Buying airsoft replicas and the law

Chances are you are very keen to buy an airsoft replica (if you have not done so already). In 2007 a bill was enacted called the violent crime reduction act, or VCRA. Before this act you could walk into a shop and buy an airsoft replica. Now things are a little more complicated but RIF's (Realistic Imitation Firearms) are still available to almost everyone, if they get involved in airsoft.



A few sections of the VCRA focus on banning the sale and purchase (but not ownership) of RIFs, a category which includes realistically coloured airsoft replicas. After the airsoft community won the long battle against the government and because the abuse of replica firearms was nothing to do with replicas sold to airsoft skirmishers, the government allowed airsoft skirmishers and a few other groups a 'specific defence' against the act which allowed us to continue buying RIF's. So if you are a skirmisher, you are allowed to buy airsoft replicas without restriction. You can get them from retailers in the UK, import them from overseas and buy them from to fellow skirmishers.

There are a number of interpretations as to what a skirmisher is. The most commonly accepted and safe method of becoming one is to attend 3 games at the same site over a time period of more than 2 months (so all 3 games can't be within 2 months). Once you have done this, you may become a member of that skirmish site. To register on the UKARA database you must do the above at a UKARA registered site. You can send an application form off to a UKARA retailer once it has been stamped by your site and you will then be placed on the database. You can then purchase airsoft replicas from any UKARA retailer as they can instantly check that you are a site member by logging in to the database. UKARA registration is absolutely not mandatory for those wishing to buy RIF's, but it there is no cost to add your details to their database (not to be confused with the membership fees which are charged by your site, if any). Just remember, site membership is the only thing that counts legally speaking, UKARA registration is meaningless in law.



Buying your first airsoft replica from a specialist UK airsoft shop is a good idea as they can help you pick the right replica and you are legally entitled to a refund if it is faulty and breaks within the first few games. Many shops will sort new players out with a starter package of magazines, batteries, a charger and a mask so be sure to ask them if they will do you a special deal. If not, shop around (remember to have a look at the list of shops which provide UKAPU member discounts and offers)!

Skirmishers can import airsoft replicas from overseas shops, but you must be able to prove that you are an airsoft skirmisher. UK Border Agency are able to check the UKARA database but if you are not registered with UKARA then Border Agency will often check directly with the owner of the site of which you are a member.

Second hand airsoft replicas can often be bought from web forums and at sites. These are, more often than not, in good condition and can be bought for a significant reduction from the new price. Again, the seller can ask a shop to check the UKARA database, but the verification which the seller will accept is entirely their decision. The seller could face criminal charges if they sold the RIF to a non skirmisher. Verifying entitlement to the specific defence is something which must be taken seriously. Many excellent second hand replicas can be found on the web forums listed on our links page. Buying a replica at a playing site is easier than doing it over the internet as the seller can see you playing a game and can see that you are buying it to use in a game, so they don’t won’t require further verification.

Keeping a diary of games you have attended, signed by the game organiser, may help to prove that you are a skirmisher. It certainly doesn’t hurt to have your own paper record to refer to. A ‘skirmish diary’ is also a nice record to keep.



If you are not yet a skirmisher then you are able to purchase ‘IFs’, which is an imitation firearm. IFs are regular airsoft replicas, but with the bodies painted in a bright colour or with a transparent body. These are often called two-tones. Once you are officially regarded as a skirmisher, you **are** allowed to paint them a realistic colour, or replace external parts with those which look more realistic. As you only have to attend 3 games, during which time you can make an informed decision about which replica you want, it is a much better idea to put off buying an airsoft replica until you are allowed to buy a RIF.

If you are under 18 you cannot legally purchase a RIF or IF, no exceptions. You can however, at any age, legally be given a RIF as a gift by an adult who is entitled to the specific defence. You can also be gifted an IF by an adult who is not entitled to the specific defence, hence the trend for younger players using IF’s gifted to them by non skirmishing parents, to avoid having to hire a replica until they turn 18. Under 18’s are allowed to ‘manufacture’ RIFs once they are entitled to the defence, that means to say that they themselves can paint their two tone black once they have become a skirmisher (many sites have junior membership schemes).

Being a member of the Police or armed forces changes nothing as regards the VCRA if you will be purchasing them for private use at skirmishes. Firearms licence holders are also no more entitled than anyone else. The exception is if they are being purchased by a law enforcement organisation for training purposes.

UKAPU members are encouraged to send an email to one of the addresses on our contact page if they are still unsure of how to comply with the VCRA.

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