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# Replica guns risky for cops

It isn't every day you see a 15-year-old walking in front of a house with an AR-15 assault rifle.

But that's what a Newmarket resident recently reported seeing to police.

When police arrived on the scene, they arrested three male teenagers, only to find out they were in possession of three air guns.

Const. Andy Pattenden illustrated the problem York Region Police face by holding up an AR-15 assault rifle the tactical team uses and an air gun assault rifle at a news conference.

"The two are nearly identical," he said. "The concern for us is how realistic they look. It's a weapons call for us."

Those who own these air guns should be very careful where they use them, Const. Pattenden said. People can easily mistake them for the real thing.

Air guns are commonly used in the game airsoft. Much like paintball, airsoft is a tactical game where participants take down opponents by striking them with a projectile. Participants are most commonly assembled in teams and wear military or tactical gear.

### TEEN WITH ASSAULT GUN LOOK-A-LIKE

There is nothing illegal about the game when it is played in controlled areas, Const. Pattenden said, adding you should not use air guns on public land, such as a park, or on private property where you do not have permission to do so.

These airguns are unregulated firearms, Sgt. Peter Jelley said. You have to be older than 18 to buy one, but a minor can operate the gun legally.

Since the air gun fires at less than 499 feet per second, it isn't regulated. As soon as the speed of a projectile reaches 500 feet per second, the

air gun would become a regulated firearm and the operator would need a licence.

While an air gun is not classified as a firearm, if it is used in a crime, it is classified as one and suspects may be charged with applicable offences. If the guns are used properly, Const. Pattenden said they shouldn't pose a safety threat.

### CHECK WITH BYLAW DEPARTMENT

"It depends on where and how they are used," he said. "If you held it right up to someone's eye, I'm sure it would cause major damage."

All three suspects in the Newmarket case were released into the custody of their parents. Const. Pattenden said he hopes people who play airsoft can take into consideration the dangers that come with having something that looks exactly like an assault rifle and should use good judgment in how they transport the air guns.

"People shouldn't be walking around the streets with these. It's dangerous," he said.

Airsoft isn't the only use of replica guns. The use of replica guns is common in the gang world due to the ease which they are acquired, guns and gangs prevention officer Paul Strong said.

Air guns and replica guns can be acquired at most major sporting goods stores across the country. York police seized 86 of these guns in 2011 and 85 in 2010.

Check with a local bylaw officer to see if you are able to use an air gun in your area and remember when police respond to any call involving a weapon, the weapon will be treated as real until determined otherwise, Const. Pattenden said.

— Simon Martin

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