

Firearms ban frustrates firearms owners as ban list continues to grow

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Almost two months have passed since Prime Minister Trudeau introduced legislation banning of 1,500 different 'assault-style' weapons in Canada, and many gun owners in the Caledon are still struggling to come to terms with the decision.

The ban came shortly after the tragic scenes in Nova Scotia back in April, where 51-year-old Gabriel Wortman set fire to his house, and later killed 22 people, using a variety of firearms, after a dispute with his spouse. Today, all military-style assault weapons are prohibited to be used, sold or transported in Canada.

'Because of gun violence, people are dying, families are grieving, and communities are suffering. It must end. Assault-style firearms designed for military use have no place in Canada,' said Trudeau in a media release. 'By removing them from our streets, we will limit the devastating effects of gun-related violence and help make our country safer.'

The new legislation has both its supporters and detractors. Here in our region, members of the Dufferin Northern Peel Anglers' and Hunters Association have been most impacted by the decision. The organization's trap chairman, Dale Krushel, believes the Prime Minister has made a mistake by essentially grouping law-abiding gun owners and criminals together and painting them with the same brush.

'As far as the range goes, there will be minimal impact. It's the impact on the individuals that have found those particular firearms to be of interest for their collections, and for their enjoyment. Now all of a sudden, they can't use them,' he explained.

He added, 'That's the equivalent of saying 'you came here with your car, you've paid your insurance, you pay taxes for the roads every year, but your car can go over 80 kilometers per hour, which means it's very dangerous, so you have to park it in your driveway and surrender your keys'.'

The Dufferin Northern Peel Anglers' and Hunters Association is a private conservation club, that was formed back in the 1930s. Today, the organization boasts up to 350 local members. The club is located on approximately 125 acres of trails, ponds and greenery just outside of Orangeville, with the land containing a variety of shooting ranges for firearms, such as rifles, handguns and trap.

Krushel says the association has spent a considerable amount of time building its education programs, which provides those who are unfamiliar with firearms the opportunity to learn first-hand how dangerous they can be, and how they should be properly used. They also provide guidance to individuals who hope to one day own a firearm.

To obtain a firearms license, also known as the Possession and Acquisition License (PAL) in Canada, interested parties have to jump through many, many hoops. It is a lengthy process, beginning with the Canadian Firearms Safety Course, which covers basic practices, ammunition, how to safely operate, safe handling, firing techniques and procedures, responsibilities, and the evolution of firearms. Following the completion of that course, individuals must pass a safety exam before submitting an application. A series of background checks are completed after the application is submitted to the RCMP, who require 45 days to process.

This essentially means that anyone with any sort of criminal record, or crime against them of any sort, cannot own a firearms licence or firearm in Canada.

'As a PAL owner, you are scrutinized every day, 365 days a year,' Krushel says. 'If you look at the system that we have, and the number of crimes that are committed by legal firearm owners, it works. Most crimes are committed by people who don't have a license.'

The counter argument from anti-gun lobbyists is that fewer weapons in legal circulation in Canada will lead to a decline in violent gun crimes. Hamilton physician, Dr. David Koff, is a member of the Doctors for Protection from Guns, a group made up of individuals in the health care sector who have united together to petition and educate the public about the dangers associated with firearms.

Dr. Koff has been a member for over a year and joined after witnessing firsthand the destruction caused by guns.

"I've been really shocked while in practice, to see the violence and impact of guns and how you can erase a life in no time," said Dr. Koff. "Seeing so much violence south of the border, and seeing people getting killed every year in the U.S. by guns, I thought, well, that shouldn't happen here."

The weapon ban recommendation was approved by the Cabinet behind closed doors, and implemented through order-in-council, rather than being discussed through Parliament and made into a legislation. Prime Minister Trudeau stated that the plan was always to ban these types of weapons, but the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted firearms owner's the ability to turn over the weapons. Owners have been requested to leave the weapons locked up, and safely kept, until further instructions are given.

Dr. Koff believes the federal government made the right decision to ban these styles of weapons, expressing his belief that only members of the Canadian Armed Forces should be allowed to handle assault-style guns.

"No one, unless you are in the military, needs to have this type of weaponry. And these weapons are designed to inflict high number of casualties in a short amount of time," Dr. Koff explained.

After the ban was announced, the National Firearms Association, Canada's largest firearms advocacy organization representing firearms owners, spoke out against the decision, backing an action that was filed in the Federal Court by Ottawa-based lawyer Solomon Friedman to revoke the order in council decision.

"The NFA will both be joining this case as an intervenor, and actively supporting Mr. Friedman's efforts. Solomon Friedman is an excellent lawyer and acknowledged expert in firearms law. He literally wrote the book on the subject. He has argued firearms cases at all levels of court in this country, including the Supreme Court of Canada. We are pleased to provide Mr. Friedman with our expertise in these matters, and we intend to support fundraising efforts in aid of his clients' case and in aid of our own intervention," stated NFA President, Sheldon Clare.

Since the announcement back in May, reports have shown that the Liberal government has been quietly continuing to add to the list of prohibited firearms in Canada. Firearms such as certain types of shotguns used in hunting. The list has grown from 1500 said firearms, to approximately 9,500 different models and makes. The RCMP has recently seen criticism towards the decision to make these additions without public notice.

For more information, please visit rcmp-grc.gc.ca.