

The Management of Armouries and Firearms in the Private Security and Risk Sector.

Best Practices

By Echelon International

If you are a member of SCEG and reading this there is a good chance you have used, work with or know people that use firearms as part of their role to provide security and defence services. There are several misconceptions and unhelpful reporting in the media about the way private security companies manage their people and their controlled goods, particularly firearms. Whilst that reporting has been unhelpful and potentially damaging to the image of the sector it has shone a light on what constitutes good practice for the control, movement and security of firearms. SCEG members recognise the importance of regulation and standards for the use of firearms and this short paper seeks to highlight some of the key considerations and best practices members may wish to consider.

At Echelon International Ltd we have made it our business to support those within the security and defence sectors attain maximum equipment serviceability and availability in a safe and proper manner. To do so we look at each the individual needs of each client needs and blend our expertise in Equipment Care along with the client's Legal obligations to formulate a bespoke action plan to maximise compliance. So how do we do this?

The Legal Framework

Firstly, it is imperative that companies considering the procurement and use of firearms should seek legal advice on what can and cannot be done in the jurisdictions they intend to operate. For example, the legal obligations of a client using a Vessel Based Armoury operating in International Waters will be different to one operating in the Territorial Waters of a sovereign state or nation. Equally land based entities operating in different jurisdictions such as Iraq or Afghanistan will have different legal requirements. Furthermore, using a third party to hold and manage their firearms may not defer their liability and this would depend on the jurisdiction they operating in and legal advice should be so this must also be checked. Echelon International thoroughly recommends companies taking appropriate legal advice and will upon request provide introductions to lawyers with expertise in this complex field.

Gap Analysis

Secondly, we recommend companies engage with a competent third party to conduct a Gap Analysis of their Armouries (owned or otherwise) along with their Systems for the safe use and management of firearms. The key word here being *competent*. Different jurisdictions and different equipments require bespoke and specific advice. By engaging a competent third-party the company will potentially reduce their liability and by seeking professional advice, - that is not tainted by a conflict of interest - they have the opportunity to mitigate risk and fulfil their compliance obligations. Furthermore, a Gap Analysis whilst helping organisations to meet their obligations but will also identify specific corrective actions to minimise risk and improve their best practices for the benefit of their stakeholders and clients.

Corrective Action Plan

Once a Gap Analysis has been completed it is important to remedy any legislative non-conformance as soon as possible whilst concurrently dealing with any Health, Safety and Environmental issues associated with the findings. A good and competent third party will be able to provide a detailed Corrective Action Plan based upon their findings that consider the entities' obligations and options to remedy shortcomings identified. These actions will provide assurance to stakeholders and improve efficiency. In addition, they can potentially minimize exposure to reputational damage, unwanted legal costs and interruptions to your business model.

Monitor and Review

There are inherent risk in the carriage and security of firearms, but these risks can be mitigated by third party Periodic Equipment Care Inspections. Echelon International staff have witnessed the incorrect use of firearms and weapons carried or stored in unsafe conditions that potentially could severely compromise the safety of the user and others around them. Often the provenance of the weapon is not known to the individuals or the company and this needs remedial action. Armouries too are often inadequate and poorly designed and fail to meet the required standards. Audits have highlighted a range of safety and security concerns:

- Inadequate storage and security of firearms.
- Armouries not fit for purpose.
- After action or unintentional discharge of firearms without adequate investigation and reporting.
- Incorrect assembly of weapons.
- Unsuitable and potentially unstable ammunition.
- Inadequate fault reporting.

By initiating third party Periodic Equipment Care Inspections and nominating suitably competent custodians and staff within their organisations to manage their day to day needs of Armoury and Firearms management, the licence carrier minimises their exposure to risk and should be able to monitor and review its success or implement timely corrective actions.

Summary

This article is not intended to be exhaustive but to highlight the need to engage a suitably competent and professional third party to conduct an audit to enable the companies to mitigate the risk to their operations, reputation and costs whilst meeting their compliance obligations. We are aware that budgets are being squeezed but there can be no compromise with firearms management and safety – the risks are too great.

At Echelon International Ltd, we as members of SCEG are fortunate to be part of a plethora of industry experts and professionals that are bound by a common goal of improving the standards in our industry and by a collegiate approach promote best practices for the common good.

Echelon International Ltd are a group of Equipment Care consultants with over 100 years combined experience of working within the private and government sectors as certified Armourers and Equipment Care specialists.

If you wish to discuss your Armoury and Firearms management needs confidentially, please contact info@echelon-international.com

SCEG Members will receive a discounted rate on any services agreed.

Yours sincerely

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