



### **D18 If I Had a Hammer 2: Another Example of Improvised Firearm Construction and Use**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of improvised firearms. This presentation will illustrate the construction and firing of an improvised firearm from a suicide.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the use of commonly found items to construct a plausible and effective weapon.

Crime scene investigators work scenes that become almost too familiar to them in that there are similar facets that often repeat themselves depending on the scenario. However, occasionally scenes have something different that sticks out and attaches itself to that case from which it will forever be known to those involved.

Although there have been ways to manufacture weapons for many years, it is not often seen in practice. It is often thought by law enforcement that the removal of weapons will prolong the life of the individual expressing suicidal thoughts, thereby giving him or her time to be evaluated, receive treatment, and be released to friends or family that will take care of them. There are circumstances where law enforcement is asked to remove weapons under court order for fear the individual will do themselves or others harm.

Removal of weapons from the possession of someone with questionable intentions should increase the difficulty in actually harming themselves. Firearm "building" is a relatively simple yet illegal alternative to acquiring another weapon. The use of such improvisation demonstrates, in the case of a suicide, sheer determination on the part of the victim to end his or her life.

One such case involved pieces of metal piping, a live shotgun round, a nail, and a hammer. The shotgun round was held inside a piece of pipe using a metal coupling and fitting with a hole drilled in to the end the same size as the width of a nail. The hammer was used to strike the nail, thereby mimicking the action of a firing pin and discharging the round through the pipe which was held against the victim's chest. Because there was not an alternative route for the gases to escape, the result was exceedingly devastating to the upper left chest cavity.

The device was disabled by the hazardous device team using a percussive disruption device. In order to demonstrate the weapon construction, PVC pipe was used to build a scale model. The model was made two times larger than the original improvised firearm for three reasons: constructing a firearm is a federal offense, even if it is used for education purposes. There would not be ammunition available for this size on a civilian level. The PVC would not contain the "explosion" cause by the striking of the round, further proven by the emergency room injuries from the commonly constructed "potato gun."

This presentation will describe the circumstances of the scene, the evaluation by the crime scene investigator and the hazardous device team, and the reconstruction of the improvised firearm using materials that were legal and safe.

**Crime Scene, Improvised Firearm, Suicide**