Halton Regional Police cadet Geoff Ball holds a realistic-looking toy Beretta handgun (left), as well as a similar-looking police issue Smith & Wesson MP40 handgun.

Photo by Graham Paine
Metroland West Media Group

Replica gun use on the rise: Police

By KATHY YANCHUS
Metroland Media Group

When a contractor walked by an open apartment door in a downtown Milton building recently and spotted a gun, he immediately notified Halton Regional Police.

When officers arrived, the door was still ajar, the gun clearly visible atop a table. Police identified themselves and when no one responded, they entered the apartment with guns drawn.

As it turned out, the occupant wasn't in the apartment, and the gun was fake.

But in those critical seconds as they made the decision to enter the unit, officers knew nothing of what awaited them inside.

Other than small lettering and a 'made in Taiwan' imprint, the black handgun was indistinguishable from the Berettas formerly used by police, and strikingly similar to the guns they currently carry. The toy gun had been spraypainted black to appear real.

Unfortunately, it wasn't an isolated incident; toy or replica guns painted to resemble real firearms are surfacing more often, according to Halton Police Constable Jay Kenzaki.

Another was discovered this summer along with drugs locked in a vault. The perpetrator had altered the toy for protection purposes.

"We are seeing them more and more. I'm not sure why. Maybe people are just becoming more aware of them," said Kenzaki.

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, replica firearms are considered to be any device that's not a real firearm, but is manufactured or altered to resemble a real firearm, and they're prohibited by law.

The toy guns creating a problem for police being as clear plastic airsoft guns available from some local retailers. They shoot plastic pellets and are powered either through compressed gas, electric motor or springs.

Although you must be 18 years of age to purchase most airsoft guns, they're being used by those much younger, said Kenzaki.

Making the toy guns look as realistic as possible is more fun for them, he said. "One can of spray paint is all they need."

The potential for a tragic outcome is all too real, he added. "It's our worst nightmare."

Police don't have the benefit in the midst of a potentially life-threatening situation to check the authenticity of a gun, he said.

"We don't have a problem with toy guns as long as they are used responsibly. I can't stress this enough that they should be used under the supervision of an adult."

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