

Availability of the M855 5.56X45 (62 grain) Steel Penetrator, FMJ (Green Tip) As of 1 September 2016

In February 2015, the ATF attempted to ban M855 Green Tip ammunition because the bullet is comprised of steel and lead, which the ATF classifies as "armor piercing". The ATF further proposed a framework for determining which ammunition would qualify for the "sporting purposes" exemption, and concluded that the "armor piercing" M855 Green Tip cartridges would no longer be eligible for an ATF exemption because the ammunition could be fired from new handguns on the market. The gun lobby, led by the NRA, accused the government of trying to impose an AR-15 rifle ban by restricting the sale of ammunition. More than 80,000 Americans submitted responses during the first three weeks of the month-long public comment period, primarily in opposition. Majorities of both the House and Senate urged the ATF to drop the proposal and a bill was introduced to strip the ATF of its regulatory power over ammunition.

On Tuesday, 10 March 2015, the ATF reversed its position and announced that it was backing away from the proposed framework due to overwhelming opposition. Today, M855 Green Tip ammunition is exempted from "armor piercing" classification and is readily available and widely popular in the United States. Today, Americans lawfully own an estimated 20-30 million AR-15 and other so called assault rifles that fire the M855 Green Tip ammunition.

A review of M855 Green Tip availability at gun shows and on the web confirms its availability in large quantities at wholesale pricing. There are at least six manufacturers of the M855 Green Tip. The FBI and ballistic experts confirm that first responder agencies should definitely consider the M855 Green Tip in risk assessments and ballistic protection decisions. NIJ III+ protection, above and beyond the M80, is required to protect a first responder from an active shooter with a high velocity rifle. With the large number of AR-15 style rifles on the US market and the availability of the M855 Green Tip ammunition, an officer deserves the protection of NIJ III+ body armor.