



SPECIAL PUBLIC SAFETY NOTICE

ISSUED BY THE SALEM COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

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DOES THIS LOOK LIKE A TOY TO YOU?



... How do you think a police officer would answer that question?

This is an air gun – not unlike the one your child or your child's friend may own. This particular air gun is an exact replica of the handgun that is carried by many Salem County police officers; the only difference between the “toy” gun and the real one is an impression on the slide and on the grip that identifies the real one as a Heckler & Kotch USP. It takes careful and close inspection to tell the difference, even if you're familiar with both guns.

Bottom line: If it looks like a gun and is handled like a gun, police officers must treat it like a gun, even if it's in the hands of a child. The results can be tragic for all involved.

Fortunately, Salem County law enforcement has averted tragedy when individuals in possession of these guns have been confronted by police:

- Responding to the report of a suspicious person, police encountered a thirteen year-old boy who was brandishing an air-gun that was indistinguishable from their own service weapons. He was swiftly disarmed by an officer within arms reach, but the realization of how nearly this child was shot is frightening.

- Late at night narcotics investigators stopped a motor vehicle and arrested the young adult driver for drug possession. After taking the suspect in custody, police found an air-gun in the glove compartment of his car. He regularly kept the 9mm look-alike handgun next to his driving credentials.
- Police received the report of a juvenile chasing another with a handgun in front of a local high school at the beginning of the school day. Police immediately rushed to the scene. Once there they learned that both juveniles had gone into the school; fortunately police immediately found the Glock replica air-gun one of the high school students was chasing a classmate with on the backseat of a parked car.

Troublingly, the frequency of incidents like these has increased in recent months. As a result, the Salem County Prosecutor's Office, in cooperation with local law enforcement and school officials, has prepared this bulletin in effort to raise awareness among parents and other adults about these guns and to enlist the community's help in keeping children safe.

What is an air gun?

Air guns are similar to BB guns. Instead of firing a copper or steel BB however, air guns fire a plastic or ceramic projectile that is round like a BB, but of a slightly larger caliber. Air guns are commonly referred to as "Airsoft" guns, which is the trade name of a popular air gun distributor. This is a bit of a misnomer since there is nothing "soft" about being struck by a projectile traveling at 15 feet per second.

What are air guns used for?

Air guns are used for indoor target shooting or for gaming, like paint ball.

How far do air guns shoot?

The effective range for an air gun is typically 15-18 feet. In other words, within this distance, every shot fired will penetrate a paper target. The maximum effective range for an air gun is 35 feet (i.e., most shots will penetrate a paper target). Nevertheless projectiles will travel much farther than 35 feet, in fact, they may travel as far as 300 feet.

Why do they look so real?

Distributors say the reason they sell air guns that look so much like real guns is because they wish to provide law enforcement with realistic training tools. However, very few law enforcement agencies use air guns in any sort of training. The real reason probably has something to do with how well they sell to the general public.

Is it legal to buy an air gun?

Yes. Air guns are for sale in many sporting goods stores in the State of New Jersey however you must be eighteen or older to purchase one. Federal law requires that air guns must be sold with an orange tip to distinguish them from real firearms, but the tips are easily removed. Air guns are also for sale over the internet (some by foreign manufacturers who are not bound by the federal requirement to mark the guns with orange tips), however many of these internet-based companies will not ship to residents in the State of Jersey, due to our state's strict regulation of firearms. Yet, an air gun is not considered a firearm under New Jersey law unless it is used during the commission of a crime. When a crime has been committed with an air gun, the defendant is subject to the same penalties as would a defendant who used a real gun.

Something to consider...

Air guns are NOT toys. They can cause serious bodily injury or even death when used improperly. They can easily put out an eye or chip a tooth.

Parental Responsibilities:

- Teach your child safe gun handling rules and make sure he uses them.
- Buy and make sure your child uses a full face mask (such as a paintball mask) and other protective clothing.
- Keep air guns locked away and accessible only with parental permission.
- Provide an appropriate place for your child to play air gun games.
- Actively supervise air gun games. Know the rules. Watch them play.
- Make sure the orange tip stays on and is clearly visible.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends about the dangers of improper air gun.

Gun Safety Tips:

- Always treat every gun as if it were loaded. Never point a gun at something you wouldn't want to shoot, hurt, or destroy, even if the gun's empty.
- When you're not shooting, always keep the muzzle of your weapon pointed in a safe direction. Never leave a loaded weapon unattended.
- Always keep your trigger finger outside of the trigger guard until the moment you're going to fire.
- Always know what you are aiming at!

Kids should know...

- Always remove the magazine and disconnect the battery until you are ready to use an air gun.
- Always transport an air gun inside a box or bag.
- When playing an air gun game, everyone must wear a face mask, a long sleeve shirt, and pants.
- Do not use or display an air gun in a public place such as a school or a park.
- Most people are not familiar with air guns – they will assume these are real guns.
- If a law enforcement officer approaches you while you are using an air gun, immediately stand still, advise the officer that you have an air gun, and do nothing more until the officer directs you to do so.
- If a neighbor or nearby person asks you to stop playing with your air gun, immediately stop and store away your gun.
- If you use your air gun to threaten another person or vandalize property, you will be charged with committing a serious crime.