

AIR WEAPONS:

A brief guide to safety

The information on this leaflet was drawn from the Air weapons: A brief guide to safety, published by Home Office in April 2023.

This leaflet is a guide to using and storing your air weapon safely and responsibly. It outlines the law on air weapons and explains what you can do to be a responsible air weapon user. Before you use your air weapon, you should read this leaflet and familiarise yourself with its contents. In this leaflet, references to 'air weapons' are to 'lethal barrelled' air weapons as defined in the legislation (see 'Types of air weapon' on reverse).



reactive targets

because shooting should be...FUN!

Safe handling

In the wrong hands, an air weapon can cause serious injury or even kill. Follow the common sense rules below to reduce the risk of an accident:

- Always treat an air weapon as though it were loaded.
- Only point an air weapon in a safe direction, preferably at the ground, and never at another person.
- Never load an air weapon until you are ready to fire it.
- Never fire an air weapon unless you are certain that the shot will be safe. This means checking that there is nothing and no one nearby who might be endangered and ensuring that there is a suitable backstop or pellet catcher to prevent ricochets.
- Never rely on a safety catch to make an air weapon safe: such devices can fail.
- Never put a loaded air weapon down. Always safely discharge or unload and uncock it first.
- Cover air weapons when you transport them, e.g. in a gun slip.
- Never store a loaded air weapon.
- Air weapons should be stored out of sight and separately from pellets.
- Air weapons should be stored inside a house rather than in an outbuilding, such as a garden shed.
- Consider ways of rendering a stored air weapon incapable of being fired.

Preventing children from accessing air weapons

It is an offence for a person in possession of an air weapon to fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent a person under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. 'Reasonable precautions' means that when a child is present an air weapon must be:

- stored securely
 - out of sight, and
 - separately from ammunition
- There have been several deaths as a result of children getting hold of air weapons. These tragedies might have been prevented had the air weapons been stored safely. Below are some simple steps to reduce the risk:
- In many cases, it will be sufficient to store your air weapon in an existing, suitably robust, lockable cupboard - keeping the keys separate and secure.
 - Alternatively, you could use a lock or locking device to attach your air weapon to the fabric of a building, or to a fixed feature. Or you could use a security cord, lockable chain or similar device attached to a point of anchorage within the building. Remember that the air weapon must be out of sight.

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- If you hold other firearms, you could use an existing gun cabinet for your air weapon provided this does not compromise security.
- You might find it useful to consider some of the security measures suggested for licensed firearms. This information can be found in the Firearms Security Handbook, available on the Home Office website.

When using an air weapon

- Keep it under close supervision at all times and never leave it unattended. Where you have no option but to put your air weapon down for short periods, unload it and gather up all the ammunition. Steps should then be taken to prevent anyone under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. This could include attaching it to a fixed object, out of sight, using a security cord or similar device, or locking it out of sight in a car.

Air weapons and the law

Apart from the exceptions mentioned later, you do not need a certificate to have an air weapon in England and Wales. In Scotland, you may need an Air Weapon Certificate or a visitor permit to use, possess, purchase or acquire an air weapon – see www.airweapon.scot for information. Lethal barrelled air weapons are classed as firearms and regulated by firearms legislation. You must make sure that you know the law and keep within it. In addition to the duty,

mentioned above, to take reasonable precautions to prevent unauthorised access:

- It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill certain wild animals and birds.
- It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill a pet animal or knowingly cause a pet animal to suffer unnecessarily, which could be committed by shooting at a pet animal.
- It is an offence for a person under the age of 18 to purchase or hire an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon.
- It is an offence to sell, let on hire or make a gift of an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon to a person under the age of 18.
- It is an offence for anyone under the age of 18 to have with them an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon unless: - they are under the supervision of a person aged 21 or over; or - they are shooting as a member of an approved target shooting club; or - they are shooting at a shooting gallery and the only firearms being used are either air weapons or miniature rifles as defined in the Firearms Act 1968; or - the person is 14 years old or above and is on private premises with the consent of the occupier.
- It is an offence to part with possession of an air weapon, or ammunition for an air weapon, to a person under the age of 18 except under the special circumstances mentioned immediately above.

- It is an offence for any person to use an air weapon for firing a pellet beyond the boundaries of any premises.
- It is an offence for a supervising adult to allow a person under the age of 18 to use an air weapon for firing a pellet beyond the boundaries of any premises.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon in a public place without a reasonable excuse. It is ultimately for the courts to decide what a reasonable excuse is. However, it might include carrying a weapon to and from a shooting club, or taking a new weapon home from a dealer.
- It is an offence to trespass with an air weapon.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon if you are prohibited from possessing a firearm. Anyone sentenced to a term of imprisonment of between three months and three years (including suspended sentences) is prohibited from possessing an air weapon or other firearm or ammunition for five years. Anyone who has been sentenced to three years or more is prohibited for life.
- It is an offence to fire an air weapon without lawful authority or excuse within 50 feet (15 metres) of the centre of a public road in such a way as to cause a road user to be injured, interrupted or endangered.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon with intent to damage or to destroy property, or to be reckless as to whether property would be damaged or destroyed.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon with intent to endanger life

Types of air weapon

The advice in this leaflet concerns “lethal barrelled” air weapons – those with muzzle energy of more than one joule. Guns below this threshold, and qualifying “airsoft” guns, are not regarded as firearms. Air weapons with muzzle energy greater than 12 foot pounds may only be held on a firearms certificate issued by local police forces. Air pistols with muzzle energies greater than six foot-pounds (and certain other air weapons) are prohibited and may not be possessed without the authority of the Home Secretary. In Scotland, any air weapon with muzzle energy above one joule may mean that you need an Air Weapon Certificate or permit – see www.airweapon.scot for more information. If you are in any doubt, seek advice from your local police force.

What can I use my air weapon for?

Air weapons can be used for a number of purposes including target shooting, vermin control and hunting small ground game. However, if you have never shot before, you should consider going to a shooting club with an air weapons section and learning from a qualified instructor how to handle your air weapon safely and responsibly and become an accurate shot. If you intend to shoot live quarry, you must be careful only to do so on private property on which you have permission to shoot.

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