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The Newsletter of the Canadian Firearms Centre
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Getting to know the Firearms Act

How do you train 52,000 police officers across Canada on how the new Firearms Act will affect their work? How do you give in-depth training to 1,000 Firearms Officers and more than 8,000 others who use firearms in their work? How do you know how much information is enough for business owners who trade in firearms? What does it take to provide precise, clear and well-indexed information to judges, justices of the peace and prosecutors? It takes planning, of course, and lots of consultation with the people who will use the information. The CFC is doing both of those things in large measure because, according to **Henry Vanwyk**, the CFC's Director of Communications and Legislative Training, "we have to meet one main goal: to train everyone who carries a firearm as part of their duties and those whose duties require them to deal with the provisions of the Firearms Act."

According to Mr. Vanwyk, the CFC is able to benefit from lessons learned with the implementation of the previous firearms legislation. "We found that information sent out to central offices did not always reach the ranks," he said. "So we have created a basic set of information modules and we are developing customized training packages for each group."

The CFC's focus on consultation includes work with the Chief Firearms Officers' Sub-Committee on Training. Vancouver-based Patrol Sergeant **Gerry Pyke**, a member of the Sub-committee, says that his role is "to make sure that police officers receive succinct information that they can use instantly." The CFC has responded, in part, by engaging the services of the Niagara Regional Police to work

with other forces to produce a series of eight to ten videos. The videos will be short, so that they can be viewed during roll call, as police officers prepare for their day's work. The Niagara force has won awards for its police videos and will be communicating each key message in less than fifteen minutes.

Other tools for police use will include a short, plain language handbook that will, according to Mr. Pyke, "use terms that police officers use on the job." As Mr. Pyke points out, "You have to think like a police officer." The handbook, which will be between 50 and 75 pages, will be supplemented by a substantial desk reference and by concise course material in every major police station.

Jim Bickford, National Manager, Legislative Training, is responsible for developing the training packages for police and others. He says that the important thing is to stick to the facts: "When I took this job," he says, "I recognized that, to convey information to police, we have to take a factual approach. The police will recognize themselves in the examples we use to explain the application of the law."

Mr. Bickford's plans for training include videos for business owners and Customs Officers, and for other government officers who are not police but who have to enforce the law or who have to carry firearms in their work. The CFC will also assist with training personnel who will process information related to implementing the law across the country. There will be training sessions for Firearms Officers and others, and Train the Trainer sessions for groups that want to conduct their own training. Judges, prosecutors and justices of the peace will be served by having the CFC provide well-indexed information that they can use as they interpret the law. For everyone, information provided on paper will also be available on CD-ROM.

A former defense attorney, **Lisa Campbell**, is working to ensure that judges and prosecutors get information they can really use. Ms. Campbell and other CFC training team members are interviewing judges across the country to find out what format the information should take and how they will use the information during court cases. Similarly, Crown Prosecutors are being canvassed about their needs through focus group sessions. Ms. Campbell says that the team is focused on presenting the information "from the perspective of Crown Prosecutors, emphasizing those areas which they deal with most, namely offences, prohibition orders and other subjects."

The training team is taking account of differences in how groups across the country might apply certain provisions of the law where they have discretion. The team is also planning to include provincial and territorial differences in laws and procedures as part of any training courses. As Jim Bickford asserts, "Are the provincial and territorial emphases different? If they are, we will adjust."

Hana Hruska, Manager of Communications, who is coordinating information for firearm owners, business owners and others who must comply with the law on a regular basis, says that the focus is on "Going to where the firearm owners and dealers are." The CFC has a presence at hunting shows and gun shows, sharing pamphlets and fact sheets and answering questions about the new law. The CFC's toll-free telephone line (1-800-731-4000) receives anywhere from 100 to 1,000 calls each day. Staff try to give everyone who calls a detailed, clear answer to their question.

Ms. Hruska wants to ensure that the CFC is seen as accessible by firearm owners. "Please keep in touch with us, let us know about gun shows and events where we can share information," she says. "Call us with your questions." The CFC is open for communication. That's a fact.

Facts vs Fiction

There are a lot of myths about the Firearms Act out there," says Jean Valin. "Part of my job is to destroy the myths vigorously and clearly, and point to sources of factual information." As the CFC's new Director of Public Affairs, Mr. Valin is concerned with making sure that Canadians who have a need to know about the new law are able to get information. At the same time, he does not want to

"over-communicate." He says that the CFC's targeted approach of identifying groups who need to know about the new law and developing information tools that meet their specific needs is exactly the right way to go.

Mr. Valin believes that frequent, clear, to-the-point messages will help Canadians understand what the law really says and will help to dispel the misinformation that many people have had to rely on in the past. For example, before the implementation comes into effect for visitors to Canada, the CFC will place advertisements giving the toll-free telephone number through which people can get more information in hunting magazines and magazines that target other groups of firearm users. Valin sees his role as "fine-tuning messages and the CFC's tactics to reach Canadians."

Mr. Valin will be working with others in the CFC to ensure that everything, including each form that firearm users have to complete, is user-friendly, clear and simple.

He says, "It is important to inform firearm users of their responsibilities without talking down to them. We have to do it in a straightforward way."

Aiming for Safety

"In safety, you can always get close to perfect. But once you assume you're there, you get bitten." That's David Osbaldeston talking, the CFC's Program Manager for Safety Education and Awareness. Mr. Osbaldeston is focused on making safety second nature for firearm owners. And he is determined to get that message across.

Mr. Osbaldeston and his team are working to prepare two new safety education courses for Canadians who want to acquire a firearm. One course will be on the safe use and storage of rifles and shotguns, the other will be focused on handguns. Currently, the courses are combined. By splitting the course, people who acquire non-restricted firearms won't have to learn about —or be tested on— safety for handguns.

Working with the Chief Firearms Officers Safety Education Sub-committee, Mr. Osbaldeston is able to plan the new courses with input from every jurisdiction across the country. Over the course of the last year, the team collected more than 400 recommendations on how to improve the existing firearms safety course, from instructors who delivered the course, associations administering it on the part of the provinces or territories, and from others.

The new courses are scheduled to be introduced in late 1998. Until then, the current course will continue to be offered. People who have successfully completed the existing course, or who have challenged and passed the test without having taken the course, will be eligible to apply for a possession and acquisition license. The training requirement does not apply to those seeking a possession-only license.

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