

Increasing accessibility of 3-D printing raises concerns about plastic guns

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Three-dimensional printers can make artists' and hobbyists' dreams a reality, opening up a new world of inexpensive, on-demand plastic parts manufacturing, producing anything from garden gnome figurines to nuts and screws, but there's also a dark side. As these printers—now available at major U.S. retail stores—become more popular, concerns are growing about their use for designing and building custom plastic firearms—weapons that could conceivably go undetected. The cover story in *Chemical & Engineering News*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, details the progress in this small but controversial corner of the market.

Alexander H. Tullo, senior correspondent with C&EN, points out that earlier this year, a self-described anarchist group called Defense Distributed fabricated a nearly all-plastic pistol using a 3-D printer, published the design online and demonstrated that it works. Other hobbyists also have made their own plastic guns with the machines. Although the printed firearms work, they can become deformed after firing, and some have burst into pieces. So far, they aren't nearly as reliable as guns that are professionally manufactured. But that could change as 3-D machines improve, more materials become available and the designs of the firearms evolve.

Defense Distributed's pistol demonstration earned them swift condemnation from critics who worried that easily accessible, unregulated and undetectable firearms would make the problem of gun violence even worse. In response, lawmakers introduced legislation to

extend the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988 to include a ban on homemade 3-D-printed gun parts.

More information: cen.acs.org/articles/91/i39/Making-Desktop-3-D.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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