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February 2015
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Illegal Explosives Devices

Illegal explosive devices are often manufactured and used during the fireworks season. The explosive compositions in these devices are typically extremely sensitive to heat, shock, electrostatic discharge, and friction and may initiate unexpectedly causing serious injury or death. The risks associated with these devices are further compounded because the persons manufacturing, transporting and using these devices often do not have the knowledge, skills, and experience required for such activities.

Many law enforcement agencies consider these explosive devices, commonly referred to as M-80s, M-100s, quarter sticks, cherry bombs, and silver salutes, illegal because they exceed the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's explosive weight limits for consumer fireworks. Additionally, these devices may also be illegal under similar state laws and local ordinances.

M-80



Average Size: 5/8" diameter, 1 1/2" long.

Average Load: approximately 3 grams explosive mixture.

Risk Factor: Damage to fingers, hands, and eyes.

M-100, Silver Salute

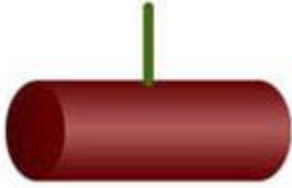


Average Size: 1" diameter, 2 1/2" long.

Average Load: approximately 9 grams explosive mixture.

Risk Factor: Severe damage to face, arms and body.

M-250

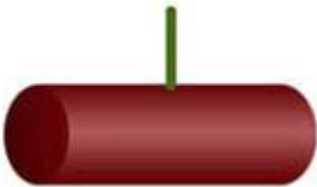


Average Size: 1” diameter, 3” long.

Average Load: approximately 13 grams explosive mixture.

Risk Factor: Severe crippling, disfiguring injuries.

M-1000, Quarter Stick



Average Size: 1” diameter, 6” long.

Average Load: approximately 25-30 grams explosive mixture.

Risk Factor: Extremely severe injuries to body, has caused death.

The U.S. Department of Transportation regulations forbid the transportation of any unapproved explosive. These explosive devices typically are not submitted for testing and have not been approved under the Hazardous Materials Regulations for transportation. Additionally, under federal explosives law it is illegal to engage in the business of manufacturing explosives without a license, to improperly store explosives, to sell or distribute explosives to any person who does not hold an ATF license or permit, to receive explosives without a license or permit, or to transport explosives materials without a license or permit.

Some indicators that a device may be an “illegal explosive device” are:

- It consists of a red, silver, or brown spiral wound cardboard tube or similar product with a green hobby fuse.
- It may be 1 to 6 inches long and up to an inch or more in diameter.
- It is sold in non-commercial locations, such as out of a vehicle or residence.
- Individual in possession has no evidence of receipt, commercial packaging, or cannot identify a purchase location.

It should be noted that many legitimate commercial firework manufacturers advertise and sell products “labeled” like those shown above but all are limited to 50 milligrams of composition regardless of the cardboard tube size, and they meet the CPSC requirements for consumer fireworks.

Each year ATF investigates explosives accidents involving the manufacture of explosive devices such as these. These accidents often result in serious injury to or death of person(s) and extensive damage to property. ATF cautions the public against handling suspected illegal explosive devices and urges everyone to report the manufacture or sale of such devices to their local ATF office or by calling ATF's toll-free hotline at 1-888-ATF-BOMB (1-888-283-2662).

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