

**Industry Circular**

Number: 83-11

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Department of the Treasury  
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms  
Washington, DC 20226

**WARNING****WARNING****WARNING****POTENTIAL EXPLOSION HAZARD IN AUTOMATIC AMMUNITION RELOADING MACHINES**

To Firearms and Explosives Licensees, Law Enforcement Agencies, and Others Concerned:

**PURPOSE:** This circular has been published to inform you of a potential explosion hazard relating to a malfunctioning of automatic ammunition reloading equipment.

In 1982, ATF assisted in the investigation of an explosion at a commercial reloading plant which resulted in the death of 2 individuals and injuries to 10 others. Investigation of this industrial accident revealed that the explosion was initiated by the ignition of a primer during its seating in a cartridge primer pocket. This ignition source from a nonaligned primer started a chain reaction resulting in an explosion of the machine's smokeless powder feeder canister.

The manufacturing process of many automatic reloading machines includes both a bulk powder feeder and a primer seating operation in close proximity to one another. Interviews with reloaders reveal that small explosions of nonaligned primers are fairly common in occurrence. The incident of the exploding bulk powder canister is an uncommon situation but it is not without precedent; other similar explosive incidents have been noted in the past several years.

The Explosives Control Act of 1970 in part provides that ... "The Secretary (Department of Treasury) is authorized to inspect the sites of explosions or fires, in which there is reason to believe that explosive materials were involved, in order that if any such incident has been brought about by accidental means, precautions may be taken to prevent similar accidents from occurring."

It has now become apparent that the close proximity of the primer seating operation to the bulk powder canister could be responsible for some of these incidents. In the interest of public safety, ATF therefore suggests that you review housekeeping and safety procedures relative to your automatic reloading production process and utilize every precaution to prevent other similar incidents from occurring.

**INQUIRIES:** Inquiries concerning this circular should refer to its number and be addressed to the Assistant Director (Criminal Enforcement), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20226 (ATTN: Chief, Explosives Division).

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen E. Higgins".

Director