



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: June 19, 2025
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VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: July 23, 2025
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services
FROM: Chief Licence Inspector
SUBJECT: Prohibiting the Sale of Gun-shaped Lighters (GSL)

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Licence By-law to regulate the sale of gun-shaped lighters in Vancouver as described in this report and as generally set out in Appendix A;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Licence By-law, generally as set out in Appendix A, to be effective immediately upon enactment.

- B. THAT, subject to Council's approval of Recommendation A, Council approve, in principle, amendments to the Ticket Offences By-law regarding the sale of gun-shaped lighters, as described in this report and as generally set out in Appendix B;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for enactment by Council a by-law to amend the Ticket Offences By-law, generally as set out in Appendix B, to be effective immediately upon enactment.

- C. THAT Council request that the Mayor send a letter on behalf of Council to the Province to advocate for legislative amendments on gun-shaped lighters as outlined in this report.

Purpose and Executive Summary

This report responds to the Council motion, "[Prohibiting the Sale of Gun-Shaped-Lighters \(GSL\) and Calling on the Province to Explore Legislation to Ban GSLs](#)", adopted on May 7, 2025. Staff are reporting back to Council on banning the retail sale of gun-shaped lighters in Vancouver. The Council motion was a response, in part, to reports by the Vancouver Police Department

(VPD) of a considerable increase in the use of GSLs in Vancouver.

Staff recommend amending the Licence By-law to prohibit the retail sale of gun-shaped lighters as a measure to increase public safety and limit an increase in the number of devices in circulation. Staff propose an amendment to the Ticket Offences By-law to make the sale of GSLs a ticketable offence with a fine of \$1,000.

Staff also propose that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write a letter to the provincial government requesting legislative amendments to prohibit the sale, distribution, and possession of GSLs in British Columbia, as well as consider legislative changes to empower law enforcement to seize these devices proactively and prevent their continued proliferation in communities across the province.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- [Sections 203, 272 and 273 of the Vancouver Charter](#) gives Council the authority to establish terms and conditions of a licence, by by-law, to regulate business activity, prohibiting specific types of business including the sale of specific goods and services.
- [Report - Regulating Continuous Flame Butane Lighters](#) (May 8, 2024). Council approved recommendations to prohibit the retail sale of continuous flame butane lighter in Vancouver. This included amendments to the Licence By-law and Ticket Offences By-law.
- [Report - Regulating the Sale of Bear Spray](#) (March 28, 2023) Council approved recommendations to prohibit the sale of bear spray in Vancouver to anyone under the age of 19 and anyone who does not provide identification. This included amendments to the Licence By-law and Ticket Offences By-law.

City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

A gun-shaped lighter will be defined in the Licence By-law as a handheld device that produces a flame, resembles a firearm, and includes an ignitor or trigger, barrel and stock. This includes torch style lighters that look like a firearm due to the shape of the barrel and/or handle.

Due to their close resemblance to real firearms, GSLs are a source of public distress and lead to 9-1-1 emergency calls. From 2023-2025 (as of May) the data reflects a steady upwards trend (see Appendix D).

With the increased proliferation of these devices, a significant allocation of police resources has been required to respond to these incidents with 162 police responses recorded in 2024. Many people mistake GSLs for real guns. These calls are classified as a priority weapons call which necessitates an elevated police response. In addition to the deployment of multiple police units, police response may necessitate a higher degree in use of force, such as conducted energy weapons (tasers), bean bag shotguns, and ARWEN launchers.

The presence of GSLs in public spaces has led to multiple dangerous encounters where police officers have had to draw their firearms. These situations pose a serious risk of fatal outcomes

or injuries sustained by law enforcement. GSLs have been used in several violent crimes, including 6 cases involving violent offences and 10 cases leading to criminal charges (robbery, assault, and weapons possession).

Discussion

The City has the authority through the Licence By-law to prohibit the sale of GSLs. The City does not have the authority to prohibit or regulate the use, possession or seizure of these devices.

Staff propose an amendment to the Licence By-law to prohibit the sale of GSLs by retailers located in Vancouver (see Appendix A). Currently, based on a canvas completed by VPD, there are approximately 50-75 stores selling multiple types of GSLs, with a concentration of retailers in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and downtown core. A sample of images of GSLs is set out in Appendix “C”.

Regulating the retail sale of an item for the purposes of public safety has produced successful outcomes in the past, for items such as bear spray and exploding animal deterrents. In March 2023, Council approved regulations on the sale and display of bear spray to reduce the number of violent offences by youth involving these products. Following regulatory changes, the number of reported incidents fell. A recent VPD report, [“Combating Bear Spray: The VPD’s Strategy to Address the Criminal Usage of Bear Spray”](#), from August – December 2023, crimes involving bear spray decreased 19%, compared to the same period in 2022.

Staff recommend an amendment to the Ticket Offences Bylaw to establish an offence for selling GSLs, with a corresponding fine of \$1,000. This aligns with the fine amount set for similar ticket offences that pose a public safety risk, including bear spray and continuous flame butane lighters. In May 2024, the City prohibited the sale of continuous flame butane lighters with a corresponding ticket offence. To align the enforcement tools for lighters, gun-shaped and continuous flame butane lighters, staff are recommending an amendment to the Ticket Offences By-law to enable police officers to enforce on violations related to continuous flame butane lighters.

Public education

Police departments in Victoria and Edmonton carried out education campaigns via public communication strategies in response to the increased use of GSLs. Metro Vancouver Transit Police (MVTP) are also facing challenges with increased presence of GSLs on Translink. In January 2025, MVTP released a [public service announcement](#) to educate the public about carrying items that look like a weapon on transit.

In June 2025, the VPD issued a public safety statement highlighting the continued rise in incidents involving GSLs and the associated risks to public safety. Additionally, the VPD conducted outreach and education campaigns with retailers in February and June 2025 to inform them of the dangers posed by GSLs and to advise them of a potential upcoming by-law that would prohibit the sale of these items. Hand in hand with enforcement, VPD will continue to inform and educate retailers and the public on the public safety risks associated with GSLs.

Advocacy

There are currently no federal, provincial or municipal laws in BC prohibiting the sale or possession of GSLs. Under the [Criminal Code of Canada](#), it is a criminal offence if a GSL is

used as an imitation firearm in the commission of a criminal offence.

In addition to municipal regulations, staff propose that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, advocate to the Province of British Columbia, requesting legislative measures to prohibit the sale, distribution, and possession of gun-shaped lighters, including considering whether to amend relevant legislation to empower law enforcement to seize GSLs proactively and prevent their proliferation in communities across British Columbia.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report's recommendations.

Legal Implications

If the Recommendations in this report are adopted by Council, Council will regulate the sale of GSLs in Vancouver.

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APPENDIX A**DRAFT By-law to amend the Licence By-law No. 4450
regarding gun-shaped lighters**

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER, in public meeting, enacts as follows:

1. This by-law amends the indicated provisions of the Licence By-law No. 4450.
2. In section 2, Council adds the following new definition in the correct alphabetical order:

“Gun-shaped Lighters” means a handheld device that produces a flame, resembles a firearm, and includes an igniter or trigger, barrel and stock. “

3. Council adds a new section 16.4 in the correct numerical order as follows:

“GUN-SHAPED LIGHTERS

16.4 No person carrying on a business shall sell, or offer to sell, gun-shaped lighters.”

4. A decision by a court that any part of this by-law is illegal, void, or unenforceable severs that part from this by-law, and is not to affect the balance of this by-law.
5. This by-law is to come into force and take effect on the date of its enactment.

ENACTED by Council this day of , 2025

Mayor

City Clerk

APPENDIX B

**DRAFT By-law to amend the Ticket Offences By-law No. 9360
regarding gun-shaped lighters**

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER, in public meeting, enacts as follows:

1. This by-law amends the indicated provisions and schedules of By-law No. 9360.
2. In Table 3, Council deletes the row at the end of the table and adds the following:

“

Police Officer, Chief Licence Inspector or Fire Chef	Sell, or offer to sell, continuous flame butane lighters	Section 12.2	\$1,000.00
Police Officer, Chief Licence Inspector	Sell, or offer to sell gun-shaped lighters	Section 16.4	\$1,000.00

"

3. A decision by a court that any part of this by-law is illegal, void, or unenforceable severs that part from this by-law, and is not to affect the balance of this by-law.
4. This by-law is to come into force and take effect on the date of its enactment.

ENACTED by Council this day of , 2025

Mayor

City Clerk

APPENDIX C INFORMATION SHEET REGARDING GUN-SHAPED LIGHTERS

Examples, including but not limited to, of various types of gun-shaped lighters available for purchase. Photos provided by Vancouver Police Department.



APPENDIX D DATA PROVIDED BY VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

Figure 1: Monthly 9-1-1 calls related to gun-shaped lighters, 2023-2025*

*As of May 2025

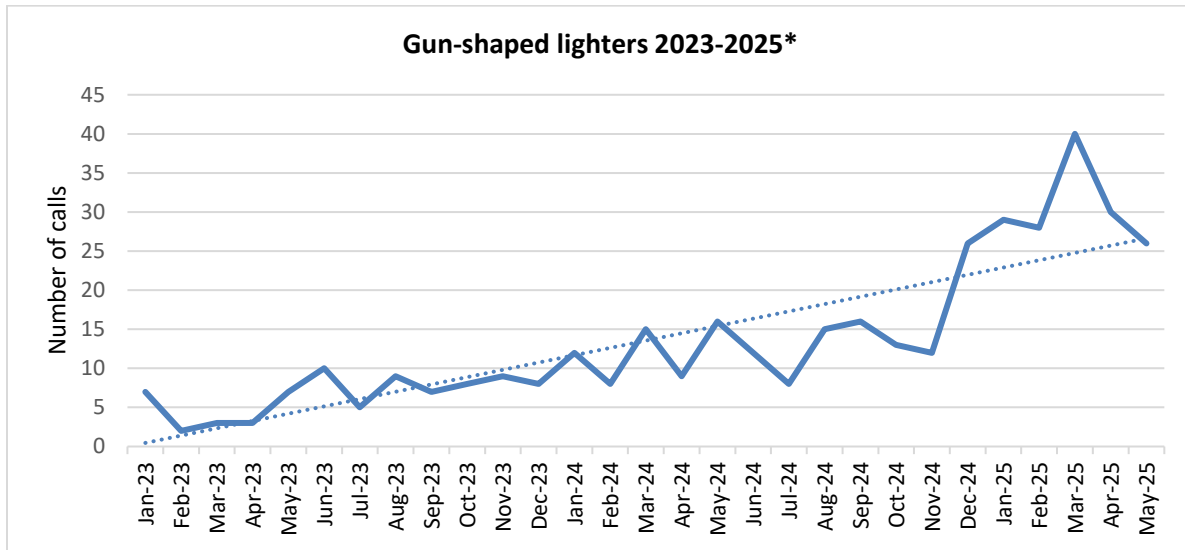


Figure 2: Annual comparison of monthly 9-1-1 calls related to gun-shaped lighters, 2022 – 2024

