



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 1, 2013

3D Printing of Guns at Home Making Gun Grabbers Nervous

[When the New York Times wrote](#) of the improved technology of 3D printing this writer responded with a [frivolous blog](#) about it, scoring the concerns of anti-gun people about how the technology will allow everyone who wants one to have a gun without government oversight or knowledge. One of those in the anti-gun camp is Josh Horwitz, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, who said that 3D printing is “going to be a big concern. We don’t know how that’s going to come about and don’t know what technology.”



That technology is evolving before his very eyes. [The RepRap Project](#) aims to produce free and open source software for 3D printers, including software that allows the printer to produce its own parts. Two years ago RepRap allowed printers to create tiny plastic parts for small motors as well as circuit boards for computers. Today it allows hobbyists to build household items like fully-functional clocks, flashlights, iPad cases, watchbands ... and receivers for rifles.

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And it is this virtual explosion in technology that is making other gun controllers increasingly nervous, including Mark Gibbs, a contributor at *Forbes*, [who wrote](#),

I’m in favor of tighter gun control and a ban on weapons that are unnecessarily powerful but I’m afraid that technology will soon make any legislation that limits the availability of any kinds of guns ineffective.

With the decrease in prices for 3D printers, and the improvement in the software to drive them, the capability to print weapons at home is coming into the reach of the average citizen. Gibbs warned,

Using either free or low cost computer aided drafting software you can create digital 3D models of pretty much anything you can think of and, with hardly any fuss, your 3D printer will render them as physical objects.

And when that happens, there will be more guns, not fewer, and the government won’t know where they are or how to track them:

What’s particularly worrisome is that the capability to print metal and ceramic parts will appear in low end printers in the next few years making it feasible to print an entire gun and that will be when gun control becomes a totally different problem.

Gibbs is already behind the times. In December, Dan Verton [noted on hstoday.com](#) that “the time is fast approaching when anybody with a few thousand dollars ... can design and manufacture their own guns.” He corrected himself, adding, “Actually, that time has already arrived.”

Anti-gun legislators are getting nervous as well. The introduction of the Glock pistol into the United



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States in 1982, with its polymer construction, caused some legislators to go ballistic. They suggested that such pistols would escape being detected at airports. It didn't take long for legislation to follow, with the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988 passing both houses of congress and being signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in November of that year. It had a 10-year sunset clause, but in 2003 it was reauthorized for another ten years with a sunset date of December 9, 2013. That law makes it illegal to "manufacture ... [or] possess ... any firearm that is not detectable by walk-through metal detectors."

In December Congressman Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), a leading supporter of making that law permanent, held a press conference just outside the security checkpoint at Long Island's MacArthur Airport. He said that the House needs to renew the law because

It is just a matter of time before these three-dimensional printers will be able to replicate an entire gun. And that firearm will be able to be brought through this security line, through the metal detector, and because there will be no metal to be detected, firearms will be brought on planes without anyone's knowledge.

Israel sports just an 11-percent Freedom Index rating and a zero-percent rating from both the National Rifle Association and Gun Owners of America, while enjoying a 100 percent rating from both the Brady Campaign and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. And so while his rant against guns pushes the envelope of believability that scanners' technology won't also improve to the point where 3D weapons can be detected, it also misses another point: There is no way that receivers — the part of the weapon that holds the internal workings such as the trigger and safety mechanisms — can be traced if they are made at home, as they lack the serial numbers that legislators like to track in order to keep an eye on their subjects.

All of which brings back the main point made in the original "frivolous" comments made by this writer earlier: Without such tracking, how can the government enforce its increasingly onerous and draconian attempts to regulate and eventually confiscate weapons from law abiding citizens? Will it want to register 3D printers? But how will that work, exactly, especially when the printers can replicate themselves? Like the brooms in Goethe's poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the printers will multiply in such numbers as to simply overwhelm attempts by gun control legislators like Israel to control them. Where the motivation is sufficient, citizens will find a way to exercise their freedoms, and all that increasing pressure from government will do is hasten the process.

Photo of 3D printer on display at International Consumer Electronics Show Jan. 10 in Las Vegas: AP Images

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