

Can Scouts

carry knives?

Whether Scouts can legally carry knives is something that concerns many of you. So we asked knife specialist and Scout Leader **Dave Budd** to cut through the confusion to reveal the facts



Dave Budd

Knives have been in the news with increasing regularity over recent years, and not always for the right reasons. The series of high-profile fatal stabbings last year highlighted a growing knife culture in the UK. Now the general public is unsure of the law on knives.

Scouts often have the need for a good knife, and in the early days every Scout was actively encouraged to put a knife on their belt. Sadly, there is now confusion about when a Scout is allowed to carry a knife. I hope to explain and clarify how the current law on knives affects Scouts.

The main piece of UK legislation regarding the possession of knives and other sharply pointed/bladed objects is the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The Act details what is generally deemed to be an 'offensive' weapon and Section 139 particularly describes what types of knives are banned, those that can be carried in public and under what circumstances.

The law in a nutshell Buying/selling knives

- It is illegal for any shop to sell a knife of any kind (including cutlery, kitchen knives or Swiss army knives) to anyone under the age of 18 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or under the age of 16 (Scotland).

Carrying knives

- In general, it is an offence to carry a knife in a public place without good reason or lawful authority (for example, a good reason is a chef on their way to work and carrying their own knives).
- However, it is not illegal for anyone to carry a foldable, non-locking knife, such as a Swiss army knife, in a public place, as long as the blade is shorter than three inches (7.62cms).

Knives

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Knives and Scouts

The Scout Association provides additional guidance:

- Knives should be carried to and from meetings by an adult.
- Knives should be stowed in the middle of a bag/rucksack when transporting.
- Knives are tools and should be treated as such: use the appropriate tool for the job (don't use a large fixed blade for carving or a penknife for clearing brush).
- Knives should be stored away until there is a need for them to be used.
- Campsites are considered public places (when used for a camp) and so knives are not to be carried.
- Except for reasons of religion, knives may not be worn with uniform.

I think it is probably safest to assume that knives of any sort should not be carried by anybody to a Scout meeting or camp, unless there is likely to be a specific need for one. In that case, they should be kept by the Scout leaders and handed out as required.

I would also suggest that proper training in the use and care of knives (and other tools) be taken, not only by the Scouts themselves but also by the leaders in charge.

more info

www.davebudd.com

Dave's site includes information, course details, advice and handmade tools. To ask him for advice, email buddknives@yahoo.co.uk

www.scouts.org.uk/scoutbase

Information specifically related to using knives on camp can be found here. Search 'knife law'

www.opsi.gov.uk

The Office of Public Sector Information's site has general information on policies

www.scouts.org.uk/correspondence

Continue the debate online

HELPING BATTLE KNIFE CRIME

A group of Scouts visited Westminster and spoke about the positive impact Scouting can have on young people in under-privileged areas, where knife crime is most prevalent.

The group spoke to the all-party panel of MPs about why Scouting teaches young people respect for themselves and for others.

Leader James Reid, from Chingford Scouts, spoke about the impact it is having in his area. He said, 'A young person we worked with had a particularly bad attitude. As a Scout we took him away camping and found he had a skill for cooking, so we worked with him and helped him to gain his Chef Activity Badge and then he went on to gain his Duke of Edinburgh's Award. It was through Scouts he found something he was good at and it gave him a set of skills to put into use throughout his life.'

The blade outline below (three inches) is the maximum size that is allowed to be carried in public



BIVOUAC

As part of the Bivouac event Scouts/Explorer Scouts will need to a penknife. As Leaders we know the subject of young people having access to knives is an emotive one.

Please take some time to read the attached article that was in April/May '09 Scouting Magazine. It will answer any questions you may have.

Bivouac Guidelines

• It is recommended that Scouts/Explorer Scouts use a penknife for this event. A good example is the Swiss Army type penknife. This is because of the quality of steel, size of the blade and other tools that are part of this penknife make it ideal.

• When travelling the penknife must be packed in the rucksack.

• During the event the penknife must be kept in a pouch on a belt and it is recommended that the penknife is tied to a belt loop by a piece of cord.

• Leaders will provide training on how to clean, maintain and best use the penknife. The event will demonstrate that a penknife is an essential tool for survival and is not a weapon.

• It is recommended that gloves are worn when using the penknife.

• The penknife must not be used after dark.

• Anyone found using their penknife in an improper manner, will have the penknife confiscated. This will result in the Scout/Explorer Scout failing the award and they will be sent home.

• A separate request must be made to the responsible Scout Leader or Camp Leader before bring a penknife on other Scouting activities.