



Feb 2026 - Latest update on lead restrictions

In 2021, DEFRA commissioned the HSE to examine the use of lead in ammunition. Following a series of public consultations and ongoing engagement with the British Shooting Sports Council, the HSE submitted its final recommendations to the government in December 2024.

This week, a statutory instrument was laid before Parliament, beginning the legislative process that will bring these recommendations into law. The new regulations will be phased in, with a full ban on possessing, using, or selling lead ammunition (subject to a few exemptions) coming into force on 1 April 2029.

Shotgun Ammunition

Shotgun shooters are likely to experience the most significant impact. Ammunition manufacturers will transition to non-lead alternatives and begin running down existing stock, meaning restrictions will become increasingly apparent well before April 2029.

- The possession, use, and sale of lead shot for live quarry shooting, as well as for indoor and outdoor target shooting, will be prohibited from 1 April 2029, with exemptions granted only for elite athletes.

Shotgun cartridge manufacturers have already heavily invested in R&D and machinery to produce effective steel alternatives to lead that meet the needs of most shooters. Only owners of guns with Damascus barrels and those using .410 shotguns are likely to require non-steel options.

Rifle Ammunition

Rifle Ammunition for Live Quarry Shooting

- The use and sale of large-calibre bullets (≥ 6.17 mm / .243 and above) for live quarry shooting will be prohibited from 1 April 2029.
- Small-calibre ammunition (< 6.17 mm / .243 and below) will remain unrestricted for live quarry shooting.

Rifle Ammunition for Target Shooting

- The use of lead bullets for outdoor target shooting will be prohibited from 1 April 2028, with a two-year transition period.
- However, a derogation will be available for ranges able to implement a lead management and recycling system approved by the competent authority (Environmental agency). This exemption will allow established facilities such as Bisley to continue operating as normal.
- Ranges unable to implement any recognised lead management and recycling control measures will be required to transition to non-lead alternatives within the two-year timeframe.

Airguns

After initial consultations with the HSE and subsequent recommendations to DEFRA, it was agreed that airguns would be removed from the scope of the lead restriction.

- Consequently, the sale and use of lead airgun pellets remain unrestricted for both target shooting and live quarry purposes.

Exemptions

The statutory instrument outlines several specific exemptions, including:

- Indoor shooting activities using bullets. These are exempt because bullet use can be controlled, and the lead can be collected and recycled effectively.
- Use by the Armed Forces and Police. The GTA has expressed concerns regarding potential supply-chain impacts, as civilian and government ammunition production is closely interconnected. It is not yet clear how the lead restriction may affect long-term availability.
- Athletes competing at national and international levels, such as the Commonwealth Games or the Olympics. Competitors will be required to provide evidence of their participation and carefully manage their ammunition usage.
- Shooting activities on registered ranges that have approved lead management and recycling systems in place. These ranges will be able to continue operating

under the exemption.

- Museums and other specialist applications, where lead ammunition forms part of a collection or serves a specific technical purpose.

Paul Green, Technical Director

tech@gtaltd.co.uk

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