

YouTube Video on Gun Safety, Locks, and Legislation

Outline

Section 1: Introduction

Hey everyone,

Today's video is going to depart from my usual lock picking content. I am going into a serious topic that I feel compelled to discuss – gun safety, locks, and regulations.

Before we start, I want to address possible concerns. You see the firearms and locks here. I have verified each firearm is unloaded. If you are unfamiliar with gun safety rules there are five I would like to tell you now.

1. Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.
2. Never point a weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot.
3. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.
4. Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.
5. Know your target and what lies beyond.

You may know from my other videos that I pick locks. I am a registered locksmith with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice. I am not registered because I work as a locksmith for a living, but because Virginias laws regarding lock picking are stricter than most states. I will not be demonstrating how to open gun locks in this video. My intention is to initiate a conversation rather than provide a tutorial on opening gun locks.

Section 2: My Background with Guns

Before we dive into the topic of weapons, let me be very transparent about my background with guns.

I was a Marine for 5 years as a combat engineer, 3 years with a division unit. I scored marksman once, sharpshooter three times, expert once. I trained with and shot the M16A4 rifle, M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, M203 grenade launcher, M240B medium machine gun, Mark-19 automatic grenade launcher, and worked with tens of thousands of pounds of high explosives including the APOBS anti-personal obstacle breaching system, and MICLIC M58 mine clearing line charge. Neither myself or anyone under my supervision ever had a safety incident with them. I deployed once to Nawa Afghanistan. Fortunately, no one has ever shot at me, and I have never shot at anyone else. While deployed I only pointed my rifle at an individual once as a threat. They immediately understood what I was telling them, stopped what they were doing, and there was no need to shoot. I have assembled firearm kits, and converted pump action rifles to semiautomatic, drilling gas blocks. I have shot all the weapons you see here. I do not hunt. I shot one rabbit. I have taught a few people how to shoot for their first time.

I am familiar with firearms and the laws regarding them. I am also familiar with the pain and death guns do inflict.

As a young adult I can think of multiple times I was reckless with firearms, but luckily and thankfully no one was ever hurt. I have seen many loaded weapons unintentionally pointed at bystanders. I have seen multiple negligent discharges. One childhood friend from middle school would be shot and killed as a teenager in our hometown over a small amount of drugs. One of the first people to teach me to shoot, a good friend from high school, killed himself with a pistol. One of my sergeants that trained me was shot by a sniper in Afghanistan. In the years I went to college in Norfolk Virginia there were multiple drive by shootings. A couple of years ago one of my previous corporals put on body armor, grabbed a rifle, and called the police on himself for suicide by cop. My best friend would be shot at in a fight about a girl, luckily, he was not hit. A couple of years ago my brother was robbed at gunpoint, and less than a year ago my brother would commit suicide with a pistol, he had just turned 18.

Currently I have a concealed weapons permit. I own roughly 10 guns, including an ATF class 3 device with tax stamp. However, my view on guns has evolved, and I will not be renewing my National Rifle Association or Virginia Coalition Defense League memberships.

Section 3: Civil Conversations

With that background out of the way, I want to start by talking about the need for civil conversations.

One of the roadblocks to progress in the gun debate is the lack of civil conversations. Instead of trashing political parties, let us recognize common ground. Both gun owners and gun control advocates share a desire to protect loved ones from violence. I have never seen trash-talking political parties help. Save it for the voting booth. Instead, focus on the issues at hand and find common ground. Both sides need to recognize the shared goal of protecting innocent lives. Responsible gun ownership and effective gun control measures can coexist.

Let us also show each other some basic respect. The majority of the 82 million gun owners in the United States follow the law and are trying to be safe and responsible with their guns. The statistics would be much worse if this were not true. The majority of Americans do not own guns, and over half of Americans report either being threatened with a gun, having a family member being killed by a gun (including suicide), or have witnessed someone being shot. Even if most Americans are not familiar with guns, they are familiar with gun violence, and have a right to speak and be heard.

There are a couple common misconceptions we can address really quickly.

1. Often you hear many gun owners have fully automatic weapons. Fully automatic means the weapon shoots multiple bullets while holding down the trigger. Fully automatic weapons are very restricted and expensive to get. Most gun owners have semi-automatic weapons. One trigger pull for each bullet fired.
2. You may hear more guns will make us safer, or guns save lives. If this were true, the United States would be the safest country in the world. We greatly out lead every other developed country with gun violence.

3. You will hear gun owners are uneducated Christian conservatives, or right-wing extremists. I have a bachelor's degree in engineering, I am not Christian, I have voted for both Republicans and Democrats, and I do not feel like the NRA represents me. I do not feel alone there. As an engineer I have met other educated and progressive gun owners with various religious beliefs.
4. One last myth I think is pertinent is the idea there is a huge divide between policies that work to reduce gun deaths. Many gun owners, me included, support evidence-based legislation. Even though you may not personally agree with them, here are three examples where there are not "deep divides". I will quote John Hopkins University studies.
 - "Laws prohibiting gun possession by individuals who are subject to a temporary domestic violence restraining order are supported by 81% of Americans, 74% of gun owners, and 80% of Republicans."
 - "Laws requiring a gun purchaser to obtain a license from law enforcement to verify their identity and ensure they're not prohibited are supported by more than 75% of Americans, 63% of gun owners, and 70% of Republicans."
 - "Laws requiring purchasers of semiautomatic rifles to be at least 21 years old are supported by 73% of Americans, 60% of gun owners, and 70% of Republicans."

There is a quote I think is relevant, it goes "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation." To bridge the communication gap, it is essential to educate ourselves. Whether you are a gun owner or advocate for gun control, understanding existing laws, gun safety, and firearm technology is crucial. I am only going to be able to scratch the surface of those topics here. Please try to keep an open mind during discussions; there is always something new we can learn.

Section 4: Status Quo, Current Events

I know all statistics are lies, but I want to look at some numbers on gun use and violence in the US. I do not expect these numbers to be taken as exact values, but we can look at them to give us ideas about general trends and orders of magnitude.

Every day, 327 people are shot in the United States. Among those:

- 117 people are shot and killed.
 - 67 die from gun suicide
 - 46 are murdered.
 - 2 are killed by police.
 - 1 is killed unintentionally.
 - 1 died but the intent was unknown.
- 210 survived gunshot injuries.
 - 90 are shot unintentionally and survive.
 - 90 are intentionally shot by someone else and survive.

- 12 are shot and survive but the intent was unknown.
- 10 survive an attempted gun suicide.
- 4 are shot by police and survive.

Each day 23 children (1-17) are shot in the U.S.

- 6 die from gun violence
- 3 are murdered.
- 17 children and teens survived gunshot injuries.
- 8 are intentionally shot by someone else and survive.
- 2 children and teens either die from gun suicide or survive an attempted gun suicide.
- 8 children and teens are unintentionally shot in instances of family fire — a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home resulting in injury or death.

Some of the shooting incidents will be defensive gun use, firearms used legally and correctly for self-defense. There are not clear statistics on these. The best number I could find from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). It showed about 70,000 cases of defensive gun use (which may be brandishing a firearm and not shooting it). That is compared to the roughly 484,000 cases of crimes involving a gun.

"In 2020, the most recent year for which the FBI has published data, handguns were involved in 59% of the 13,620 U.S. gun murders and non-negligent manslaughters for which data is available. Rifles – the category that includes guns sometimes referred to as “assault weapons” – were involved in 3% of firearm murders. Shotguns were involved in 1%. The remainder of gun homicides and non-negligent manslaughters (36%) involved other kinds of firearms or those classified as “type not stated.”"

Active shooter incidents have continued to grow over the past 20 years. There are various definitions, but looking at 2021, between data from the FBI and gun violence archive, 103 to 706 people were killed. This is about 0.2 to 1.7 percent of the total deaths by firearms that year.

This says to me, when also considering many of the homicides are from spouses (especially so when women are murdered), that for any given individual, they are most likely to be shot by someone in their own home, with a very large percent of those being suicides and accidents. That is important to keep in mind when we are considering what we need to fix.

Assault weapons and mass shooting scare us, and they get our attention; so, this is what the media shows us the most. It is not what is killing the majority of Americans. I do not say this to dismiss these victims or discussions on the types of rifles out there. I say it to help explain why I am going to concentrate on talking about safe training and storage first.

Section 4: Safety Training

One of the most valuable resources for a gun owner is a hands-on safety and training course. Significantly more important than what gun you own is your familiarity and training with it. When people ask me, what gun should I get to defend myself, my question back is what training do you have, or do you plan to get? If the answer is none, I don't recommend you get a gun. I recommend you look into a stun gun, pepper spray, or less lethal pistols like the ones from Byrna. Yes, you can still injure or kill people with these. It is much less likely than with a gun.

In Virginia right now, there is no requirement for training to purchase a gun or for open carry, which is what it sounds like, carrying a weapon openly in public. There is a requirement for training for a concealed weapons permit. Many states in the US do not require any training for concealed carry (I count 9 to 11 depending on how you read the law). Regardless of the law, as a responsible gun owner, I think anyone who wants to purchase a firearm needs to get training from professionals and experience shooting prior to purchasing a gun. I say that for two reasons, purchasing a firearm without training is dangerous. Do you know what internal safeties the gun you purchased has, or how to properly load and unload it, or do you know how to handle a gun safely when you start getting burned by hot casings ejected from a gun that sometimes bounce and fall in your clothing? The second reason is also practical, you likely will not know which gun is best for you until you have had some hands-on experience. Is that slide too hard for you to rack, does the slide bite your hand when it fires, is the gun something you can comfortably hold? These are all the things a course should introduce you to and give you at least basic experience with. You will learn how to use a firearm legally, responsibly, and with some skill. My wife took a women's only pistol defense course, which was led by female instructors near us and included live fire training. I am not sure what they told her differently than I did, but her shooting improved significantly after taking it, and she felt more comfortable and confident shooting as well.

When I say professionals, I mean ideally individuals who do weapons training for a living. If you have family or friends that are law enforcement, military personnel, or even gun enthusiasts or competition shooters, they are valuable assets to talk to and train with. I still recommend going to a formal class with instructors. They will have more experience teaching brand new people, which is a skill. I have forgotten some of the challenges of first learning to shoot and may forget to teach you. An instructor is going to follow a predetermined course and make sure you get that information. And let's be honest, there are some gun owners that do not know what they are doing. If you are new, you may not realize the person teaching you is not safe. Going to a formal class should prevent that. This also ties into the statistics about the roughly 90 people unintentionally shot a day. Should it be a legal requirement? At this point I want to say yes, but I don't know if it can be done legally or without targeting those from a lower socio-economic status or minorities. There are complications about what is legal with the second amendment. In the US you do not have a constitutional right to own a car (for which you need a driving test), but you do have a constitutional right to own a gun. Training and the cost of it can be used to restrict rights. Training requirements could be made so difficult or costly it is unattainable to many Americans, so I do not think the answer is simple. I think it should be a discussion. I do think as more people die from negligent firearm use, communities will begin to demand it become law, and will look into how to change the laws so they can require it.

Regardless of the law, go get training, The NRA has nationwide training classes, and their courses will often suffice for a concealed weapons permit.

You can also go to a local gun shop and ask if they recommend anyone. They should be able to point you to local instructors that have earned a good reputation. My local gun shop has cards on their counter for local firearms instructors. Many gun ranges will also provide hands on training, and if not will recommend someone who can, so I would look for one near you and give them a call. My intention there was not to discourage responsible gun ownership but to highlight the need for proper training and awareness.

Section 5: Gun Locks

Now I am going to shift gears a little and talk about gun storage and locks.

My entire time I was in the Marines I was issued a rifle. The exact rifle that was issued to me changed, but at any point in my career, there was a rifle and serial number assigned to me. The rifles spent the majority of their life checked into an armory. A building with multiple locks, alarms, and armed guards protecting it. When I checked it out of the armory it was my responsibility to retain it. The primary way I maintained control of my rifle was by keeping it with me, literally in arms reach at all times. There were occasions where there was a group of us that needed to do some work, and we would stack our rifles in a pile, and choose one Marine to watch over them, with his rifle. Lastly, in boot camp, a couple occasions while traveling internationally, and when deployed certain weapon systems or rifles would be outside of the armory and outside of direct supervision (things like vehicle mounted machine guns). In all of these cases, we secured the weapons using at least one form of lock, and sometimes multiple locks. That is not to say I never saw negligent weapon storage, but long story short, every case I can think of was taken care of quickly and seriously by the chain of command.

The ATF provides an enormous amount of information on guns stolen in the United States. Nationwide there are about 250,000 guns stolen each year. That's about one gun every two minutes. 95% of those gun thefts are from private citizens, not manufacturers, dealers, or commercial transport. The most common gun stolen is a 9mm pistol. The number of these guns that are stolen from cars has continued to increase over the past 20 years, such that the majority of guns stolen in 2020 were from vehicles. The gun my brother killed himself was illegally purchased from an individual who illegally stole it from a car in Portsmouth Virginia, which is in the top 10 cities in this country for the number of gun thefts from a vehicle.

Between the number of guns that are being stolen each year, and the number of accidental discharges in the home, we can say there is a safe storage problem.

Everywhere I look online discussing responsible gun ownership says to store guns safely, and almost everywhere provides generally good advice on how to do that.

Safely generally being some form of unloaded, and locked, preferably locked in a case or safe, and out of sight of strangers or children. Many recommend locking the firearm and ammunition separately. Even the NRA, which opposes "government mandates on how to store firearms" says "store guns so they are not accessible to unauthorized persons", "always unload firearms when they are not in use", and that "Gun Safes are by far the most effective way for homeowners to secure their guns against unauthorized use."

You should be getting a gun lock any time you purchase a pistol from a dealer. The Child Safety Lock Act of 2005 says, "When selling, delivering, or transferring a handgun to any person other than another licensee, any licensed importer, licensed manufacturer, or licensed dealer must provide a secure gun storage or safety device to that person for the handgun." This means if you purchase a handgun in the United States, the FFL is required to provide you with a means to secure it. If you do not see one when you buy a pistol, just ask them for it.

Project ChildSafe is the official safety program of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association for the firearm industry. They have partnered with law enforcement nationwide to provide free gun locks. On their website you can enter your city and state and see where you can pick up a gun lock for free.

If you live in Virginia, House Bill 2387 passed last year which provides a \$300 tax credit for individuals filing, or \$600 for a jointly filed tax return, for the purchase of a gun safe. I really like this. Especially as someone familiar with locks, I know that a quality pistol or gun safe is expensive and can cost hundreds to thousands of dollars. I think this tax credit would be great to see Nationwide.

Here in front of me you can see a variety of gun locks. I originally intended to open them all on camera as some sort of entertainment and for awareness of their security level. After talking with a friend and family I have decided not to do that. I think there is risk a young person would use it as a tutorial to do something foolish and dangerous. I will say every lock here can be opened in under 10 minutes nondestructively when you know the techniques to open them, most of them can be opened in under a minute, and most of those techniques are already online. That being said, these are 1000 times better than nothing. The average person or child does not know how to pick locks, and just the lock being there discourages handling it. Just because these locks are not perfect, does not mean you should not use them. Security is something that comes in layers, and you can build it up over time. If a cable or trigger lock is all you have right now, that's the tool to use, and it really is better than no lock at all. I cannot go into a lot of detail on these locks security without revealing methods to open them. I will say the SafeGunLock here (that is what it is called by the manufacturer) will take the longest to manipulate open. That being said, because it is a combination, someone in your home could try new combinations over time. It may also be of interest in countries that serialize and restrict barrels. In the US we serialize and regulate receivers. This barrel lock like the trigger locks generally do not allow you to lock the firearm to a structure. Some trigger locks like the Noble Guard NG-900 can be secured to structures with the provided cable. Cable locks will also allow you to secure your firearm to a structure and generally when used as intended prevent the firearm from being loaded. The cable can be used to secure your gun to the frame of your car in the trunk or under the seats. The trigger locks with fingerprint sensors are not more secure, but they can provide a method for quicker access to an authorized user. You can also purchase a gun cable and then use a more secure padlock if desired.

The next level up is going to be a lock box or pistol safe. These can range significantly in quality and price. They offer the advantage of concealing your weapon, and more protection from damage or disassembly. Depending on the quality it may or may not be easier to open than a gun lock. I cannot afford to evaluate all the options out there. If any manufacturers want to send me one and get my opinion (public or private) that can be arranged, but I am limited to what I have seen in other

people's reviews and testing. Four brands consistently come up as providing quality pistol or "fast access" safes. That would be, in no particular order, Fort Knox, Steelhead, Vline, and SecureIt. Some states also provide lists of approved devices for firearms storage which may be important to you legally, so you will need to check with your state laws to verify that.

Gun safes are going to be the most secure option. These are going to be large safes that when bolted to the framing in your home can not be easily removed and opened in another location. They can range in quality just like the pistol boxes. I do not have the money to do firsthand evaluations on them. If someone wants to cover the cost to provide them, I can evaluate them firsthand. The same brands I just mentioned as making quality pistol boxes, also all appear to have good reputations for making quality safes. Again, in no particular order, Fort Knox, Steelhead, Vline, and SecureIt.

I will also mention if you are a felon in Virginia, if you live with someone who owns firearms, they need to be secured in a manner in which you cannot access them, or the state of Virginia may try to prosecute you for illegal possession. Early in college, me and a roommate lived with a genuinely nice guy in Norfolk who was a felon. We lived in a somewhat bad neighborhood where people regularly tried to break into our cars and had to chain up our grill to keep it from being stolen. We used a large gun safe for the guns, and we did not give the roommate the combination. It was not because we did not trust him, but because legally it protected him from being charged with having access to the guns.

Every lock or safe can be opened if enough time or resources are thrown at it. That is not the point. The majority of these thieves are not master safe crackers showing up with thermal lances. They are opportunistic "smash and grabs", teenagers and family getting access to loaded, unlocked, unsupervised firearms. If as gun owners we do not protect our firearms from unauthorized use on our own, we can expect the government will start stepping in and telling us how to do it.

Section 6: Legislation

That brings me to the last topic I want to mention, legislation. Everything I discussed today is a current topic. The white house just released a statement a few days ago on plans to reduce gun violence. The first action items in their list all involved safe storage. They provide a guide from the Department of Justice on safe storage recommendations, and they also provide a guide to state legislatures of model legislation for securing firearms, written warnings, and civil liabilities.

I often hear the NRA is the reason gun legislation fails. I have seen firsthand that there is a lot of grassroots gun rights support in the US. When gun legislation is being purposed, gun owners call and write senators, and show up in person to hearings. I have done this, and locally I have seen the county administration building have to have gun owners wait outside because there were so many of them waiting to voice their opinion against gun control legislations. That involvement is a major part of gun owners' success in reducing gun legislation. The majority of Americans are not gun owners though, and the majority of Americans do have experience with gun violence. If those Americans decide to also call and write senators, and show up in person to hearings, for better or worse, gun owners will find themselves outnumbered, and more legislation being passed.

I am not against gun legislation in principle. Some of it I think makes a lot of sense. I support background checks including between private sales to reduce gun trafficking. I support wait periods to reduce suicides and homicides including intimate partner homicides. I support restricting gun sales to individuals 21 and up, because in that period brains are still developing, and we are more prone to make high risk or impulsive decisions, including suicide and murder.

There is legislation being heard right now in Virginia that I support. I support Virginia House Bills HB945 and HB35 that expand the devices covered under the safe storage tax credit. I support House Bill 158 that essentially expands the Federal Child Safety Lock Act on a state level to include all firearms. I think we should be securing rifles and shotguns too. I support Senate Bill 447 that makes it a civil penalty to leave a gun visible in an unattended car and allows the car to be towed for safekeeping. I support it not to "punish victims of car theft" but because I think it empowers law enforcement to correct a clearly negligent situation when they see it, and maybe prevent a gun from getting on the black market like the one that was sold to my brother.

Section 7: Closing Comments

I support legislation I think will really work, but I know it is of limited value. There were multiple laws that were broken for my brother to get the handgun he got. When I read through his messages, I was shocked to see adults so willing to sell a gun to a kid they did not know, and other kids his age involved in getting guns. I was naive about that.

I think gun owners like me have the power to make a bigger impact than anyone else by holding ourselves accountable. We can shift the culture to one that prioritizes safety and begin practicing and improving our safe handling and storage. We can reduce gun theft, trafficking, and violence by policing ourselves first.

Indifference to the current status quo might seem fine until tragedy strikes close to home, or in your home. We can't undo certain damages, and we cannot bring the dead back to life. My mother tried to stop my brother's bleeding while he died on the floor. I got there as soon as I could, but it was far too late, all I could do was clean up his blood. I do not wish the pain that my brother felt or that stays with me on anyone. I know suicide is more than just a gun issue. As a gun owner, and the one who taught my brother to shoot, and with the legislation being heard, I feel obliged to talk about this now.

As communities, gun rights and control advocates, we can strive for improvements. Let us explore where change is possible. Please comment below what you think we need to do. Even better, engage in real conversation with people you know on both sides of the fence so we can get some real conversations and solutions, and enact them and get actual results. If you know in your soul how you feel, call, and write to your senators and let them know too.

If you are still watching, I appreciate you joining me in this conversation. Gun rights may be an individual issue, but gun violence is a community one, and improvement starts with some civil honest dialogue. Discussing successful laws, responsible ownership, and realistic measures can pave the way for progress. We all play a part in trying to make a safer future. I think we can do better, and we need to do better. Thank you for watching.

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