

Changes to the Canadian Firearms Program

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In May of 2006, the Minister of Public Safety, the Honourable Stockwell Day, indicated that would be substantial changes to the Canadian Firearms Program, most notably the elimination of the long-gun registry.

The long-gun registry not only proved to be ineffective, but also very costly, while it was estimated that the cost of running the long-gun registry would be approximately \$2 million, it is estimated that the actual cost is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. In addition, it has often been criticized for being ineffective. For example, of the 549 murderers that occurred in Canada in 2003, only two of them were committed by long-guns that were registered. There are approximately 7 million long-guns registered.

In an effort to address some of the problems with the current firearms program, the government has cut the program's operating budget to \$10 million and introduced the following changes:

The Transfer of Responsibility from the Canadian Firearms Centre to the RCMP

Responsibility for the firearms registry and the Firearms Act and regulations is being transferred from the Canada Firearms Centre to the RCMP in an effort to provide a more cost effective program that meets with the government accountability requirements. By transferring responsibility for the program to the RCMP, the government is seeking to make it easier for the police to co-ordinate crime control initiatives and gun control measures.

Despite the organizational change, you can still contact the Canadian Firearms Program to access firearm services. You can call their toll free number at 1-800-731-4000.

License Renewal Fee Waivers and Refunds

In an effort to bring individuals into the gun registry system, the government has introduced a license renewal fee waiver and refunds that are to be in place until May 17, 2008.

However, there is no fee for license renewals (whether it is a minor's or a regular license), to replace an expired license or to change your license privileges. If you have already paid a fee to do any of the above, your money will be reimbursed to you. Nonetheless, if your application was refused, you will not get a refund. To be eligible to receive a refund, you must have paid the fee between December 1, 1998 and May 17, 2006.

It will take a few months to process refunds. If you are deemed to be eligible, the government will issue a cheque and mail it to the address on your records. If your address has changed, you should let them know as soon as possible. You can contact them at 1-800-731-4000 or make the change yourself on the internet at www.cfc-cafc.gc.ca.

On the other hand, if you are getting a firearms license for the first time, or if you are making a transition from a Minor's license to a PAL, you must still pay a fee. The fee for a PAL is \$60 for a non-restricted firearms license and \$80 for a combination of restricted and non-restricted firearms. You will also be required to pay a fee if you are trying to get a new license after your license was revoked or refused or if you try to get a license after the expiry of a firearms prohibition order. A fee is also required to purchase a minor's license. The fee is \$10 for one year, \$20 for two years and \$30 for more than two years. Possession-Only licenses are no longer available, but if you already have one, you may renew it before it expires.

The \$25 fee to replace lost, damaged or stolen licenses will remain in place. A minor's license can be renewed for \$10.

Non-restricted firearms no longer need to be physically verified.

Firearm owners will now be urged to call a Verifier in order to register or transfer a non-restricted firearm. The firearm owner is to provide a detailed description of the weapon, which will then be compared to the information found in the Firearms Table of Known Firearms. It is recommended that a person who calls have the weapon with them when they do so, since they will be asked very detailed questions regarding their firearm.

A physical examination by a professional verifier will only be requested if the type of firearm cannot be properly confirmed over the phone or if the weapon is a restricted or prohibited firearm. While verifications will usually be done over the phone by employees of the Firearms program, the police, firearms businesses and shooting clubs can also verify non-restricted and restricted firearms for individuals if they have an approved verifier on staff.

Amnesty Period

The government is offering a one year amnesty to protect previously-licensed owners of non-restricted firearms from prosecution under the Criminal Code and to encourage them to comply with the law as it currently stands. The amnesty only applies in two cases:

- For individuals who were licensed to possess that class of non-restricted firearm in the past but whose license expired since January 1, 2004 or will expire by May 17, 2007; and
- For individuals who have not registered their firearms but have or have had a firearms license, whether it was a possession only license (POL) or a possession and acquisition license (PAL).

The amnesty does not apply to people who never obtained a firearms license.

Aside from allowing you to get a registration certificate or a license without penalty, the amnesty period also allows you to possess the firearm in question until you decide to deactivate the firearm, export it, turn it in to a police officer for disposal, or to sell it or give it to another individual or business that holds a PAL.

Moreover, a license will continue to be required during the amnesty period if you wish to

buy ammunition for a non-registered rifle or shotgun. The amnesty period ends May 17, 2007.

In addition to the above changes, the Conservative government is also planning to table legislation to repeal the requirement to register non-restricted firearms.

While the government is making changes to the gun control law, it continues to advocate for the protection of Canadian families and communities. The government will continue to require safe storage, safety training, a licensing program that includes a handgun registry and a ban on prohibited firearms, as well as a police background check. The background check is meant to screen applicants who have certain criminal convictions or a history of violent behaviour in order to preserve public safety. The safety training requires that everyone who applies for a Minor's License or a Possession and Acquisitions License (PAL) to have knowledge of safe-handling practices and the law. Safe storage also continues to be reinforced so as to prevent accident and restrict access to those who are not allowed to possess the weapons. For now, a license is still needed to possess non-restricted rifles and shotguns, regardless of the government's future plans to abolish the long-gun registry.

Furthermore, they are planning on investing funding on police, crime prevention initiatives and providing support for the victims of crime, as a compliment to the new gun control approach.