

18 U.S.C. 921(a): DEFINITIONS

18 U.S.C. 922(a)(1)(A): LICENSES REQUIRED

18 U.S.C. 923(a): LICENSES REQUIRED

27 CFR 478.11: DEFINITIONS

27 CFR 478.41(a): LICENSES REQUIRED

Any person who installs “drop in” replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms does not manufacture a firearm, and does not need to be licensed as a manufacturer under the Gun Control Act. A “drop in” replacement part is one that can be installed in or on an existing, fully assembled firearm without drilling, cutting, or machining. A replacement part, whether factory original or otherwise, has the same design, function, substantially the same dimensions, and does not otherwise affect the manner in which the weapon expels a projectile by the action of an explosive. Any person who is licensed as a dealer, which includes a gunsmith, and who installs “drop in” replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms as described in this ruling does not need to be licensed as a manufacturer under the Gun Control Act. Any person who is engaged in the business of installing “drop in” replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms as described in this ruling must be licensed as a dealer, which includes a gunsmith, under the Gun Control Act.

ATF Rul. 2009-2

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has received inquiries from Federally licensed firearms manufacturers and dealers/gunsmiths seeking clarification as to whether installing “drop in” replacement parts in or on existing firearms constitutes a manufacturing activity that requires a manufacturer’s license.

Persons may buy “drop in” replacement firearm parts to replace worn or broken original factory parts. Replacement parts, such as barrels, triggers, hammers, and sears have been designed so that they can be dropped in to replace existing parts on fully assembled firearms. A “drop in” replacement part is one that can be installed in or on an existing, fully assembled firearm (not solely a frame or receiver) without drilling, cutting, or machining.

The Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA), Title 18, United States Code (U.S.C.), Chapter 44, provides, in part, that no person shall engage in the business of importing, manufacturing, or dealing in firearms until he has filed an application with and received a license to do so from the Attorney General. A “firearm” is defined by 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(3) to include any weapon (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive, and the frame or receiver of any such weapon. The term “manufacturer” is defined by 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(10) and 27 CFR 478.11 as any person engaged in the business of manufacturing firearms or ammunition for purposes of sale or distribution. The term “dealer” is defined by 18 U.S.C. 921(a)(11) and 27 CFR 478.11 to include any person engaged in the business of selling firearms at wholesale or retail, or repairing firearms or making or fitting special barrels, stocks, or trigger mechanisms to firearms.

In Revenue Ruling 55-342, ATF's predecessor agency interpreted the meaning of the terms "manufacturer" and "dealer" for the purpose of firearms licensing under the Federal Firearms Act, the precursor statute to the GCA. It was determined that a licensed dealer could assemble firearms from component parts on an individual basis, but could not engage in the business of assembling firearms from component parts in quantity lots for purposes of sale or distribution without a manufacturer's license. Since then, ATF has similarly and consistently interpreted the term "manufacturer" under the GCA to mean any person who engages in the business of making firearms, by casting, assembly, alteration, or otherwise, for the purpose of sale or distribution. Such persons must have a manufacturer's license under the GCA.

Installing "drop in" parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms, whether factory original or otherwise, does not result in any alteration to the original firearms so long as they are replacement parts. A replacement part, whether factory original or otherwise, has the same design, function, substantially the same dimensions, and does not otherwise affect the manner in which the weapon expels a projectile by the action of an explosive.

Held, any person who installs "drop in" replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms does not need to be licensed as a manufacturer under the Gun Control Act.

Held further, a "drop in" replacement part is one that can be installed in or on an existing, fully assembled firearm without drilling, cutting, or machining. A replacement part, whether factory original or otherwise, has the same design, function, substantially the same dimensions, and does not otherwise affect the manner in which the weapon expels a projectile by the action of an explosive.

Held further, any person who is licensed as a dealer, which includes a gunsmith, and who installs "drop in" replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms as described in this ruling does not need to be licensed as a manufacturer under the Gun Control Act.

Held further, any person who is engaged in the business of installing "drop in" replacement parts in or on existing, fully assembled firearms as described in this ruling must be licensed as a dealer, which includes a gunsmith, under the Gun Control Act.

Date approved: January 12, 2009

Michael J. Sullivan
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