

# Education & Training Bulletin



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## M- Series Explosive Devices

### KEY POINTS

- "M" - Series explosives are not simply large firecrackers; they are explosive devices which could be deadly to those standing nearby during detonation.
- The clandestine manufacture of these devices make them extremely dangerous to handle or transport.
- The criminal element has enhanced the danger of these devices by attaching nails or other shrapnel to them.
- If you come across one of these devices on the street, do not attempt to handle it yourself; call the Bomb and Arson Section for assistance.

In the past few years there has been a proliferation of large "M" - Series explosive devices used and recovered within the City of Chicago. In 1996 the Bomb and Arson Section recorded 50 explosions and bombings involving these devices and recovered 427 of them. The appearance and use of "M" - Series explosives becomes especially prevalent in early summer, building up to the Fourth of July. Often in these situations, if children are around, tragic results follow.

### Definition of "Fireworks"

The **only** type of fireworks that may be legally

possessed, used or sold within the City of Chicago are the following: ". . . snake or glow worm pellets; smoke devices; sparklers; trick noise makers known as 'party poppers,' 'booby traps,' 'snappers,' 'trick matches,' 'cigarette loads' and 'auto burglar alarms' or toy pistols. . . in which paper caps containing 25/100 grains or less of explosive compound are used." (MCC 15-20-210)

*All other fireworks are illegal!*

### Illegal Fireworks

**Class C Fireworks** - Also called "common fireworks," they are designed for use by the general public and include firecrackers and salutes with casings that do not exceed 1- 1/2 inches in length and 1/4 inch in diameter. The pyrotechnic composition does not exceed two (2) grains. These devices are not regulated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and **are outlawed by both state law and city ordinance.**

**Class B Fireworks** - This group includes "special fireworks," and are the fireworks used in public displays. These devices contain more than two (2) grains of an explosive mixture. They are regulated by the BATF and have federal law restrictions such as the required issuance of a user permit for any possession, transportation or use. These devices are illegal in the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago **UNLESS** the proper permit and/or license has been obtained.

## **Reporting and Charging For any Sale, Use or Explosion of Fireworks**

**Report: Miscellaneous Incident  
Exception report.**

**Charge: Prohibition Against  
Fireworks  
MCC 15-20-220**

## **M - Series Explosive Devices**

A growing threat today, these devices are not firecrackers or fireworks at all: M-Series devices are deadly. Originally, there was a legitimate purpose for the M-80 device. It was manufactured for the military and used during training to depict artillery fire, booby traps and land mines in simulated warfare. Thus the letter "M" designates the original military use of these type of devices.

Today, an "M" Series of illegal explosive devices is manufactured in unregulated, clandestine labs and factories. These devices are known to the public as M-100 (silver salutes), M-250, M-500 or M-1000 (quarter sticks). **THEY ARE PROBABLY THE MOST DANGEROUS EXPLOSIVE THAT POLICE OFFICERS WILL NORMALLY COME INTO CONTACT WITH WHILE WORKING THE STREET.**

### **Appearance**

As varied as their street names, these devices come in different compositions, sizes and explosive weights. They basically consist of a cardboard tube, hobby fuse, flash powder filler, sealing agent and glue. They range in size from 5/8 inch in diameter by 1- 1/2 inch

in length and contain anywhere from .12 - .97 ounces of flash powder. Often the cardboard tubes are red or silver but can be any color. The device's fuse can be inserted in the center or at either end.

### **Manufacture**

The reason for this wide range of color, size, fusing and filler stems from the illegal manufacture of these products in someone's garage, barn, shed or basement. No quality control exists in the manufacturing process; the quantities and strength of the explosive filler may vary and the fusing is not coated or uniformly timed. Unsafe working conditions as well as poor housekeeping make these labs time bombs waiting to explode - and they often do. If you discover a clandestine lab, **DO NOT ENTER**. Call the Bomb and Arson Section immediately.

### **Instability**

The explosive filler is usually a quantity of flash powder that is extremely sensitive - even more sensitive than black powder. It will react to **OPEN FLAME, SPARK, HEAT, FRICTION, SHOCK and STATIC ELECTRICITY**. Because of the conditions under which these devices are made, powder can often be found on the fuses and bodies of the devices, making them susceptible to sparks and static electricity. The static electricity caused by keys mixing with coins in a pants pocket or a nylon jacket brushing against itself may be all it takes to ignite the powder on and in these devices. In addition, these devices can detonate spontaneously and sympathetically. One M-250 is capable of setting off other M-Series devices which are nearby. Also, if an M - Series device is moistened, it can become so unstable during the drying phase that it can detonate haphazardly, without any apparent ignition source.

## Past Incidents

In the last three years alone, in the City of Chicago, these devices were reportedly responsible for the loss of twenty-seven (27) hands (or parts of a hand), eyes and punctured eardrums. The victims ranged in age from five to sixty-five years. These devices caused serious damage to vehicles, including a department squad car, plates of glass in business windows, public toilet facilities, residential windows and foyers, doorways, mail slots, mailboxes and newspaper boxes. There were approximately 139 incidents of Criminal Damage to Property in the last three years in which an M - Series illegal explosive device was used. They have been used as weapons in attempted robberies and attached to flammable devices. Some of the devices have been found to contain additives such as nails, B-Bs and other metal pieces, adding fragmentation to the danger.

## Safety Guidelines for Officers

*Remember. . . parents, children and sometimes even police officers perceive these devices as simply large fireworks. They are not; they are actually dangerous explosive devices, capable of causing severe injury, disfigurement or death.*

Thus, when encountering M - Series devices on the street, whether in an arrest situation, a recovery, or a turn-in, follow these safety measures:

### Do not-

- **Handle the devices carelessly or playfully.**
- **Hold them in your hand for a long period of time.**
- **Put them in your pocket.**
- **Try to open them.**
- **Smoke anywhere near them.**
- **Put them in a department vehicle.**

### Make sure you:

- **Notify the Bomb and Arson Section at:  
Bell 6-7619  
Pax 4334  
Fax 6-7689**
- **Wait for an Explosives Technician to respond and secure the device.**

## Reporting and Charging

For Possession of an Illegal Explosive Device, M-100 or larger:

Report: Possession of Explosives

Charge: Possession of Explosives  
720 ILCS 5/20-2

This charge requires an intent to use and is a Class 3 Felony.

Or

Charge: Unlawful Use of Weapon,  
720 ILCS 5/24-1(a) (7)

This charge requires that the device have more than 1/4 ounce filler, that it be subjected to a lab analysis and is a Class 2 Felony. There is no intent to use requirement for this charge.

Or

Charge: Reckless Conduct  
720 ICS 5/12-5

This charge requires facts supporting the recklessness of the act and is a Class A Misdemeanor.

**Contact the Bomb  
and Arson Section  
for Assistance in  
seeking Felony Charges:**

**Bell 6-7619**

**Pax 4334**

**Fax 6-7689**



### M-100

1" diameter, 2 1/2" long,  
.33 oz. explosive mixture; severe  
damage to face, arms and body.



### M-250

1" diameter, 3" long,  
.48 oz. explosive mixture; severe  
crippling, disfiguring injuries.



### M-1000

1" diameter, 6" long,  
.97 oz. explosive mixture;  
extremely severe injuries to the  
body, has caused death.

*ETB 99 - 8 was written by Lt. Irene Jones, Bomb and Arson Section, with editing and design by Sgt. Linda Turek and P.O. Mike Hans of the Education and Training Division.*