

Deadline approaches for antique firearms law change

Owners of certain firearms previously regarded as antique will be required to obtain a licence following a change in the law, which comes fully into effect on 22 September.

The changes are aimed at protecting the public by making it harder for criminals to get their hands on these types of weapons.

Earlier this year, the government changed the law to introduce for the first time a [legal definition of antique firearms](#).

From Wednesday 22 September 2021, owners will require a licence to own any firearm not meeting the criteria. Due to their use in crime, seven cartridges which previously appeared in the Home Office's guidance were not included in the new legal definition. This means all firearms chambered for use with these cartridges will require a licence from 22 September.

The UK has some of the strictest gun control legislation in the world and comparatively low levels of gun crime. These changes will help to further restrict access of criminals to firearms and better protect the public.

Minister for Policing and Crime, Kit Malthouse, said:

Criminals have been exploiting a grey area in the law to get their hands on these firearms, so this change will make our streets safer and ensure these potentially deadly weapons do not end up in the wrong hands.

There are of course legitimate reasons for owning a firearm that is an antique or was previously regarded as an antique, and their owners are not involved in any wrongdoing. They may be owned by a collector or as a family heirloom, for example.

I would urge anyone who owns one of these weapons to check what is required and either licence them or legally dispose of them to ensure they do not fall foul of the law.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for firearms licensing, Deputy Chief Constable Dave Orford, said:

We welcome the changes to legislation around antique firearms. These measures will help officers to seize more dangerous weapons and deal with those intent on using them to cause harm and suffering.

I urge anyone who owns a firearm that they have previously believed to be antique and exempt from licensing to check whether it now needs to be licensed, and if so, to contact their local police force to facilitate this.

Anyone wishing to dispose of a firearm can hand it in to their nearest police station. If people suspect others of keeping an illegal firearm, they can report it via 101 or Crimestoppers.

Christian Ashwell, Criminal Firearms Threat Lead at the National Crime Agency, said:

Criminals gaining access to these seven calibres of self-contained cartridge revolver has led to their use in shootings across the UK, resulting in serious injuries and in some cases death.

In response, the NCA has collaborated with the Home Office, policing partners and the lawful shooting communities to deliver these changes in regulation, to protect the public from future harm.

The risk posed by the criminal use of firearms remains high in the UK and so disrupting the supply of illegal firearms is a top priority for the NCA and our law enforcement partners.

Protecting communities from this threat cannot be achieved by law enforcement action alone. Continued public support is key and we encourage anyone with information about illegally held firearms to contact Crimestoppers or their local police.

The seven cartridges which previously appeared in the Home Office guidance but which have been omitted from the equivalent list in the 2021 Regulations and which will therefore require a licence to be legally-held from 22 September are:

- .320 British (also known as .320 Revolver CF, short or long)
- .41 Colt (short or long)
- .44 Smith and Wesson Russian
- .442 Revolver (also known as .44 Webley)
- 9.4mm Dutch Revolver

- 10.6mm German Ordnance Revolver
- 11mm French Ordnance Revolver M1873 (Army)

The law on antique firearms changed on 22 March but owners were given 6 months to decide whether to apply for a firearms certificate if they wanted to keep their firearm, or to otherwise dispose of it (for example, surrendering them to the police or selling them).

Section 58 of the Firearms Act 1968 and the Antique Firearms Regulations 2021 set out in law which firearms can be regarded as antique, and therefore are exempt from licensing. The definition closely follows the model used previously in Home Office guidance and will therefore be familiar to collectors, dealers and museums.

To be regarded as an antique, a firearm must:

- have been manufactured before 1 September 1939, and
- either have a propulsion system of a type specified in the 2021 Regulations (for example, muzzle loaders, pin-fire or needle-fire) or the chamber(s) are those that the firearm had when it was manufactured (or a replacement that is identical in all material respects) and it is chambered for use with a cartridge specified in the 2021 Regulations, and
- be sold, transferred, purchased, acquired or possessed as a curiosity or ornament.

People who possess such firearms can apply to their local police firearms licensing department to retain them on a firearms certificate. Applications must be made before the transition period ends at 23:59 on 21 September 2021. As long as a person has applied for a firearm certificate, they will remain in lawful possession of their firearm even if their application remains outstanding or is the subject of an outstanding appeal when the transition period ends.

Should a firearm meet the criteria for a historic handgun under section 7 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, the owner can apply for a certificate on this basis.

If the owner of a firearm that no longer falls within the definition of antique firearm chooses not to licence it, they will need to otherwise dispose of it before the transition period ends. Disposal could include selling, exporting or deactivating the firearm, donating it to a museum or surrendering it to the police. To enable this, owners will be able to freely sell or transfer the firearm to another collector or to a museum without

requiring a firearm certificate, section 5 authority or a museum firearms licence. Owners can also sell or transfer the firearm to a dealer, but only one who is registered with the police and who has a section 5 authority. In all cases, the new owner must then apply to the police for a firearm certificate or museum licence in respect of the firearm before the transition period ends.

Dealers will be able to sell or transfer such firearms, which they already own, before 23:59 on 21 September 2021 without being registered with the police and without holding a section 5 authority. However, they need to be registered and hold a section 5 authority before they can purchase or acquire any such firearms.

Museums can also sell or transfer such firearms freely until the transition period ends. Where a museum purchases or acquires such firearms, they must apply before the deadline for either a museum firearms licence (with the authority of the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers to possess any which are prohibited weapons) or a firearm certificate.

Further details about the changes to the law are set out in a [H0 circular](#).