

SSANZ News March April 2018

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Summary of AGM 24 February

Our thanks to all members who attended to provide us with a quorum; and those who sent in apologies and proxy nominations. The Officers and Committee remains much the same; Alec Melville has replaced Allan Delaney, who remains on the committee, as President and one new committee member, Neville Dodd has replaced Nick Mathew. Our thanks to Nick for his contribution and support over the past few years.

The Associations finances continue to improve with a net gain of \$1,887 and Members equity now stands at \$15,835. There were no other issues raised at the AGM.

Public Health Summer School

Several of our committee attended this event organised by the Otago University in Wellington on 14 February, primarily because it appeared that it would be dominated by people who promoted an anti-gun agenda such as Chris Cahill and Philp Alpers. Various pro-shooting groups/individuals were able to inject some reasoned arguments into the discussions and it was a good opportunity to network with people who share our interests. Unfortunately the media focussed largely on the exaggerated claims of Police Association President Chris Cahill and mostly ignored the issues raised by other speakers.

The following article has been sent to the Minister of Police and published in NZG&H magazine.

Managing the risk - Gun Control in New Zealand by Phil Cregeen

The purpose underlying all firearms legislation is the need, in the public interest, to reduce damage from the misuse of firearms. (Thorpe-1997 p 87)

The author of this paper also contends that the purpose of any gun control legislation or measures should be to manage the risk, to the population at large, of death or injury from the misuse of firearms in the community. New Zealand has an estimated 1.5 million privately owned firearms and some 250,000 licensed owners and so if firearms were unregulated the risk potential could be significant.

In New Zealand every person wishing to own a firearm is required to apply to police for a licence. First they must attend a training programme on firearm safety and pass a test to ensure they have a clear understanding of the 7 basic safety rules. Next police carry out a criminal record check and vetting process, interviewing referees to ensure that the applicant is of good character and has no history of violent behaviour. At the same time the security arrangements for firearms storage are inspected to ensure that they meet the requirements of the regulations. If all these checks are satisfactory the applicant is considered "fit and proper" to own a firearm and a licence is issued.

Some types of firearm are considered a higher risk than others and are treated differently from the norm, requiring an Endorsed licence, further vetting and stronger security: these are classified as Pistols, Military Style Semi Automatics (MSSA), and Restricted Weapons.

The risks:

1. Young children may cause harm to themselves or others.
2. Individuals with mental illness may cause harm to themselves or others.
3. Individuals unfamiliar with firearms may cause harm to themselves or others.
4. Licensed owners may injure themselves or others in unintentional shooting incidents.
5. Criminals may steal and use firearms to kill, injure, rob or intimidate their victims.
6. Law enforcement officers may use lethal force inappropriately or accidentally.

Managing the risks

1. **Young children** – this risk is managed by securing firearms effectively, obeying the 7 basic safety rules and denying access to firearms by children under 16 years unless under the immediate supervision of a licence holder.
2. **Mental illness**-again this risk is managed by the safe storage of firearms and by the refusal or revocation of a firearms licence for any person with known untreated mental illness issues.
3. **Unfamiliar with firearms** – again this risk is managed by the safe storage requirements for all firearms and the requirement for an unlicensed person to be supervised by a licence holder at all times when handling a firearm.
4. **Unintentional shootings** – this risk is managed by the safety training programme that all new licence applicants must attend, and safety messages published in the media. It is further enhanced by oversight and mentoring from community firearm safety instructors at clubs and ranges, and by heeding seasonally published safety messages.
5. **Criminal use of Firearms** – This risk of firearms falling into the hands of criminals is managed by the refusal of a licence to those with a criminal record, known membership of a criminal gang and search and seizure of firearms by police from known criminals and gangs. Theft from licensed owners of firearms is prevented by the safe storage regulations, which are intended to deter an opportunist thief however it is not intended to prevent access by a skilled and well prepared burglar. This is illustrated by 830 firearms recorded as stolen in 2016 of the approximately 1.5 million in circulation..
6. **Law enforcement:** Police officers are exempt from the provisions of the Arms Act while on duty; however some officers are licensed for their personal use of firearms. Police guidelines and training make provision for officers to be armed with firearms and use lethal force.

Effectiveness of current Arms Act to manage risks

1. **Young children** - Since the introduction of the current system of licensing in 1983 and the firearm storage regulations in 1992 the number of shooting incidents involving children both as perpetrator and victim has declined steadily to the extent that it is now rare.
2. **Mental illness** – while the safe storage of firearms and vetting process denies access to firearms by those known to be mentally unwell, the fact that mental illness can go unnoticed by family, friends or professional agencies and leads to some 600 suicides per year, about 50 involving firearms, shows that this risk is not always managed successfully. Also of concern is that mental illness is almost always linked to random shooting events, which are fortunately rare in New Zealand. This point was brought home by the 2017 random shooting of 3 people by Quinn Patterson, where it was revealed after the event that close friends knew he suffered acute depression.

3. **Unfamiliar with firearms** - Occurrences due to this risk are low but contribute to the total unintentional shooting incidents each year where it is observed that often the shooter is unlicensed and is thus perhaps not familiar with the basic safety rules. Since airguns, other than those declared especially dangerous, may be owned by those over 18 years without a licence, there is potential for a proportion of owners to be unaware of the basic safety rules associated with firearms, consequently putting themselves and families at risk.
4. **Unintentional shootings** - The effectiveness of the firearms safety training programme may be judged by the steady decline in this type of shooting incident, which now stand at single figures annually.
5. **Criminal use of firearms** – Since criminals by their very nature have no regard for the rules and laws that govern the rest of society it may be argued that the Arms Act is totally ineffective in denying criminals access to firearms. Typically violent offending with a firearm is low representing only 1.4 % of all violent offending and 10% (7 annually) of homicides, however possession by criminals may be considered high when in 2016/17 proceedings were taken against 1730 individuals for unlawful possession, 1207 firearms were seized in searches and 549 were reported stolen. It must be remembered there is an unknown pool of unlawfully held firearms circulating in what is known as the “black market” which are available for sale or hire as well as those in the “grey market” which are unlawfully held but for no criminal purpose such as war souvenirs or family heirlooms.
6. **Law enforcement** - As stated above the Arms act does not apply to police while on duty, however armed police do pose a risk to the general public. In the past 10 years 16 citizens have been shot and killed by police, at least one an innocent bystander, and several unarmed offenders. Police are known to have had accidental discharges and lost firearms in public places. While Police officers have access to firearms (Glock pistol and Bushmaster (AR15) rifle) locked in their patrol cars, they do not generally carry firearms on their person. Front line officers receive 8 hours of practical firearm training, firing 43 rounds with the Glock and 49 with rifle annually. The average sporting shooter will use 1000 to 2000 rounds per year to maintain competence at a regional or national level, while International level shooters will expend tens of thousands of rounds per year.

Areas for improvement

1. **Young children** – children are naturally curious and so if they come upon a firearm they are likely to pick it up and play with it, this is more likely in homes where unlicensed guns are held, whether they be firearms or airguns. All children should be taught in school from an early age -if you find a gun, don't point it at another person, don't pick it up, tell an adult. Firearm Safety courses in Schools would not only teach children to be safe with firearms but would have the added benefit of passing safety messages on to parents and family. A return of the 1980s “Billy Hook” comics, illustrated, below may also be worthy of consideration.
2. **Mental illness** – more publicity is needed in educating family members on the signs of mental illness, particularly those families where firearms are present and advice on what to do with firearms in such events. There needs to be more sharing of information between health professionals and police who are often the first responders to the mentally unwell.
3. **Unfamiliar with firearms** – For those unlicensed persons wishing to use firearms accessibility to gaining a licence needs to be easy, with firearms safety training readily available in all communities. For those not required to hold a licence, such as for air guns, safety messages should be broadcast in all media at regular intervals.

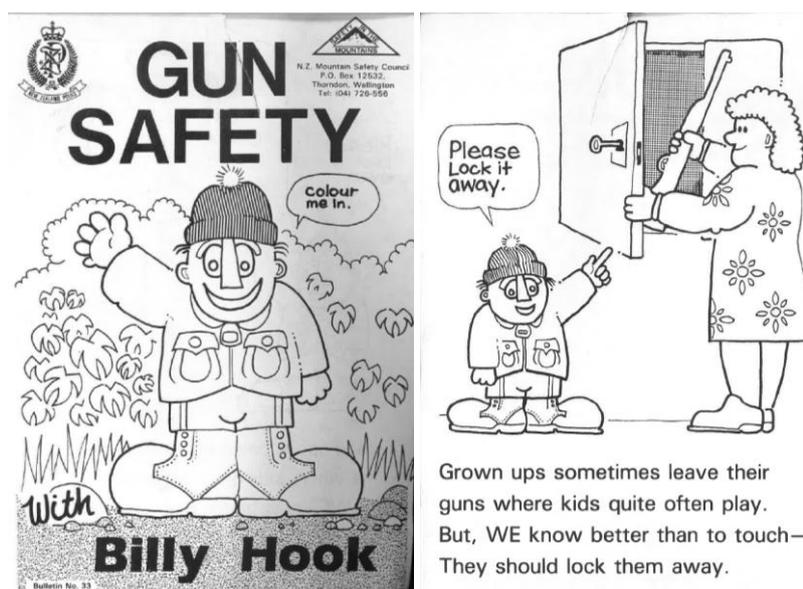
4. **Unintentional shootings** – safety messages need to be reinforced, particularly at peak hunting seasons (Roar and Duck season opening) and holidays by messages in all forms of media.
5. **Criminal Use of firearms** – Since the 2016 Select Committee Inquiry into how criminals obtain firearms failed to produce any new data on this topic and only managed to produce recommendations that affected the lawful ownership of firearms by licensed firearm owners there is considerable room for improvement. Since criminals have demonstrated an ability to buy (illegally), steal, manufacture or illegally import firearms detailed research needs to be undertaken to determine methods and sources. (Such research was conspicuously absent from the recent Law & Order Select Committee Inquiry). More resources need to be put into recovering stolen firearms and detecting and confiscating illegal imports and other illegally possessed firearms.
6. **Law enforcement** – Confronting a possibly armed offender must produce an adrenaline rush in a police officer, in hunting it is known as “buck fever” when a hunter confronts his first animal, a well recognised phenomenon which is overcome by training and experience. Arms training for all front line police should be sufficient to attain absolute familiarity and good accuracy with both types of firearm and a mindset that shooting is a last resort.

Conclusion

The Arms Act 1983 and Arms Regulations 1992 have been effective in reducing the risks to society posed by the lawful private ownership of firearms; however their impact on the criminal use of firearms remains open to debate, because of the overall attitude of criminals. Nevertheless, with firearm-armed annual offending remaining at less than 2% of all violence, the legislation must generally be considered to be successful.

Note: Figures, where quoted, were obtained from New Zealand Police sources.

Phil Cregeen
January 2018



LOCK UP YOUR FIREARMS

Keep a Record of: Make, Model, Serial No