

# Tom's bullet burner hits the mark

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The Hamilton Spectator

Tom Braithwaite had had enough of running away from burning barrels full of live ammunition.

The former Hamilton police department mechanic knew there had to be a better way of disposing of unused, confiscated or damaged ammunition.

When he retired five years ago he took those experiences, along with his mechanical skills, and created Canada's and the world's first commercial ammunition disposal burner.

His services are now in demand by more than 30 police agencies around Ontario, the Prairies, and the northern United States to help them get rid of their excess ammunition and destroy damaged or seized weapons.

His mobile ammunition combustion system uses a specially designed propane-powered oven to essentially cook the ammunition until it pops like popcorn. He then collects the melted brass and lead for recycling.

Braithwaite has patented the collection trays and the process of separating the metals.

Before Braithwaite's invention, police would go to a quarry, put the ammunition into a 45-gallon drum with wood chips, kerosene or diesel fuel, throw a road flare on top, and run to safety.

While the barrel burned, bullets tended to fly out of the barrel, diesel fuel and lead might leach into ground water, and black smoke went up into the atmosphere. The next day officers would return to the quarry and clean up excess rounds and debris.

Braithwaite created the combustion system after working with the Hamilton's explosive disposal unit.

"I just said that they need to step it up, and thanks for being proactive, but you need to do a little more of a better job. Why don't you just go get a good (burner). And they said 'No one made a good one,'" said Braithwaite. He developed his system with some input from the RCMP.

When Braithwaite, 54, retired in 2007, he poured in almost \$90,000 of his own money, as well as using money from a couple of



Tom Braithwaite has developed a mobile furnace that is used to destroy ammunition and weapons. He's sold some of the units overseas.

loans from investors, and set to work on his burner. In addition to travelling around to dispose of ammunition, he has now sold a dozen of the \$90,000 mobile ammunition combustion systems in Canada.

Braithwaite's burners have also been bought around the world.

"We sold one of our burners to the Australian military," said Braithwaite.

"And we've sold one to the Dubai police department."

Things really took off after he won an award at the International Association of Chiefs of Police conference in October.

He said he's had inquiries from the ministries of defence in Greece, Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Braithwaite employs up to five local businesses to help build each unit, including a burner, the trailer and the canopy. Braithwaite uses businesses such as Trailer-

world Industries in Brantford because they are local and they know what they are doing.

"All local if we can," said Braithwaite. "Everything as local as we can."

When Braithwaite first rolled out the machine, he needed to find a police service to give him a chance.

"I had to cold-call police agencies and then they'd say, 'Well why would I use your services when they are burning it out in the quarry for free?'" said Braithwaite.

Thankfully, Ottawa and Hamilton police services were the agencies that gave Braithwaite a chance. Sergeant Terri-Lynn Collings said Hamilton was looking for a system within their resources that was environmentally friendly and safe for their officers.

"It was perfect timing for him to come up with this system," said Collings. "I don't know if there was anything else on the market at

PHOTOS BY RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR



The unit, top, and the ammunition after it has been burned.

the time, so it was wonderful that with his creative mind he was able to come up with this system. And we were able to utilize it, and to continue to utilize it."

Collings said the Hamilton police use Braithwaite's system three to four times a year.

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