

For Information

Legislative Council Panel on Security

The Handling of Guns by Police Officers

PURPOSE

This paper sets out the general policy on the handling of handguns by police officers, with particular reference to the security and safety aspects.

BACKGROUND

2. In the morning of 9 February 2007, during a scuffle in Yaumatei, a police officer's handgun was dislodged from his holster and fell to the ground. The magazine ejected and several rounds of ammunition came out of the magazine. With the assistance of other police officers at the scene, the officer quickly retrieved his handgun, magazine and all the ammunition. The incident has caused some concern.

3. A complaint against the Police was subsequently lodged by a member of the public in respect of the incident and is being investigated. In accordance with the established procedures, the investigation findings will be submitted to the Independent Police Complaints Council for consideration before the complainant is informed of the result of the complaint. It would be inappropriate to divulge further details of the investigation at this stage as this might pre-empt the findings in relation to the case. Nonetheless, we set out below the general policy of the Police in the handling of handguns.

GENERAL POLICY

4. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) attaches great importance to the safe handling and retention of handguns by both uniformed and plainclothed police officers. In general, police officers on operational duties draw their handguns before reporting on duty and they are required to return them to the respective armouries when they go off duty. On the other hand, to cater for their operational need, crime streamed officers are generally issued with handguns on a personal basis and it is not necessary for these to be drawn and returned to an armoury on a daily basis.

5. To protect the safety of the public and police officers, the HKPF has put in place detailed arrangements and issued comprehensive orders on the use and handling of handguns. In general, handguns can only be used to protect any person from death or serious bodily injury, or to effect the arrest of any person who has just committed a serious and violent crime and who attempts to evade such arrest, if no lesser degree of force may achieve the purpose. Handguns may be drawn from a holster as a precautionary measure if an officer considers that he is justified to do so under the foregoing situations. There are also detailed orders regarding the carriage of handguns and use of holsters. The orders require, inter alia, that a handgun should be carried in a Force approved holster properly secured to a belt fastened around the waist. Police officers are required to observe these orders and arrangements closely.

6. The safe carrying of handguns is one of the key modules of tactical firearms training for officers. In particular, officers receive one-on-one practical training on snatching-prevention skills when they undergo recruit training at the Police College. After graduation, they receive refresher training three times a year during their handgun training courses. These drills seek to reinforce an instinctive reflex action should any attempt be made to snatch a handgun. Moreover, officers are taught to maintain a safe distance when dealing with suspects.

7. The Police also place great emphasis on safety aspects in their sourcing of firearms and ancillary equipment. The holsters used by officers in the HKPF are carefully selected to allow officers to respond effectively in emergency situations while at the same time incorporating safety and anti-snatching features. All serviceable handguns currently used by members of HKPF have safety features which will prevent them from being accidentally discharged even if they are dropped onto a hard surface from a height.