

## AIRSOFT WEAPONS FOR TACTICAL TRAINING



By Officer Bob Goepfert.

As Law Enforcement professionals, we understand the importance of ongoing training in weapons and tactics in order to maintain mission readiness. Unfortunately, many agencies simply do not have the resources necessary in order to train as often as they would like. In a perfect world, we would all have a 360 degree live fire shoot house and an unlimited supply of ammunition with which to train. In reality, ammunition costs and availability, as well as the lack of live fire training facilities severely limit our ability to conduct realistic training exercises.

One solution that is becoming increasingly popular with Law Enforcement is the introduction of AIRSOFT weapons into their training regiment.

### **Introduction to Airsoft;**

Airsoft weapons are basically 1:1 scale replicas of actual firearms that fire round plastic pellets. These pellets are fired at a relatively low velocity (Aprox. 300 FPS). Most of these weapons look exactly the same as the actual firearm and many actually function similar to the real thing. Some are so realistic, that they are actually built on receivers licensed by the manufacturers of real firearms (I.E. ArmaLite.)

The higher end Airsoft weapons are such exacting copies of the actual firearm that it is almost impossible to tell the difference between the two. (Because of this, all Law Enforcement officers should be aware of the increasing popularity of airsoft weapons in the US. Most of us have already had encounters with subjects armed with airsoft weapons.)

Airsoft weapons were developed in Japan in the 1980's. Traditionally, Japan has been a weapons based culture. (The Samurai legacy dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century). As such, there is a tremendous interest in weapons and firearms. However, ownership of firearms in Japan has been illegal for many years. To satisfy people's interest in weapons, several companies in Japan began manufacturing a variety of realistic looking firearms, which fire 6mm pellets. These simulated weapons proved so popular that their use spread rapidly to neighboring countries and eventually to the United States. Today, airsoft enjoys the same popularity as paintball in the US. Many paintball fields now have regularly scheduled airsoft tournaments. Airsoft is now a huge business throughout the world.

## **Types of Airsoft Weapons;**

**Spring Airsoft:** These weapons are the least expensive airsoft firearms, costing as little as \$20 each. As the name implies, the weapon functions by use of a spring that is compressed each time you manually cock the weapon. The weapon must be manually re-cocked for each shot fired. These weapons can be found to replicate most of the common firearms in Law Enforcement use today, including Glock, Sig Sauer, Beretta, etc.

**Gas Airsoft:** There are several different types of gas powered airsoft pistols and rifles. Most of these utilize what is referred to as a “Green Gas” propellant. This is simply a pre-packaged pressurized can consisting of propane gas with silicone oil added as a lubricant. These weapons have a gas reservoir in the magazine or body of the weapon. They are very realistic, as the gas propellant also cycles the slide creating some felt “recoil”. I am currently utilizing gas airsoft pistols that mimic my agencies Glock pistols. These airsoft replicas have a slide that functions similar to the real thing and they even duplicate the trigger reset of a real Glock pistol. This, combined with the fact that they fit into our issued holsters, make them an excellent tool for training scenarios. While these airsoft weapons are slightly more expensive than the spring powered versions, costing upwards of \$75 each or more, they have proven to be more realistic and reliable for Law Enforcement training than the spring Airsoft weapons.

**Electric Airsoft:** These are the top of the line Airsoft weapons. Commonly referred to as AEG’s (Automatic Electric Guns), they are powered by an electric motor that turns gears to compress and release a piston. This piston creates the blast of air necessary to propel the pellet. Onboard rechargeable batteries power the electric motor. Many of these weapons are capable of semi-automatic and fully automatic firing and have rates of fire as high as 900 rounds per minute. Spare magazines and batteries are readily available to accommodate longer training sessions.

## **Ammunition:**

Most airsoft weapons fire a 6mm or 8mm pellet (The 6mm being the most common.) These pellets come in many different varieties, including; Glow in the dark “Tracer” rounds (For night fire), biodegradable pellets (For outdoor use), and even paint pellets (For marking hits). They are also available in a variety of weights (Ranging from .12 grams to .28 grams). While most of this ammunition tends to be very inexpensive (\$6 for 2000 rounds.), you should be aware of the following before you select your training ammo;

6mm paint pellets are only designed for use in spring powered airsoft weapons. The use of these in gas or electric airsoft guns will create misfires in the weapons and will void most manufacturers’ warranties.

6mm, .20 gram ammunition is the most popular type for Law Enforcement training. Most available ammo will feed properly in all spring and gas powered airsoft weapons. However, only *precision* pellets will feed properly in AEG’s. DO NOT purchase cheap China made pellets for use in electric airsoft weapons! They will simply not function

properly. The use of a good quality precision pellet, such as Airsoft Elite Precision or Airsplat Ultimate Precision, will ensure a trouble free day of training.

### **Benefits of Airsoft training;**

**Cost:** Airsoft weapons are very cost effective. The initial purchase price is low compared to other available training weapons systems. A good quality Airsoft Glock pistol can be purchased for under \$100. A replica M-4 carbine AEG can be found for around \$250. Follow up costs are also low as the ammunition is very inexpensive. Maintenance on these weapons is minimal and most replacement parts are readily available and inexpensive due to the tremendous civilian customer base. The overall low cost of this training equipment will allow agencies to train more frequently and under more realistic circumstances.

**Availability:** With the growing popularity of Airsoft weapons, Airsoft retailers are opening throughout the United States. There are also a multitude of online Airsoft retailers to choose from. For your initial purchase, I recommend that you find a retail store in your area where you can actually handle the weapons. You will also be able to speak to a salesman who is familiar with the available Airsoft equipment. This will help you purchase the equipment that suits your specific training needs.

**Safety:** The lightweight projectiles used in airsoft weapons eliminate the hazards associated with live fire and simulated ammunition training. Officers can participate in training with simple eye/face protection and light clothing. The 6mm pellets will cause a welt upon striking bare skin, but they will not cause any permanent injury. Due to the low power projectiles, training can be conducted in any available building with little or no damage to that building. You do not have the associated damage that you have with plastic bullets, paintballs, and soap or wax rounds. This is especially useful in conducting realistic training scenarios in the building that your officer's may be required to respond to. As an example, you could conduct an active shooter scenario in a local school without causing any damage to the facility. Clean up would consist of simply sweeping or vacuuming up the spent pellets after training is completed.

One final word on safety; because airsoft weapons are such exacting replicas of real firearms, extreme care must be taken to ensure that no live firearms are present during airsoft training. Safety measures must be in place to ensure that all officers entering the training area are disarmed and thoroughly checked for live weapons before being allowed to participate. As an additional precaution, I mark all of my airsoft weapons with conspicuous pieces of brightly colored tape (Scotchlite, or similar.) Each weapon is marked on the barrel, magazine and slide. This allows instructors and participants to immediately identify the weapons as simulated airsoft weapons. Some agencies simply spray paint their airsoft weapons a bright color using good quality paint such as Krylon. This is a simple, inexpensive method of identifying the weapons as dedicated airsoft

training tools. As with all weapons related training, officer safety should always be our primary concern.

**Realism:** Airsoft weapons are 1:1 scale and normally weight the same as the real firearm. All key functional controls are identical to the real firearm. (Safety, selector switch, etc.) The higher end AEG airsoft weapons will function as select fire weapons (Semi or full auto) to duplicate the function of most popular tactical firearms such as the MP-5, M-4, and G36.

The airsoft versions can also accommodate the same accessories as their real counterparts. Your training weapons can be set up with the same sling and optical sight as your live weapons. This allows for the most realistic training as you are practicing on a weapon set up the same as the weapon that you work with. As officers train with the airsoft weapons, they are increasing their familiarity and proficiency with their service weapons. With the vast selection of airsoft weapons currently available, you should have no problem finding exact replicas of your currently issued firearms.

**Maintenance:** Airsoft weapons normally only require an occasional cleaning. Most come with a cleaning rod and simple instructions for cleaning. A once yearly lubrication is sufficient for most weapons internal parts. For gas powered weapons, periodically spray silicone directly into the gas fill valve to keep the seals lubricated. Some additional tips to make your airsoft weapons run trouble free include;

Avoid dry firing any airsoft weapon. Repeated dry firing can damage gearboxes and pistons.

DO NOT reuse ammunition! This is especially important for AEG guns. Once used, the 6mm pellets can become dirty and deformed. The reuse of these pellets can jam your weapon. This ammo is cheap. Always use new pellets.

Always use a fully charged battery. Weak batteries can make the weapon function improperly. Get some spare batteries and keep a fully charged backup set available.

Avoid dirt and moisture. Wipe down your airsoft weapon after use. If it gets wet, dry it off immediately.

Only use 100% pure silicone spray to clean and lubricate airsoft gun barrels. The use of other oils or lubricants can damage internal parts of airsoft weapons.

Treat your airsoft weapon with the same care that you would treat your duty weapon.

Consider purchasing a service contract for your airsoft weapons. Many stores selling airsoft now offer service contracts. This will allow for a quick turnaround for any needed repairs and less down time for training weapons.

**Training Tips:** One of the greatest benefits of using Airsoft weapons in tactical training is the ability to conduct realistic training exercises. All types of force on force training can be conducted with a minimum of preparation. Have several officers' role play as shooters and victims, while the other team members make entry into the training room. If you do not have the manpower available to utilize role players, use simple fixed targets. The airsoft weapons will easily penetrate any standard paper targets.

I have found that ordinary children's balloons make excellent targets for use during airsoft training scenarios. Simply inflate several balloons and position them around the training area using double sided tape or rubber bands. The balloons will provide a challenging target to your teams as they make entry into the room. Additionally, team members will be provided with positive feedback from the "pop" of the balloon when it is hit center mass. For an even more realistic feel, utilize some old shirts. Tie a string and a small weight to the balloons and slip the weighted end down the neck of the shirt. The balloon will rest on top of the shirt as a life sized head target.

More challenging training scenarios can be conducted by adding team members into the room as "Hostages" with balloon "bad guy" targets in close proximity. Dynamic room clearing and hostage rescue exercises can be conducted with a good deal of realism using these techniques.

The training scenarios that can be conducted with airsoft weapons are limited only by your imagination.

If you are not currently utilizing airsoft weapons in your training regiment, you may want to consider adding these tools to your inventory. The cost effectiveness, realism, and training opportunities afforded by using airsoft weapons can be a significant benefit to any tactical team.

Sources;

Applied Tactical Technologies, Inc.  
PMB 268  
Babylon, NY 11702-0268  
1-800-223-1204  
(Law Enforcement distributor of Airsoft equipment.)

Bob Goepfert is a 15 year veteran of the New York State Park Police. He is currently assigned to their Firearms Training Unit and is the lead instructor for their Tactical Rifle Unit (TRU).