

Firearms

Don't be left without certificates

George Wallace explains why you must take care not to allow yourself to fall into a tricky situation.

WHEN IT COMES TO CERTIFICATE RENEWAL, some police licensing departments do their best (they are the ones I never hear about), whereas others appear to be run with either dim-witted incompetence or outright malice. Occasionally you come across both, which is really frightening.

A recurring problem in the poorly performing constabularies is that certificate holders are routinely left in possession of guns after their certificates have expired and before (sometimes long before) the new ones are issued. This is not acceptable.

If you are likely to find yourself in that position, before your old certificates expire you should contact the licensing department and ask them if the new certificates will be ready by the expiry date. If they will not, ask the constabulary to provide you, as a matter of urgency, with a Temporary Permit under Section 7 of the Firearms Act 1968. You may then receive the permit or a load of flannel instead! Refusals are couched in a variety of ways such as:

1. "You don't need it because we have received your application." RUBBISH. If you have guns and your certificate has expired you are an armed criminal. If convicted, the minimum sentence is five years.
2. "We don't issue temporary permits; it's not the Chief Constable's policy." ROT! They have been advised by both Home Office and ACPO to issue temporary permits if the delay is not your own fault, so ask for their reasons in writing, with the name of the person whose decision it is.
3. "The permit won't allow you to keep expanding ammunition because that is Section 5." NONSENSE. Expanding ammo and "missiles" (bullets, to you and me) are only Section 5 (ie. prohibited) if you don't have a certificate allowing you

to possess them. The police can put that authority on a temporary permit just as easily as on a full certificate.

4. "If we gave you a permit it wouldn't allow you to use the guns." MORE NONSENSE. It is a tenet of British Law that everything is allowed unless specifically prevented and since a temporary permit does not prevent you from using your guns, you may do so.

5. "You don't need a temporary permit as long as you stay within the Chief Constable's jurisdiction." GIVE ME STRENGTH. The Chief Constable, no matter how important he or his juniors think he is, cannot give you permission to break the Law – even if he is aware of the shenanigans of his staff; which he probably isn't.

6. "It takes just as long to issue a temporary permit as to issue the certificate." HAH! Apart from the fact that that is nonsense, the correct response is: "Right, then, I'll have the certificate, please."

7. "You'll have to store the guns with a dealer until we can issue your certificates." In which case, tell them you will be reclaiming the cost from the Chief Constable.

If none of this gets you anywhere, then the NGO Head Office can refer you to me for help and advice. Or you might first like to write to your Chief Constable, by name (copied to your MP, asking him/her to bring it to the attention of the Home Secretary) along the lines of the *pro*



forma letter below. Just put it into your own words and keep a copy.

And before you feel guilty for harassing them, remember that the average member of staff in police firearms licensing produces one certificate per working day. Good job they don't have to rear birds and organise a shoot or we'd be down to 10-bird days!

[Your address and telephone number]

[Date]

[John Brown Esq (you can find his name and address online or by phoning the police on 101)]
The Chief Constable
[constabulary address]
[Postcode]

Dear [Mr Brown]

I have been advised by the National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) to write to you personally because of the difficulties I am experiencing in having my shotgun and/or firearm certificates renewed.

I applied in good time and my cheque was cashed immediately but now my certificates are about to expire, leaving me in unlawful possession of firearms. I asked your firearms licensing department for a temporary permit, as provided for by Section 7 of the Firearms Act 1968 and as advised by both the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers under circumstances such as mine. My request was refused on the grounds that [fill in the detail]. That is not acceptable.

I very much hope that you will feel able to use your good offices to resolve this situation. It is surely unreasonable to expect me, having applied for my certificates in good time, to be compelled either to break the Law or go to the expense of storing my guns with a dealer.

Yours sincerely