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Written Question

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on plastic baton rounds.

Answer

Tests have shown that a significant proportion of a batch of plastic baton rounds, approved for use by the Security Forces in Northern Ireland, have muzzle velocities marginally in excess of the upper limit in the equipment specification, [which represents a balance between safety and effectiveness]. These rounds, which were on issue from early 1994, were withdrawn from all operational use in April this year. Replacement stocks, which do not exceed the specified velocity, have been issued to the Security Forces in Northern Ireland. Further stocks, conforming to a tightened specification, will be made available over the next few weeks.

The Government very much regrets that this situation should have arisen. Plastic baton rounds and the procedures governing their use are kept under continual review. Stocks will be tested regularly to ensure that they continue to conform to specification. A development programme has been put in hand to take advantage of emerging technologies, with the aim of introducing improved baton round equipment to meet operational needs but with reduced injury potential.

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