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SAGA Education Series | Licence Approved - Card Delayed? The SAPS Temporary Authorisation Printout

Issued by the SAGA Board of Trustees

1. Situation

A firearm licence application may be approved while the physical licence card is still awaiting printing and delivery. The approval has been granted, but the applicant does not yet have the physical card ordinarily used to evidence the licence for practical purposes such as collecting the firearm.

SAPS established a specific administrative mechanism for this gap: a system-generated **A4 temporary authorisation** that can be printed by the Designated Firearm Officer (DFO) while the approved licence card is pending.

This is not a rumour, dealer workaround or informal letter. It is a formal SAPS process recorded in a national directive issued in September 2022 and reinforced in October 2024.

2. What SAPS Put in Place

The 12 September 2022 SAPS Directive, reference 27/5/2/1, records the Central Firearms Register decision to issue a system-generated A4 document titled:

“Authorisation to possess a firearm for approved licences”

The directive states that the document serves as proof that the firearm licence application has been approved while printing of the licence card is still pending. It further states that the authorisation is available on the Enhanced Firearm Registration **System (EFRS) - function 17.9**, and is to be printed on request by the DFO at station level.

The directive also records that this specific authorisation may be issued without a separate application for the temporary authorisation - an important distinction from the ordinary SAPS 518 process used in other section 21 circumstances.

3. Legal Basis

Section 3 of the Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000 prohibits possession of a firearm unless the person holds, for that firearm, a licence, permit or authorisation issued in

terms of the Act. Section 21(1) empowers the Registrar to issue a temporary authorisation for a period determined by the Registrar and subject to prescribed and imposed conditions.

The 2022 SAPS directive applies that section 21 mechanism to an already-approved firearm licence where the physical card has not yet been printed. The Firearms Control Regulations add important conditions: the authorisation must be kept wherever the firearm is located, must be produced with the firearm on request by a police official, and is valid only for the firearm, period and specific use stated on it (regulation 24).

Use is not automatic merely because possession is authorised. Section 21(5) provides that the firearm may be used only if the Registrar permits that use by endorsement on the authorisation and only in accordance with the applicable conditions.

Important: this is a temporary authorisation – not a replacement plastic licence card and not a fresh firearm licence application.

4. When This Route Applies

The process is intended for the specific gap between approval of the firearm licence application and receipt of the printed card. In practical terms:

- the firearm licence application has already been approved;
- the physical licence card has not yet been printed or delivered; and
- the EFRS record allows the DFO to generate the temporary authorisation.

It must not be used to assume that a pending application has been approved, that an expired licence has been revived, or that a person may possess a firearm without a valid licence, permit or authorisation.

5. What to Ask Your DFO For

Do not simply ask for a “*printout*” or a “*temporary licence*,” because terminology may differ between stations. Ask for the SAPS system-generated:

AUTHORISATION TO POSSESS A FIREARM FOR APPROVED LICENCES - A4 PAPER

Reference the 12 September 2022 directive (Ref 27/5/2/1) and, if necessary, **EFRS function 17.9**. The 16 October 2024 SAPS letter (Ref 3/21/3/1/144) again urged DFOs to support applicants by facilitating temporary permits during licence-card printing delays.

6. Practical Steps

1. Confirm that the firearm licence application is reflected as approved.
2. Attend the DFO / police station where the application was submitted. Take your identity document, approval SMS or application reference if available, and the firearm details.
3. Request the system-generated A4 “***Authorisation to possess a firearm for approved licences***”.
4. Before leaving, check your personal details and the firearm make, type, calibre and serial number carefully.

5. Read the validity period, permitted use and every condition printed on the authorisation. A section 21 authorisation may contain conditions that differ from the eventual licence.
6. Keep the original authorisation wherever the firearm is located and have it available whenever you rely on the authorisation. Keep a separate copy or clear scan for your records.
7. Continue following up for the physical licence card. The A4 authorisation is an interim possession authority while the approved licence card remains outstanding.

7. Collecting the Firearm While the Card Is Pending

Once the A4 temporary authorisation has been issued and correctly identifies the firearm, it is the section 21 authority under which the holder may possess that firearm for the period and subject to the conditions stated on the document. In practice, it may therefore be presented to the dealer as the possession authority while the licence card is still pending.

The dealer should be given a reasonable opportunity to verify the authorisation and the firearm details. The authorisation must match the approved firearm exactly. If there is any uncertainty, verification should be obtained through the DFO / SAPS rather than relying on verbal assurances.

8. How Long Is the Authorisation Valid?

The 2022 directive states that validity commences from the date on which the firearm licence application was approved and ends on the day the applicant is issued with the firearm licence card.

The 16 October 2024 SAPS letter repeats the practical position: temporary permits remain valid until applicants receive their official firearm licence cards.

When collecting the printed licence card, the 2022 directive requires the applicant to hand the temporary authorisation back to the DFO for cancellation.

9. If the DFO Says “*We Have Never Heard of This*”

This can still arise at station level. The appropriate response is to produce and escalate the source material rather than argue at the counter.

1. Show the DFO the 12 September 2022 **directive, Ref 27/5/2/1**, especially the paragraphs dealing with the A4 authorisation and EFRS function 17.9.
2. Show the 16 October 2024 **SAPS letter, Ref 3/21/3/1/144**, which again urges DFOs to support applicants by facilitating temporary permits during card-printing delays.
3. Ask the DFO to confirm the process with the station FLASH commander or the relevant Provincial FLASH office.
4. If the matter remains unresolved, record the station, date, name/rank of the official and the response received, and escalate factually through the station commander / FLASH chain.

The 2024 letter expressly requested commanders to convey the information to all DFOs and relevant personnel. Lack of local awareness does not alter the existence of the national process.

10. Important Limits and Cautions

- **Application must be approved.** An expectation of approval, a delayed SMS, dealer advice or a pending status is not enough.
- Authorisation is firearm specific. Check the serial number and all other identifying details carefully.
- Comply with the period, permitted use and conditions printed on the authorisation. Possession authority does not automatically mean unrestricted use.
- Regulation 24 requires the authorisation to be kept wherever the firearm is located and produced, together with the firearm, on request by a police official.
- Do not assume that ammunition privileges under an eventual licence automatically carry across. Regulation 24(3) limits possession under a section 21 authorisation to 200 cartridges per calibre unless, for sports-shooting, the Registrar has specified a larger quantity on good cause shown.
- **Do not confuse** this system-generated route with an ordinary SAPS 518 application. The 2022 directive expressly records that this authorisation may be issued without a separate application for it.
- Once the physical licence card is issued, **return the temporary authorisation to the DFO for cancellation** as required by the 2022 directive.

11. Quick Checklist

- ☐ Licence application status shows **APPROVED**
- ☐ Physical licence card **NOT YET RECEIVED**
- ☐ Take ID, approval SMS / reference and firearm details
- ☐ Attend the DFO / station where the application was submitted
- ☐ Ask for the A4 “**Authorisation to possess a firearm for approved licences**”
- ☐ Quote Ref 27/5/2/1 and EFRS function 17.9 if necessary
- ☐ Also quote 16 October 2024 Ref 3/21/3/1/144
- ☐ Check personal and firearm details, especially the serial number
- ☐ Read the validity period, permitted use and all conditions
- ☐ Keep the original authorisation where the firearm is located; retain a copy/clear scan
- ☐ Collect the physical card when notified and return the authorisation for cancellation

12. Bottom Line

An approved firearm licence should not be rendered practically unusable simply because the physical card has not yet been printed or delivered.

SAPS created a formal temporary-authorisation mechanism in 2022 to bridge that gap and reinforced the operational instruction in 2024 when card-printing delays persisted. If your licence application is approved but the card is delayed, ask the DFO for the system-generated A4 authorisation, quote the relevant references if necessary, and comply strictly with the conditions printed on it.

Approved means approved. The A4 authorisation is the lawful bridge until the card is issued.

The following original SAPS documents should be retained with the final factsheet and may be annexed behind it:

Annexure A - SAPS Directive dated 12 September 2022, Ref 27/5/2/1: "Firearms Licence Issued in Terms of Section 6 Read with Section 21(1) Authorisation to Possess a Firearm for Approved Licence (A4 Paper)".

Annexure B - SAPS Letter dated 16 October 2024, Ref 3/21/3/1/144: "Delays in Printing and Delivery of Firearm License Cards by Government Printing Works (GPW)".

*Issued as part of the **SAGA Educational Series**
guide to firearm owners on compliance and responsible firearm ownership.*

Acknowledgements & Source Material

- Drafted by SMS Lyle
- Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000, as amended - sections 3, 6 and 21
 - Firearms Control Regulations, 2004 - regulation 24
- SAPS Directive Ref 27/5/2/1 dated 12 September 2022
 - SAPS Letter Ref 3/21/3/1/144 dated 16 October 2024
- Fidelity Security Services (Pty) Ltd and Others v National Commissioner of SAPS and Others [2022] ZAGPPHC 731

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