

Response ID ANON-QCCC-Z8H4-8

Submitted to **Laser pointers: call for evidence**

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About you

What is your name?

Name:

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What is your organisation (if applicable)?

Comment here:

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots

Please select a respondent type

Other

Please tick this box if you would like your response to be treated as confidential

Please treat my response as confidential:

No

Nature of the problem

1 What do you consider to be the scale of the problem with laser pointers? Is the problem specific to high-powered laser pointers (those with a strength of 5 mW or above), or a particular class of laser pointers? What evidence do you have to support your view?

Comment here:

The consultation document outlines the number of eye damage cases in children. It would be reasonable to assume that, without action to prevent this in the future, the number of cases will increase year on year and especially as more and more higher-powered devices enter the UK.

Laser 'attacks' on aircraft of all types, including airliners carrying large numbers of passengers are a regular occurrence around the world and particularly prevalent at our major airports. The phenomena is worldwide but any accident in UK could have a direct impact on UK citizens on the ground as well as passengers in UK airspace.

One of our members has been subjected to a possible car hijack attempt at night where a laser was used.

Without adequate disincentive to carriage of higher-powered lasers, the prevalence of lasers used to distract, intimidate or blind could increase significantly and lasers become the 'weapon of choice' on the streets. We believe that applying 'fines', that must be scaled according to 'means', is no deterrent to many potential perpetrators.

The problem is caused principally by easily portable (hand-sized), higher-powered (greater than 1mW) devices that exceed the level at which they can cause permanent eye damage.

Reports of child eye damage were made to the UK Laser Working Group by Health England, as were reports of laser incidents concerning aircraft by CAA. The Air Pilots conducted a survey of members. Alos reported to UK Laser Working Group that confirmed there was significant under-reporting of attacks on airliners with pilots becoming increasingly convinced that their reports were being ignored by the authorities.

One of our members was subjected to a laser incident while driving in London, when occupants of a car that had been following him shone an extremely powerful green laser into his rear view mirror. The resultant dazzle/disorientation was alarming, threatened his ability to control his car and left him worried that those following were intent on criminal activity. He then drove to the nearest police station, at which opoint the following car drove away.

2 How well do you think the current legislation is working? Is the current guidance on safe use of laser products sufficient?

Comment here:

The occasional successful prosecution of people using laser devices inappropriately, whether through malicious intent or lack of understanding, does not match the prevalence of such incidents, nor their potential severity in terms of personal injury and significant number of fatalities.

Current legislation makes it difficult to apprehend someone who may have carried out a laser attack, whether on an aircraft or ship pilot, a train or car driver or a child, even when someone is carrying a high-powered device. New Zealand has introduced licencing of all lasers stronger than 1mW and an offence for anyone

carrying a device above that power without a suitable licence.

3 Is the current guidance on manufacturing and importing laser pointers sufficient?

Comment here:

Current guidance does not prevent the import of extremely high-powered devices such as those used against aircraft, so is self-evidently not sufficient.

It is simplicity itself to find high-powered lasers available for sale; a 3W blue (445nm) laser is available at:

https://www.lucklaser.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=33&products_id=190&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI6fzitpzA1gIVipPtCh31tgCSEAAYAAEgJoLvD_BwE

This site does not advertise anything less than 20mW and includes hand-held devices up to 5W.

4 Do you have any further evidence about the nature and misuse of laser pointers?

Comment here:

All reported above

Legitimate uses and relevant power levels

5 What legitimate uses are there for high-powered laser pointers?

Comment here:

- Military target ranging

and designation. (Eye-safe devices have been used for both applications for many years to allow peace-time training within the UK.

- Astronomy societies have reported that they need only a device that will point; therefore, they can use low powered devices and still carry out their activity effectively. They are NOT a legitimate user of higher-powered devices.

- Survey and building trade applications should be possible with eye-safe lasers as they operate over much smaller ranges than military devices.

Industrial and scientific applications will need devices of sufficiently high power to cut, etc. This is a legitimate activity that could be covered effectively by licencing higher powered devices and controlling their importation accordingly. [This is, in general, feasible for shotguns etc. that are manufactured in and imported into UK for personal use in relatively high numbers.]

6 Have you ever purchased, sold or made a laser pointer? If so, can you provide more information about where you bought or sold the product (or its component parts), and what the intended use was?

Comment here:

Our members have purchased and use small laser pointers for use when giving presentations. When these first became available, everyone was warned not to shine it directly at another person.

We have conducted internet searches of higher powered devices and these appear to be readily available for sale in the Far East.

My personal device is a Kensington combined laser-pointer/ PowerPoint remote controller. It carries the following details: Class 2 Laser, Model #33374, CE marked N1368, operating frequency 2.407Hz (red); it also has a laser warning yellow triangle. It was purchased on-line about 7 years ago for use while giving presentations. The remote controller function is used regularly, the laser pointer very rarely.

7 (Enforcement Bodies) Do you know/can you estimate the number of manufacturers, retailers, importers and/or distributors within your Local Authority area?

Comment here:

Not applicable

Specific problem of power and measurement

8 What strength laser pointers do you make/sell? What is the price of each strength laser pointer that you make/sell? Is this a seasonal product (e.g. do you sell more at Christmas)? How many do you sell annually?

Comment here:

Not applicable

9 What is your target market?

Comment here:

Not applicable

Policy options under consideration

10 (If you are an enforcement authority) Have you undertaken any enforcement actions with respect to laser pointers, and if so what were they?

Comment here:

Not applicable

11 (If you are an enforcement authority) What do you estimate as being the level of compliance with the General Product Safety Regulations for laser pointers in your area? On what evidence do you base this?

Comment here:

Not applicable

12 Do you think a licensing system to control the sale and purchase of laser pointers would be effective?

Comment here:

Yes

13 What do you estimate the costs of implementing a licensing system to be? How should these be recovered?

Comment here:

Not applicable

14 How might a licensing regime operate? Who should administer a licensing system? Who should enforce it?

Comment here:

The police operate shotgun and firearm licencing but there are alternative agencies/bodies that issue licences granting certain privileges, e.g. DVLA, CAA.

Enforcement of any licencing system should sit with the police.

15 Are you aware of any other licensing systems in the UK or in other countries – either for laser pointers or for similar products - which might provide the Government with a useful comparison?

Comment here:

As mentioned above, shotgun and firearm licencing provides a restraint on the availability of such weapons for malicious or criminal purpose; like most countermeasures, it is not 100% effective but it does place firearms and shotguns into a category where they can only be obtained outside licencing system through deliberate criminal act. Furthermore, no-one legitimately holds one of these weapons without an understanding of their responsibilities for safe use, carriage and storage.

16 Do you think that a ban on advertising laser pointers would be effective? Why?

Comment here:

An advertising ban would prevent whetting a public appetite for such devices. However, it might also cause people to search on-line for any device, rather than make them aware of legitimate lower-powered devices that would fulfil their needs without risking others.

17 How else might Government and other public authorities increase public awareness about the potential dangers of laser pointers?

Comment here:

An awareness campaign, that highlights the dangers that can be caused by higher-powered lasers, and the jeopardy faced by anyone carrying such a device – supported by a flurry of police stop and search of anyone near a building from which a laser attack has been made as well as random or intelligence-led searches would increase public awareness and inhibit carriage and purchase.

A campaign to link lasers' potential adverse impact on the safety of the travelling public, so their ownership/carriage/use became socially unacceptable (in the same way as drink-driving/drug-driving campaigns) could be effective.

18 How else do you think that the supply of high-powered laser pointers could be restricted? Why?

Comment here:

If there is no demand, there will be no incentive for supply. Extinguishing demand will require a shift towards social unacceptability of carrying and non-eye-safe laser in a public place.

19 Do you have any other comments or views which might inform the Government's recommendations?

Comment here:

The penultimate measure of part 4 of the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill presented to Parliament in February addressed the threat from lasers to not only our members but also to air travellers, all vehicle drivers and the public. The Bill was progressing well with cross-party support before the June 2017 prorogation. We were dismayed that it was not re-introduced in this June's Queen's Speech. Draft legislation to counter the threat of malicious use of lasers against transport already exists; it does not need to be prepared.

We urge its re-introduction to parliament at the earliest opportunity.