. McAdam has had 277 applications for restricted weapon FAC's and permits, down 22 from last year's figure in the same time period.

Weapon offence statistics from the police service's records bureau prove that Halton Region, especially Halton Hills, has few criminal incidences involving restricted firearms. Only one person in Halton Hills was charged with a restricted weapon offence between January and May of this year. Last year, three people got in trouble with restricted weapons.

In all of Halton, from January to May, five people were charged with a restricted weapon offence while last year's total for Halton was 12.

Ms. McAdam said the statistics are low due to, in part, the "tight reins" the Halton Regional Police Service has on issuing gun permits and FAC's.

"We're strict in this region," she said. "I personally meet

every person who comes into this office to apply for an FAC - that's a major part of the control."

She's hoping Halton will be able to have even tighter reins on gun regulations if the federal government passes new gun legislation that has just been given second reading in the House of Commons.

She said she supports the revised rules that, if passed, would

mean people would have to wait 28 days to purchase a firearm after receiving their FAC certificate, would have to pay more for the FAC application (now \$10) and be required to take safety courses before they could purchase a firearm.

Anyone who has any questions on FAC's or firearm registration, can call Ms. McAdam at 878-5511, extension 538.

PHOTO SPECIAL

FREE
2nd Set of Prints
With 1 Hour Service

1 HOUR, SAME DAY, NEXT DAY SERVICE

Passport Photos in 3 Min. WE RENT VIDEO CAMERAS

CRAIG'S PHOTO
NORMANDY PLAZA
Next to Kentucky Fried Chicken 877-5945

JAKE'S AUTO CLEAN

877-3802

• Steam Cleaning • Fire Retardant
• Interior Shampoo • Engine Shampoo
• Under Car Oiling • Perma Sheen
• Scotch Guard • Paint Touch-Up

DON'T FORGET OUR ADDRESS CHANGE!

265 GUELPH ST. SINCLAIR PLACE
Next to Belamy's GEORGETOWN

target food stores
OPEN 24 HRS.
7 DAYS A WEEK
51 GUELPH ST., GEORGETOWN

FLYERS

Watch for these MONEY-SAVING flyers inside this edition of THE HERALD

CANADIAN TIRE
PARTIAL DISTRIBUTION

GEORGETOWN FOOD MARKET
PARTIAL DISTRIBUTION

If you did not receive your flyer please call our circulation department, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.