

10 Commandments of Concealed Carry

Carrying a lethal weapon in public confers a grave power that carries with it great responsibilities. Here are the 10 commandments of concealed carry.

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Carrying a lethal weapon in public confers a grave power that carries with it great responsibilities. Those who lawfully engage in the practice realize that. Those who are considering concealed carry need to know what those experienced people know.

I. If You Carry, Always Carry

The criminal is the actor, and the armed citizen is the reactor. The typical violent criminal arms himself only when he intends to do something with it. He picks the time and place of the assault, and initiates the attack. Therefore, he doesn't need to worry about self-defense.

The armed citizen, the intended victim, does not know when or where that attack will come. Therefore, he or she must be constantly prepared and constantly vigilant. The "pistol-packer" learns to pick a comfortable holster and an appropriately sized handgun, and "dress around the firearm." After a few days, or a few weeks, it becomes second nature to wear it.

When the defender does not know when the attack will come, the only reasonable expectation of safety lies in being always armed.

II. Don't Carry If You Aren't Prepared To Use It

There is a great irony that attaches to the defensive firearm. When you analyze a great many defensive gun usages (DGUs) you discover that the great majority of the time, the protection weapon does its job with no blood being shed. Usually, the offender who is confronted with the prospect of being shot in self-defense either breaks off and runs or surrenders at gunpoint.

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Its most important asset turns out to be its power to deter. The irony comes from the fact that its power to deter is drawn directly from its power to kill.

Understand that criminals do not fear guns. They are, after all, an armed subculture themselves. What they fear is the resolutely armed man or woman who points that gun at them. Criminals are predators, and their stock in trade is their ability to read people and recognize victims. They are very, very good at reading "body language" and determining another's intent to fight, or lack thereof. In short, you're not likely to bluff them.

If you carry a gun, you must be absolutely certain that you can use deadly force. The person who is hesitant or unwilling to do so will, in the moment of truth, communicate that vacillation to the hardened criminal they are attempting to hold at gunpoint. In such a case, it is quite likely that the offender will jump them, disarm them, and use the hesitant defenders' own weapons against them.

If, however, that same criminal realizes that he is facing a resolute person who will, in fact, shoot him if he takes one more transgressive step, he is most unlikely to take that step.

The irony: The person who is prepared to kill if he or she must, is the person who is least likely to have to do so.

III. Don't Let The Gun Make You Reckless

Circa 1970, armed citizen Richard Davis invented the [Second Chance vest](#), concealable body armor that for the first time could be worn constantly on duty, under the uniform, by any police officer. Some alarmists speculated that "being made bulletproof" would cause cops to become reckless. Those fears turned out to be totally unfounded. As any officer who has worn armor can attest, the vest is a constant reminder of danger and, if anything, makes its wearer more cautious.

"Like an officer's body armor, the armed citizen's gun is a reminder of danger, a symbol of the need for caution..."

It is much the same with concealed firearms in the hands of responsible private citizens. People unfamiliar with the practice fear that "the trigger will pull the finger," and armed citizens will go looking for a chance to exercise their deadly power. This, too, is a largely unfounded belief.

The collective experience of ordinary, law-abiding people who carry guns is that they don't feel a sudden urge to go into Central Park at three o'clock in the morning and troll for muggers. They learn that being armed, they are held to what the law calls "a higher standard of care" and are expected to avoid situations like traffic arguments that could escalate and, with a deadly weapon present, turn into killing situations.

Like an officer's body armor, the armed citizen's gun is a reminder of danger, a symbol of the need for caution. The late, great big game hunter and gun writer Finn Aagard once wrote, "Yet my pistol is more than just security. Like an Orthodox Jewish yarmulke or a Christian cross, it is a symbol of who I am, what I believe, and the moral standards by which I live."

IV. Get The License!

You'll hear some absolutists say, "No government has the right to permit me to carry a gun! I don't need no stinking permit! The Second Amendment is my license to carry!"

"If you carry, make sure you carry legally..."

That is the sound of someone asking to go to jail. Like it or not, the laws of the land require, in 46 of the 50 states, a license to carry. In two states, there is no legal provision for the ordinary citizen to carry at all. Realize that things are not as we wish they were; things are as they are. If things were as we wish they would be, we wouldn't need to carry guns at all.

If you are diligent about studying carry license reciprocity, and about seeking non-resident carry permits in states that don't have reciprocity, you can become legal to carry in some forty or more states. It can get expensive, and it can get tiresome. However, allowing yourself to be made into a felon and being ramrodded through the courts is much more expensive and far more tiresome. Bottom line: if you carry, make sure you carry legally.

V. Know What You're Doing

You wouldn't drive an automobile without knowing the rules of the road. Do not keep or carry lethal weapons for defense without knowing the rules of engagement. It is a myth to believe that you can <https://www.handgunlaw.us>

shoot anyone in your home. When Florida rescinded the requirement to retreat before using deadly force if attacked in public, the anti-gun Brady Center introduced a publicity campaign claiming that the new law allowed Floridians to shoot anyone who frightened them. This, of course, was blatantly untrue, but a great many people believed it to be so because “they heard it on TV” or “they saw it in the paper.” Such dangerous misconceptions can cause the tragic death of people who don’t deserve to be shot, and can get good people sent to prison.

“A person who opens fire with a gun they don’t know how to shoot is a danger to all...”

It is the practitioner’s responsibility to “learn the rules of the road” when they take the path toward armed self-defense. There are many firearms training schools, and at least one, the author's Massad Ayoub Group, specializes in teaching the rules of engagement. Information is available at <https://massadayoobgroup.com/>." It is wise to take local classes that emphasize the rules of “deadly force decision-making.”

Similarly, a person who opens fire with a gun they don’t know how to shoot is a danger to all. If you need the firearm for its intended purpose, you will be under extreme stress. Learn to shoot under pressure. Quick draw from concealment, safe holstering, proper tactics, and much more are on the curriculum if you are serious about defending yourself and your loved ones to the best of your ability.

VI. Concealed Means Concealed

A very few people carrying guns for the first time feel an irresistible urge to let others see that “they’ve got the power.” First-time carriers and rookie cops, usually young in both cases, may fall into this trap. It is a practice to avoid for several reasons.

“A harasser who has picked you as his victim and knows you carry a gun can create a situation where there are no other witnesses present...It is his word against yours...”

In most of this society, the only people the general public sees carrying guns in public are uniformed “protector figures,” such as police officers and security guards. When they see someone not identifiable as such, who is carrying a lethal weapon, they tend to panic. This makes no friends among the voting public for the gun owners’ rights movement—you do not make people into friends and sympathizers, by frightening them—and can lead to a panicky observer getting the wrong idea and reporting you to the police as a “man with a gun.” This can lead to all sorts of unpleasant confrontations.

Moreover, a harasser who has picked you as his victim and knows you carry a gun can create a situation where there are no other witnesses present, and then make the false claim that you threatened him with the weapon. This is a very serious felony called Aggravated Assault. It is his word against yours. The fact that you are indeed carrying the gun he describes you pointing at him can make his lie more believable than your truth, to the ears of judge and jury.

[MCRGO, Michigan Coalition of Responsible Gun Owners](https://www.handgunlaw.us), is directly responsible for getting reform concealed carry legislation enacted in their state, and has been in the forefront of fighting for the rights of armed citizens in that state. MCRGO’s Steve Dulan, in the organization’s Weekly E’News of 6/23/08, had some cogent points to make on the topic of private citizens carrying handguns visibly in public:

“Open carry of firearms, subject to MCL 750.234d, it is legal to carry a visible pistol in public. MCRGO has not adopted an official position on this subject,” wrote Dulan, who continued, “I agree

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with Ted Nugent and many others that it is a bad idea in almost every situation. Tactically, you are giving up the element of surprise should you face a deadly force situation. Furthermore, you run the risk of being called in to 9-1-1 as a 'man with a gun.' I have been on police ride-alongs when this call comes over the radio. It creates a very dangerous situation for all concerned. I do not carry openly. I have a CPL (Concealed Pistol License) and take care to choose a gun and holster that, along with appropriate clothing, allow me to keep my gun concealed unless/until I need it to save a life."

As cogent and valid as Steve Dulan's arguments are, it still makes sense to have legal open carry available as an emergency option. If the wind accidentally blows your coat open and reveals the gun, an open carry provision assures you have committed no crime. If someone who has not yet felt the need to get a concealed carry license suddenly begins getting death threats, open carry provides an emergency avenue of self-protection until the paperwork can be processed to acquire the license to carry the weapon discreetly out of sight.

VII. Maximize Your Firearms Familiarity

The more you work with the firearm, the more reflexively skilled you will become in its emergency use and its safe handling. If your home defense shotgun is a Remington 870, then when you go claybird shooting or hunting, use an 870 pump gun with a barrel and choke appropriate for each task. If you are a target shooter who uses the 1911 pistol platform at bull's-eye matches and have become deeply familiar with it, it makes sense to acquire a concealable 1911 to use as your carry gun, so that the ingrained skill will directly transfer. If a double-action [.44 Magnum](#) is your hunting revolver, and another double-action revolver is your home defense gun, it makes sense to choose a carry-size revolver as your concealment handgun when you're out and about.

Consider training classes or competition shoots where your chosen defensive firearm is appropriate to the course of fire. This skill-building will translate to self-defense ability if your carry gun ever has to be used to protect innocent life and limb. If training ammunition is too expensive, consider a .22 conversion unit for your semiautomatic pistol or a .22 caliber revolver the same size as your defensive .38 or .357. The more trigger time you have with a similar gun, the more confidence and competence you'll have with the gun you carry, if you can't afford to practice as much as you'd like with the carry gun itself.

VIII. Understand The Fine Points

Every state has different laws insofar as where you can and can't carry a gun. It's your responsibility to know all the details. In one state, it may be against the law to carry a weapon in a posted "no-gun zone." In another, that sign may have no weight of law at all behind it. In a third, you may be asked to leave if your gun is spotted, and if you do not depart, you will be subject to arrest for Trespass After Warning.

In the state of New Hampshire, it is perfectly legal to carry your gun into a bar while you sit down and have a drink. If you do the same in Florida, it's an arrestable offense, though you're allowed to have a cocktail in a restaurant with a liquor license, so long as you're seated in a part of the establishment that earns less than 50% of its income from selling alcoholic beverages by the drink. In North Carolina, you can't even walk into a restaurant that has a liquor license, with a gun on. And, perhaps strangest of all, in the state of Virginia at this writing, it is illegal to enter a tavern with a concealed handgun, but perfectly legal to belly up to the bar and sip a whiskey while carrying a loaded handgun "open carry" fashion in an exposed holster!

A superb current compendium of gun laws in the 50 states can be found at <https://handgunlaw.us/>. Review it frequently for possible changes.

IX. Carry An Adequate Firearm

If you carry a single-shot, .22 Short caliber derringer, you will be considered armed with a deadly weapon in the eyes of the law. You will not, however, be adequately prepared to stop a predictable attack by multiple armed assailants. Most experts recommend a five-shot revolver as the absolute minimum in firepower, and the .380/9mm/.38SPL range as the minimum potency level in terms of handgun caliber.

“Once you’ve found a carry gun that works for your needs, it’s a good idea to acquire another that’s identical or at least very similar...”

It is a good idea to carry spare ammunition. Many people in their first gunfight have quickly found themselves soon clicking an empty gun. A firearm without spare ammunition is a temporary gun. Moreover, many malfunctions in semiautomatic pistols require a fresh (spare) magazine to rectify. Some fear that carrying spare ammo will make them look paranoid. They need to realize that those who don’t like guns and dislike the people who carry them, will consider carrying the gun without spare ammunition to still be paranoid. It’s an easy argument to win in court. Cops carry spare ammunition. So should you.

Carrying a second gun has saved the lives of many good people. When the primary weapon is hit by a criminal’s bullet and rendered unshootable...when it is knocked from the defender’s hand, or snatched away by a criminal...when the first gun runs out of ammo and there is no time to reload...the list of reasons is endless. It suffices to remember the words of street-savvy Phil Engeldrum: “If you need to carry a gun, you probably need to carry two of them.”

At the very least, once you’ve found a carry gun that works for your needs, it’s a good idea to acquire another that’s identical or at least very similar. If you have to use the first gun for self-defense, it will go into evidence for some time, and you want something you can immediately put on to protect yourself from vengeful cronies of the criminal you were forced to shoot. If the primary gun has to go in for repair, you don’t want to be helpless or carrying something less satisfactory while you’re waiting to get it back.

X. Use Common Sense

The gun carries with it the power of life and death. That power belongs only in the hands of responsible people who care about consequences, who are respectful of life and limb and human safety. Carrying a gun is a practice that is becoming increasingly common among ordinary American citizens. Common sense must always accompany it.