

ATF's Proposed Rules for Firearms Imports

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On May 8, 2026, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) [issued](#) a series of proposed rules that would change how it regulates firearms. Amongst these changes are two clarifying rules that affect how ATF regulates firearms imports. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) at [91 Federal Register 25159](#) would define firearms “imports” in such a way that would allow conversion of *temporary firearms imports* (i.e., firearms with a final destination outside the United States) into *permanent firearms imports* (i.e., items with a final destination inside the United States). The NPRM at [91 Federal Register 25192](#) proposes allowing importation of firearm frames, receivers, and barrels that can be used in building [sporting, non-sporting](#), or National Firearms Act (NFA) regulated firearms.

Allowable Firearms Imports

Importing a firearm into the United States requires having a Federal Firearms License (FFL) [Type-08](#) and being registered as a licensed importer [under the Arms Export Control Act \(AECA\)](#). For individuals possessing these credentials, the Attorney General shall authorize “imports” as defined in [18 U.S.C. §925\(d\)](#) when the item

- is being imported or brought in for scientific or research purposes, or is for use in connection with competition or training of U.S. Armed Forces pursuant to [Chapter 751, Title 10](#);
- is an unserviceable, non-machinegun firearm imported as a curio or museum piece;
- is not defined as a “firearm” under the NFA; is generally recognized as particularly suitable or adaptable to sporting purposes; and is not a surplus military firearm (however, in any case where the Attorney General has not authorized the importation of the firearm pursuant to this paragraph, it shall be unlawful to import any frame, receiver, or barrel of such firearm which would be prohibited if assembled); or
- was previously legally taken out of the United States or a possession by the person who is bringing in the firearm or ammunition. (This allows a person to avoid standard importation bans on firearms if they are legally bringing a firearm back into the United States after bringing it out.)

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Permanent and Temporary Firearms Imports

The AECA, at [22 U.S.C. §2778\(b\)\(2\)](#), states that most defense articles—including [firearms](#) listed under the U.S. Munitions Import List (USML)—cannot be permanently imported without an importer’s license issued in accordance with the AECA. The Directorate of Defense Trade Controls within the U.S. State Department can provide a temporary import license for up to four years if the item is to be serviced and re-exported; enhanced or incorporated into another item for permanent export; imported for the purpose of exhibition, demonstration, or marketing in the United States and subsequently returned to the country from which it was shipped; or approved for such import under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program pursuant to a Department of Defense Letter of Offer and Acceptance.

Currently, when a defense article is a firearm subject to the Gun Control Act (GCA) or NFA, the importer must generally comply with the requirements of those laws, even when the import is not permanent. Furthermore, before an importer may permanently import an item on the USML, the importer must obtain a permit from ATF using [ATF Form 6, Part I](#). Currently, ATF does [not approve](#) Form 6, Part I applications for firearms already in the United States.

The NPRM would change the definition of “import” in [27 C.F.R. §447.11](#) to indicate that importing occurs not only via permanent import, but also temporary import. This proposed change would permit ATF to process a Form 6, Part I, for items currently in the United States as temporary imports and, if otherwise authorized by law, permit the importer to convert these articles to permanent imports. Furthermore, the NPRM clarifies marking requirements and would require that firearms converted from temporary-to-permanent imports be adequately marked for ATF traceability 15 days after approval of a Form 6, Part I.

This change would allow businesses that seek to permanently import a temporarily imported firearm to avoid the financial costs of exporting and re-importing said firearm. Nonetheless, there are risks stemming from the theft or loss of an unmarked firearm and its potential use in crime during the period between when the firearm is temporarily imported and it is made permanent.

Importation of Dual-Use Frames, Receivers, or Barrels

ATF [defines](#) “dual-use” firearm frames, receivers, or barrels as those that can be used for both sporting and non-sporting purposes. Currently, barrels affixable on both sporting and non-sporting firearms are importable only if used to assemble firearms used for a sporting purpose. The importer is therefore restricted in how the barrel, frame, or receiver can be assembled once imported. Furthermore, in June 2025 ATF [took the position](#) that barrels that were once affixed to a non-sporting firearm could not be imported even if they could be affixed to importable firearms. Firearm parts and characteristics that ATF recognizes as indicating a firearm is non-sporting [include, but are not limited to](#), folding stocks, pistol grips that protrude beneath the action of the weapon, suppressors, threaded barrels, and high-capacity magazines.

The NPRM would amend [27 C.F.R. Part 478](#) to clarify that frames, receivers, and barrels that can be used on both sporting and non-sporting firearms may be lawfully imported into the United States if, at the time imported, there is an identified firearm sporting configuration for the frame, receiver, or barrel. Once the dual-use item is in the United States, it could be used to assemble a sporting, non-sporting, or NFA firearm without regulation beyond existing U.S. firearm laws. While one could not use these parts to build a fully automatic machinegun, the [possession and transfer](#) of which is unlawful, they could use the parts to build any firearm that the buyer is lawfully allowed to possess.

There is no federal monitoring, nor does the NPRM propose it, to ensure that an imported dual-use firearm part is used legally after it is delivered to the recipient. This concern is [briefly considered](#) in the

NPRM, though ATF has [previously discussed](#) at greater length the danger of imported firearms and firearms parts becoming crime guns.

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