

# Lancashire Constabulary

## OPERATION AIM

### *Crime & Disorder Reduction Category*

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Endorsed By. Deputy Chief Constable Paul Stephenson

## OPERATION AIMS SUMMARY

Operation Aim was set up as a direct result of the increasing sales of cheap "Ball Bearing" guns in and around the Blackpool sea front area, by both novelty shops and street traders. This had a noticeable impact on the amount of incidents the Western Division Armed Response Unit and local officers were being deployed to all over the Blackpool area, which eventually ended with holidaymakers and local children being warned or prosecuted for firearms offences. Also it was causing great distress and concern to the members of the public caught up in what they thought was a real firearms incident.

Interrogation of the C.R.S II system, which is the computerised incident logging system in Lancashire, showed that there was an increasing amount of incidents involving BB guns and there had been 56 recorded incidents in Blackpool in May 2001, as well as the increasing amount of firearms incident forms, that the Armed Response Unit complete after each incident they attend when firearms are believed to be being used, showing that a BB gun was recovered. These weapons have the appearance of a real firearm and it is almost impossible to recognise one until a firearms officer has hold of it, which meant that armed officers with authority to carry firearms attended many of these incidents.

Liaison with Trading Standards revealed that they had conducted their own tests on them and they were in fact legally classing them as toys and could therefore be openly sold to anyone and no license was required to sell or have possession of one.

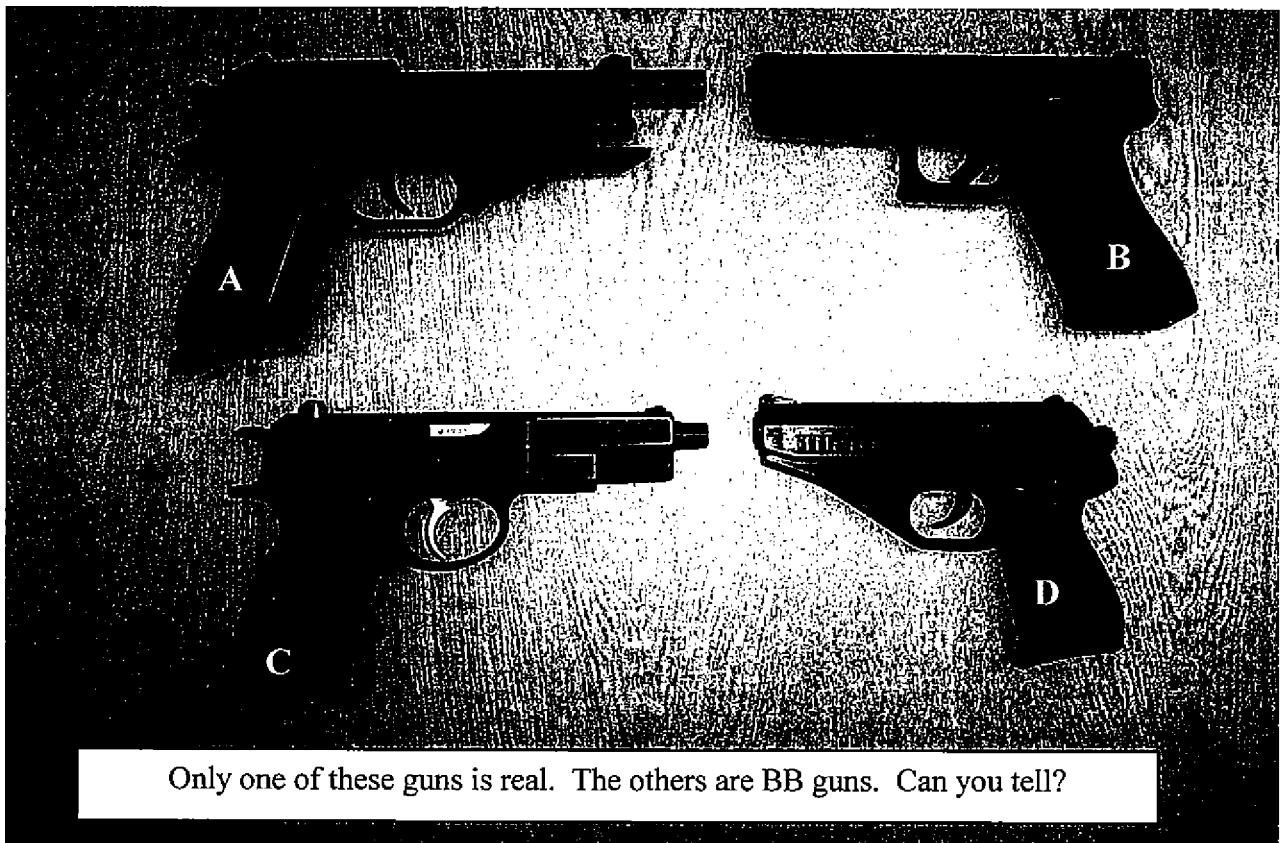
# Operation Aim

Blackpool is the busiest seaside resort in the United Kingdom and attracts millions of visitors every year, especially during the summer months and into the illuminations during autumn. Anything that is sold cheaply on the promenade that is dangerous or a nuisance, in gift and novelty stores, not only affects Blackpool, but also will eventually have an impact on other parts of the country, due to visitors taking the items home.

## NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

- **Increase of sales of cheap Ball bearing guns in and around the Blackpool sea front area** — with the amount of small vendors and independent street traders selling all manner of items, BB guns became a favourite with visitors and the sellers saw a market for them. BB guns are generally replicas of semi automatic pistols that are spring powered and fire a small plastic ball bearing, generally yellow in colour, which causes a stinging sensation if it hits bare skin. Some street traders began to only display BB guns for sale, as they were that popular with both locals and holidaymakers. Initially people were contacting the police as they thought that real firearms were being openly sold. One supplier in the town had 60 thousand in stock.

- **Increase in amount of potential firearms incidents the Western Division Armed response Unit were being deployed to**– as the public had no real experience of firearms we were receiving a large amount of reports relating to persons in the street, promenade and public areas with what they believed to be real firearms. This was causing members of the public real concern and fear.
- **They have the appearance of a real firearm**- as previously stated they are generally an exact replica of some self loading pistols, which is the main selling point, especially to youths and children, as no one would probably want one if they were a bright colour or did not resemble a real one.



## ANALYSIS

- **Impossible to differentiate between a real firearm until physically checked by a firearms officer** — as you can see from the picture above, by just looking at the items it is almost impossible to tell the real one without actually handling it. This obviously causes a massive problem if they are being misused and the public only had a moment to look at the guns and decide if they were real. How would a member of the public react if they only saw it for a fleeting glance, especially if it was being pointed at them or their loved ones?
- **Liaison with Trading Standards showed they were not covered by any legislation** — upon checking with them they had conducted several tests on the most common guns. These tests were on both the power and the mechanics of them to see if they fell into the category of air weapons, or if they could be adapted to something more powerful. They found that they in fact could only be categorised as a toy or replica firearm due to their low spring power and realistic appearance, they also had a moral problem with the items use. They were generally of a shabby construction and could break apart easily in the wrong hands and maybe cause choking to very young children.
- **The BB guns could be sold to anyone** — as previously stated it was common knowledge amongst the sellers that they were in fact toys and toys can be sold to anyone of any age. Unfortunately

some traders were actively targeting children and parents, by putting them in areas of the shop that toys were being sold or in display cabinets that were positioned near to the entrance to attract purchasers.

- **No local legislation regarding sales-** we also checked with the legal department at the Blackpool Borough Council to see if anything within the newly formed Lancashire Act (which is a local government act) would fit to prohibit sales, but it was deemed the legislation did not fit this problem, as there were no incidents of serious and consistent harm or suffering to a large amount of the public.
- **Research of databases and other written information-** all incidents reported to Lancashire Constabulary are recorded on the CRS II computerised logging system and all ARV deployments are recorded onto a separate form called a FR2, which shows the nature of the incident and type of weapon used or recovered. Upon researching these it was found that there was no real problem before April 2001, except for a small increase right at the end of the 2000 season.
- **Increase in incidents involving BB guns from around April 2001** – from personal experiences and that of colleagues it became apparent that in this month we were being called to more small spontaneous firearms incidents and that a large number of these involved BB guns. The vast majority of people dealt with, stated that they had recently purchased the gun from the promenade area for a small amount of money.
- **Countless incidents involving children in parks and other public places** – it became apparent that

the public's perception of age was also a problem, as we often received reports of 17 to 18 year old males in possession of firearms or using them in a concerning manner, when officers arrived they found them to be generally 10 to 12 years old and playing amongst themselves with BB guns. As the old saying goes kids will be kids and these new toys that fired a small yellow plastic ball at your friend made war games that more exiting, as you could tell if you had been hit. To begin with the communications room would put a final result of juvenile nuisance on these logs, this later caused confusion when interrogating the system to find exactly how many incidents there had been. As a result of this analysis it was decided that a new final category should be implemented for BB gun incidents in the local requirement field when closing the incident log. This category is still being used so any increase in these incidents can easily be identified, upon checking the system.

## **ASPECTS OF LOCATION**

- **Mainly in the Central & South areas of Blackpool** – due the majority of vendors being on the Central and South promenade area the majority of the problem centred in those locations, even as far back as the outskirts of both of those areas. It did not appear to affect the North Blackpool areas as much, as they did not have any promenade sellers.

- **Many Incidents on the busy Promenade** — on a normal summer weekend in Blackpool there are thousands of people walking the promenade, who are on holiday, some of which are drunk. A large amount of these people had never seen BB guns for sale before and this either caused concern or excitement. One small incident witnessed by the local authority CCTV operator involved a very drunk male as part of a larger group of adult males step into the road on the promenade and point a newly purchased saw off pump action shotgun style BB gun at a car passing by, attempting to make it stop. How must that driver have felt? Was he able to comprehend that this person was actually in possession of a toy and not a real shotgun. This drunken male was later found, by a police patrol and he believed he was just having a bit of fun and not causing anybody any harm, as a result he was warned regarding his behaviour and the item confiscated.
- **Public areas, parks and playgrounds** — as stated earlier generally a problem with juveniles, as when they got bored they often began to fire the BB pellets at passers by, animals and other children not involved in their game. This caused parents to then either call the police or take the law into their own hands.
- **BB gun incident involving a woman in court** — a female defendant brought a BB gun into Blackpool Magistrates Court inside her bag and was challenged by the security staff in relation to why she would bring the item into a court building. It caused some grave concern as she was later overheard by staff



stating she was intending to shoot a Magistrate. Unfortunately this female was not arrested, as the court did not see it fit to contact the police and ejected her from the building. They later informed the press and this is how the incident came to light.

- **Reports of persons in possession of a gun in vehicles** – the public seeing things for a brief second became a real problem and highlighted their perceptions of guns. They were making a lot of reports of persons in cars with firearms, the majority of these involved an adult loading and checking a semi automatic pistol. One incident involved a lorry driver sighting the occupants of a car in possession of two handguns, he had seen them being passed about in the rear of the vehicle. The assumption was that they were armed and had or were about to commit a serious crime. Observations were put out for the vehicle and the car was eventually stopped on Yeoden Way, which is the main arterial route into Blackpool, by two ARVs. Due to the information and the perceived threat the officers were armed, when they stopped the car and the road was shut for about 30 minutes to create a sterile area to protect the public, whilst the operation was in effect. Two BB guns were found in the back of the car and the occupants went on their way with a warning, as no offences were disclosed. This operation involved not only two armed response vehicles, but also a police dog and handler, as well as three road-policing units and the force helicopter. Therefore depleting a large section of the operational police infrastructure for that area.

## VICTIMS

- **Innocent members of the public** – it must be very shocking to most to be involved or have witnessed what they believe to be an incident involving real guns, as the vast majority of people have only ever seen firearms on the television.
- **Putting police officers in stressful situations where they believe they may have to face real firearms** – this not only relates to the members of the Armed Response Unit, but also those unarmed officers who are being sent initially to these incidents, or may have to deal with them if a decision has been made that it might be a BB gun. There is always in the back of their minds, the thought of is it real or not; as we have all seen how realistic they look in the pictures included previously.
- **ARV officers, waste of time and resources** – officers were being put into positions where they had to make quick decisions at firearms incidents as to whether a real firearm was being used. What if we were forced to fire shots at a person and it was later established they were armed with a BB gun? This also relates to the subsequent investigation into not only the shooting but also all the decision-making processes behind the scenes, which would make life uncomfortable for not only the firearms officers, but the organisation and any other individuals involved.

## **OFFENDERS**

- **Persons who would use BB guns with criminal intent, who would not ordinarily have easy access to firearms-** not a lot can be done with this group as anyone with criminal intent involving firearms is generally mindset and could use the items for illegal purposes, by attempting to pass them off as real firearms. These persons have to be dealt with by the criminal justice system.
- **Persons who purchase the guns as toys but use them in an irresponsible manner** – this is the group we attempted to reach with this initiative, as the majority of them were probably ignorant of both what could happen to them if they used them in an irresponsible manner i.e. possible arrest and prosecution or even worse. Or how their actions affected other members of the public and society as a whole.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Reduce the amount of incidents that both the public were reporting and officers were attending.
- Educate both the distributors and retailers about the responsible selling of these potential weapons.
- Educate those members of the public who purchased them about using them in a responsible manner.
- Establish partnerships to address the problem of these guns.

## EXIT STRATEGY

- The intention from the outset was to review the success or otherwise of the initiative at the end of the summer season. The co-operation is still in place with the partnerships and the strategy can be reinstated at any time should the problem reoccur.
- We let it run over what we perceived to be the problem months and if it was a success to put it on the back burner rather than push it and remind people that they had one of these items in their bottom drawer and resurrect the problem.

## PARTNERSHIPS

- Lancashire Constabulary
- Blackpool Seasonal Traders Association
- Blackpool Evening Gazette
- Radio Wave
- Rock FM radio station
- Blackpool Borough Legal Department
- Blackpool Highways Department
- Local School Head Teachers
- Bay House Hostel
- The Foyer Hostel
- Independent Street Traders
- Western Division Schools Liaison Department

## SHORT TERM RESPONSES

- Create a **poster to be displayed** — the crux of the short-term response was to produce a poster that could be displayed in several locations, that was both informative but also as simple as possible. We wanted to get the message across, highlighting the **YOU** and **YOUR**. It showed the punishment and used the logo of the Blackpool Seasonal Traders Association to show that other organisations in the community were aiding in the solution to this problem.

**Individual visits to novelty and joke shops** — we attempted to visit every retailer on the length of the promenade and adjoining streets to both make sure that they were aware that there was a problem with the misuse of BB guns and leave our details as a point of contact for any advice. We also made an important partnership with the Blackpool Seasonal Traders Association and its chair Mr. David Gee. This organisation was set up to draw together all the seafront traders to give them a common voice on local issues. We had regular meetings with him so we could pass on any information to him and he

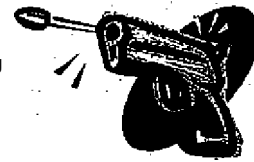
# THINK

## HAVE YOU JUST BOUGHT A "B. B. GUN"?

You now have a responsibility to use this item in a safe and responsible manner.

Your actions may cause others to think that you are in possession of a **REAL** gun.

Although this item is in fact a toy, it has the look of a real firearm and may cause others to believe that you are committing a serious offence



If you use this item in an irresponsible manner you may cause police action, and if a person feels threatened by you, **YOU** may receive up to **TEN YEARS IMPRISONMENT**



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would disseminate it to his members, along with receiving feed back from his members to us.

- **Display the poster next to BB guns for sale** — whilst at the retailers we asked them to display the poster in a prominent location, especially by the guns themselves and also at the till.
- **Display posters at prominent locations** — we had fifty posters laminated and then put them onto lampposts in the affected areas on the promenade, with help and materials from the local highways department. This was an attempt to remind the retailers, but mainly the purchasers of the problem and their responsibility, as well as the punishments if they did not. Also, educate persons who were not aware of BB guns, that they can cause problems in the community. The two local hostels for homeless youths were also visited, the staff were spoken to and posters were provided to be displayed on the notice boards that the youths had access to.

## **MEDIUM TERM RESPONSE**

- **Local Street Traders produced their own leaflet after consultation** — after speaking with Mr Keith Butcher who appeared to have control over the vast majority of the south shore street traders, we agreed that he would produce a leaflet similar to the poster to be handed to every purchaser when they bought a BB gun, from him or any of his team. He was prepared to do this at his own expense and we

regularly monitored him and his sellers in relation to their pedlar's certificates.

- Create **local press interest** — in an attempt to broaden the awareness of this problem it was decided to involve the local media. The Blackpool Evening Gazette were very interested and ran several articles in the paper regarding the dangers of misusing BB guns, with comments from both of us, as well as senior officers, trading standards, head teachers and Mr Gordon Marsden member of parliament for Blackpool South Shore. PC Booth also gave an interview to Alex Feeney at Rock FM radio news and arranged for a piece on Radio Wave.
- **Voluntary prohibition of certain** items — it became apparent that due to the boom in sales of these items that it was a very lucrative business. It was suggested by the retailers that more realistic pump action shotguns and proper air pistols might be offered for sale via the distributors. We visited them and we came to a verbal agreement that some items should not be sold in novelty stores and on the promenade via street traders, but should be left to specialist retailers.

## LONG TERM RESPONSES

- **Visit all primary and high schools in the problem areas** — we delivered a letter explaining the problem and visited all schools in the central and south area of Blackpool. It explained the issues regarding BB guns and asked them to discuss the dangers of their use at assemblies and in a letter home to parents.

We were also invited to speak in assemblies at several schools, this was done to generally years five and six (age 10—11 yrs) in primary schools and it was done in a friendly and informative way. This was done to encourage them to participate and show the local police in a good light. Unfortunately we were unable to speak to secondary school children due to time constraints and their holiday pattern, but when we spoke to secondary school head teachers we were generally handed several BB guns that had been confiscated from pupils. We made sure that the head teachers had all our details so they could easily contact us if any problem arose or they needed further advice.

- **Maintain regular contact with the suppliers and wholesalers** — as stated previously we wanted to keep a regular contact with the suppliers to remind them that the goods they are supplying can cause problems in the local community, as well as other areas of the country. It has recently been discovered that one supplier alone this year is expecting 100 thousand BB guns, and there are another two new suppliers opening, who may stock BB guns. Obviously this amount of BB guns cannot be bought solely by local people and that of the northwest, so therefore this problem may become a national problem, if it is not already.
- **Cultivate the existing partnerships and involve other agencies deemed necessary** — by cultivating the existing partnerships then the operation can be resurrected at any time if the problem should reoccur. But we are keeping our minds open to new ideas and organisations that can assist.



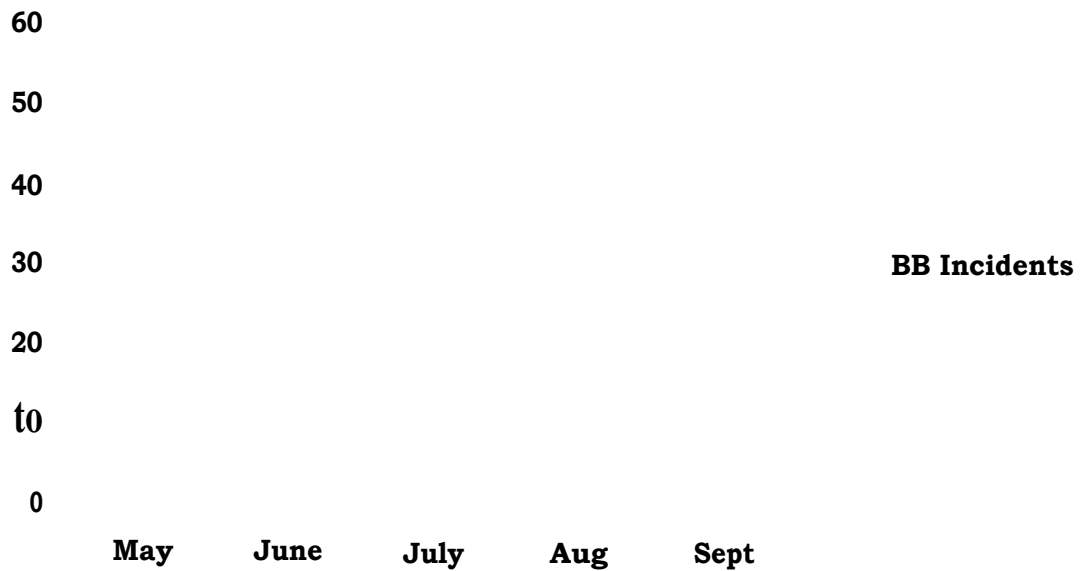
- **Revisit informants from previous BB gun incidents-** as this may now become a national problem, further evidence to show the consequences of the misuse of these items is required before any legislation is passed for them. It is intended to revisit the informants of these incidents and survey them on the emotional harm that it has caused them, both then and afterwards.

## ASSESSMENT

Since the start of this Operation the amount of incidents involving B.B. guns has drastically reduced in the five months that it ran, this information came after interrogating CRS II computerised logging system, as well as the firearms incidents forms.

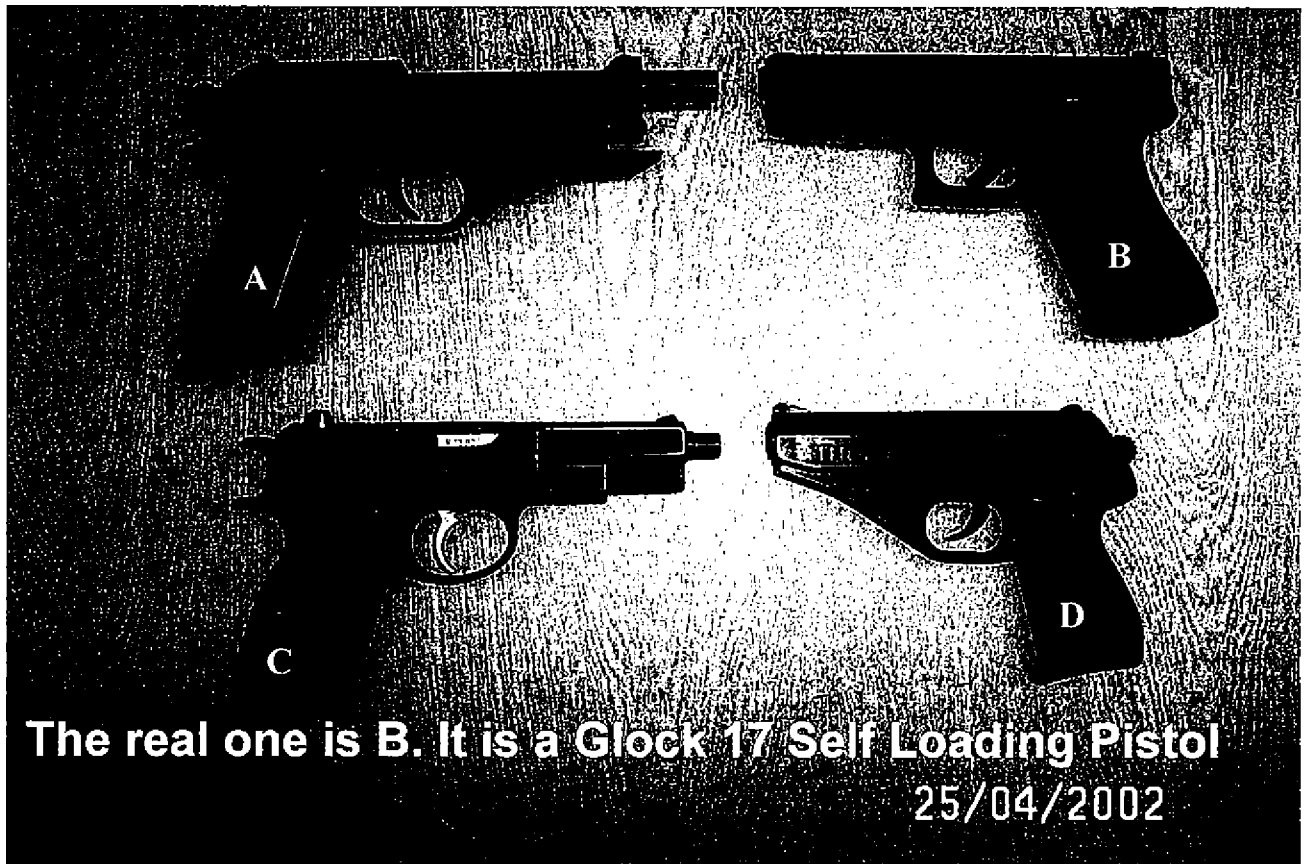
- May 2001: 56 incidents
- June 2001: 31 incidents
- July 2001: 28 incidents
- August 2001: 23 incidents
- September 2001: 16 incidents

These figures showed a 70% overall reduction of incidents attended, when traditionally problems in Blackpool generally peaked in July and August.



- Due to the change in the resulting of incident logs, it was easier to collate the numbers and it was found that rather than rising, they were in fact dropping at a steady rate, dropping from 56 in a month to 16 five months later.
- Letters of appreciation were received from Mr. Gee of the Blackpool Seasonal Traders Association and also Mrs. Martin the acting head teacher of Thames Rd Primary School. We were also informed that the issue had been used to promote responsibility in certain lessons at some of the schools.
- Supervisor's comments — our sergeant at the time PS 1644 Richard Hoyle also expressed a positive opinion on the initiative, complementing us on the operations success.

- This operation was run with minimal costs to the organisation, as besides the officers normal working time only sixteen hours of overtime was used. This was to allow for the posters to be put in place on the promenade, so it did not detract from operational policing. The posters were designed and printed using computers and printers within Blackpool Central Police Office, in order to keep costs to a minimum and ease of acquiring more when required.



The real gun on the above photograph is the top right hand one. All the others can easily bought on the promenade at Blackpool from as little as £1.99

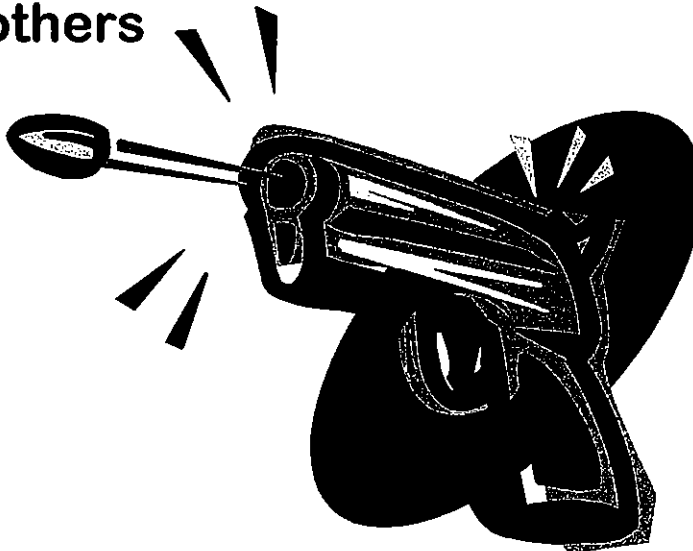
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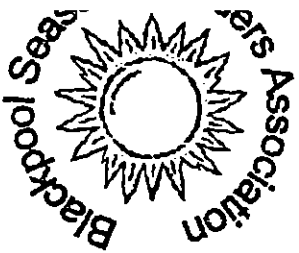
Your actions may cause others to think that you are in possession of a REAL gun.

Although this item is in fact a toy, it has the look of a real firearm and may cause others to believe that you are committing a serious offence



If you use this item in an irresponsible manner you may cause police action, and if a person feels threatened by you, YOU may receive up to TEN YEARS IMPRISONMENT





# Seasonal Traders Association

To Whom It May Concern,

As Chairperson of our association I was fully involved in consultation with P.C. Booth and P.C. Bell in relation to the distribution of an educational poster regarding the issue of pellet guns (B.B. Guns) I was provided with these posters and ensured that all our retail members received one and was given relative advice about the sale and display of these products.

The feedback I received was very positive and my members felt re-assured over this police initiative.

Yours faithfully

David Gee

# Lancashire Constabulary



Date: 19<sup>th</sup> June 2001

Dear Head Teacher

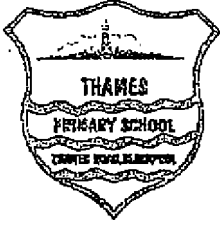
Blackpool police are experiencing a massive problem at the moment with the sale and use of "B.B." (Ball bearing) guns, due to the fact they have a realistic appearance. One of the main problems relates to young persons, innocently playing with them in the street, parks and other public places. The public's perception of guns has been heightened after recent high profile cases and the Police are called following any small incident.

Can you please advise all your pupils at an assembly regarding the dangers of the above problems and attempt to make them think about their actions if playing with these guns, as well as display the attached poster in prominent locations. Could you also mention this problem in any type of newsletter you may send to parents?

It has also become apparent that these guns are regularly being brought into schools and if you wish further advice please do not hesitate to contact me or any member of the Armed Response unit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Booth'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Mark Booth  
Police Constable 1235  
ARMED RESPONSE UNIT  
01253 293933  
01253 604060 Direct dial



# Thames Primary School

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*Acting Headteacher:*  
Mrs J martin

*Chairman of Governors:*  
Mrs .A Hentbrow

*Business Manager:*  
Mrs S wolrc

*Secretary:*  
Mrs 3 Somcrside

To Whom It May Concern,

Thames School wish to thank PC 1235 Booth, who gave up his time and came into our school and talk to the children about the dangers around "BB " guns. The talk brought across to the children the problems relating to the consequences of their misuse.

Thank you once again,

Yours sincerely,

*J.C. Martin*

J.C. Martin

Acting Headteacher



# Operation Aim

## Supervisors comments

I am pleased to be asked to comment on this Operation.

Replica weapons have always been a cause for concern. Even experienced firearms officers of several years standing have difficulty in differentiating between replica and real weapons. Add into the equation the problem caused when "BB" guns become a fashion fad and there is a tragic situation waiting to happen.

Officers of the 'A' Division ARV were responding to incidents, were being authorised and then finding that the weapon seen was a replica 'BB' gun. Liaison with ARV officers in other Divisions revealed that these incidents were not confined to Western Division.

Something had to be done.

Accordingly PC's Ball and Booth looked hard at all aspects of the issue. They then applied this POPs solution. They quickly realised that this was a complicated issue that required more than just a police response.

Having looked at a wide variety of solutions, including approaching the council and apply for a by law banning such items they settled on the approach used.

Making the best use of partnerships both internal and external and including the media at an early stage.

Perusal of the figures for firearms incidents shows that the methods they used were successful. The number of incidents reduced and more importantly firearms were not discharged.

This POPs initiative was well thought out and applied.

Both officers are to be complemented.

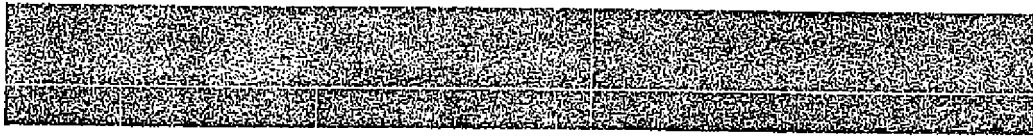
Signed *tic(nd)acyPe*



Blackpool police are urging children to steer clear of BB guns and imitation firearms.

It comes after a 12 year old boy was filmed pointing a pistol at a cashier in a Liverpool off licence.

PC Mark Booth from Blackpool's armed response unit told us whether it was fake or not they aren't to know:



# Lancashire Constabulary

**Paul R Stephenson QPM**      Assistant Chief Constable (Designate)

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29 May 2002

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## **The Tilley Award 2002**

As Chair of the force 'Problem Oriented Policing Steering Group' I am delighted to forward Lancashire Constabulary's nominations for the Tilley Award 2002.

There has been an enthusiastic response from the force's divisions/departments in respect of this Award, therefore the Lancashire Constabulary is submitting a total of 19 applications, all of which have been quality assured.

I personally endorse each individual entry and commend each one on its own particular merit. Many of the nominations were used as case studies in the Constabulary's own Annual 'POP' Conference that took place in May of this year.

# Lancashire Constabulary

## **OPERATION AIM**

### *Crime & Disorder Reduction Category*

PC 1235 Mark Booth / PC 1340 Tony Ball  
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Endorsed By. Deputy Chief Constable Paul Stephenson

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Interrogation of the C.R.S II system, which is the computerised incident logging system in Lancashire, showed that there was an increasing amount of incidents involving BB guns and there had been 56 recorded incidents in Blackpool in May 2001, as well as the increasing amount of firearms incident forms, that the Armed Response Unit complete after each incident they attend when firearms are believed to be being used, showing that a BB gun was recovered. These weapons have the appearance of a real firearm and it is almost impossible to recognise one until a firearms officer has hold of it, which meant that armed officers with authority to carry firearms attended many of these incidents.

Liaison with- Trading Standards revealed that they had conducted their own tests on them and they were in fact legally classing them as toys and could therefore be openly sold to anyone and no license was required to sell or have possession of one.

It was decided to attempt to educate the distributors, sellers, buyers and users about possible misuse of the guns and peoples reactions, by a poster campaign and personal visits with them. This included partnerships with a local traders association, local schools and a press campaign.

This eventually impacted on the amount of recorded incidents drastically in the five months the operatioi ran, as well as the Western Armed Response Unit being deployed less. Positive feedback was received from several sources about how the operation was conducted and its success. The initiative also won this years Rose Bowl Trophy, which is the Lancashire Constabulary P.O.P award.