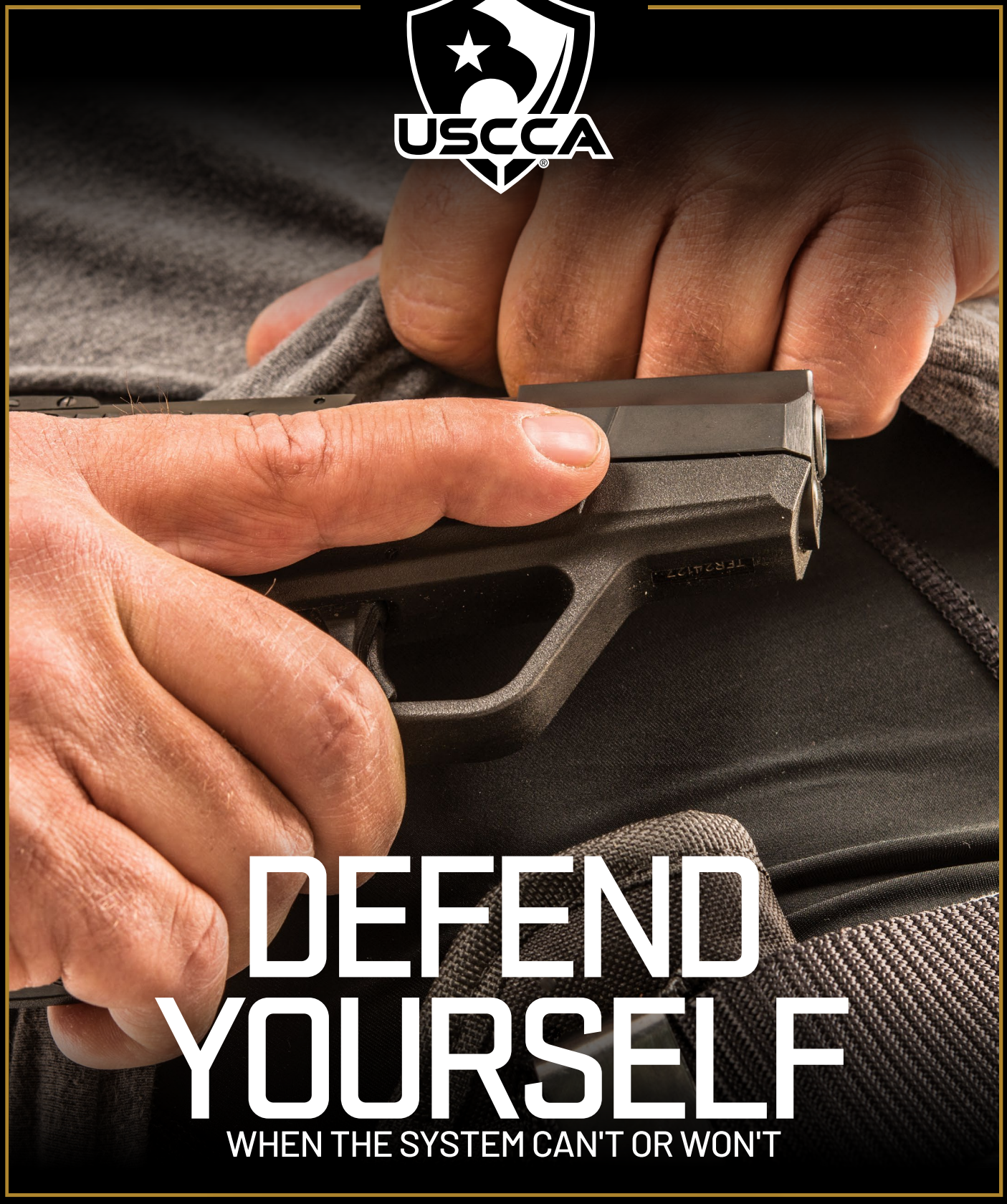
CONCEALED CARRY GUIDE

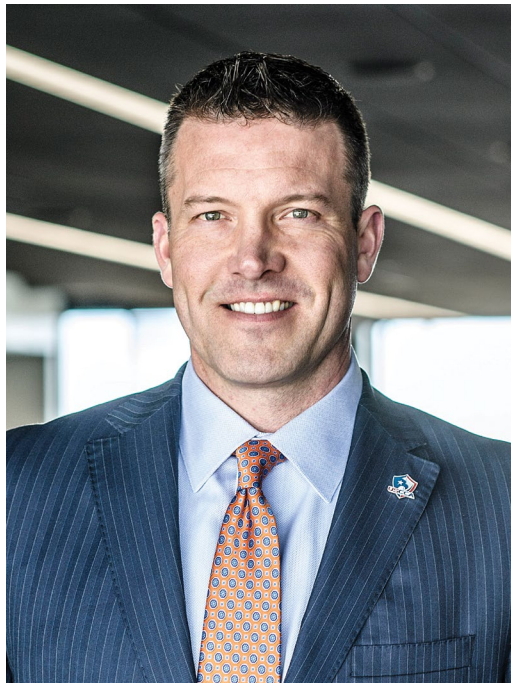
USCCA



DEFEND YOURSELF

WHEN THE SYSTEM CAN'T OR WON'T

THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROTECTING THE ONES YOU LOVE



You might know me as the president and founder of the United States Concealed Carry Association — the USCCA — an organization that teaches and empowers its hundreds of thousands of members to confidently and responsibly protect the ones they love. Above all though? I am a father. The love I have for my children and the responsibility and duty I have to keep them safe are the driving forces behind everything I do. (I imagine you know exactly what that's like.) In fact, my desire to be my family's ultimate protector is where the USCCA story really begins. And where it continues is with people like you — people who just want to do the right thing when it comes to defending the ones they love. My hope is that the 23 strategies presented herein will guide you on your self-defense journey and help you to feel more confident and prepared as your family's ultimate protector. Take care and stay safe.

Tim Schmidt, President & Founder, USCCA

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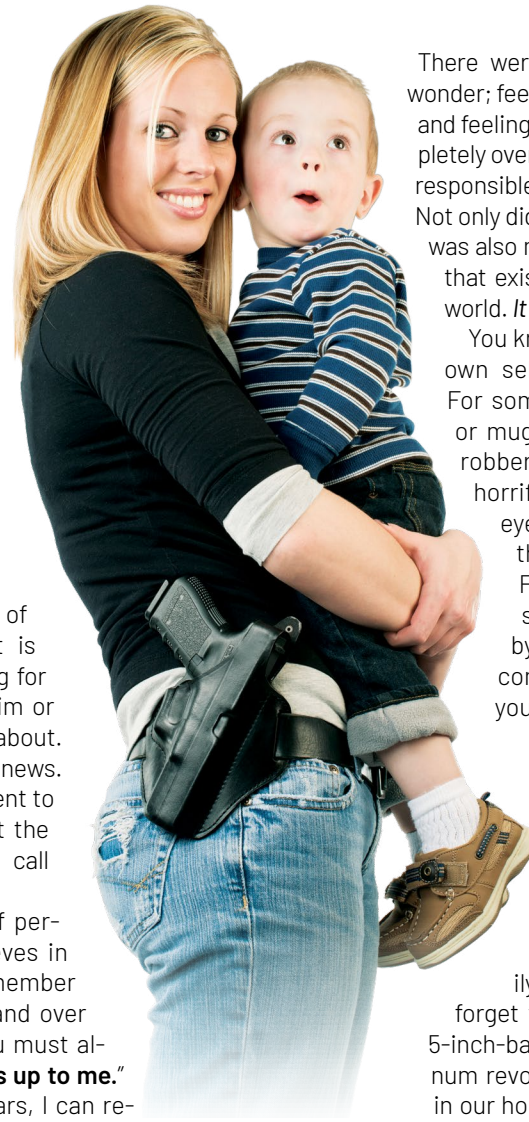
1

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE ... WHICH ARE YOU?

LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU ARE YOUR FAMILY'S FIRST RESPONDER.



There are really two kinds of people in this world. The first is the person who is always looking for someone else to take care of him or her. You know what I'm talking about. Nowadays, it's all we hear on the news. These people want the government to provide for them, and they want the police to protect them. (Some call these people "sheep.")

Then there's the *other* kind of person, the person who truly believes in personal responsibility. I can remember a saying my dad told me over and over as I grew up. He'd say, "Tim, you must always remember, **if it is to be, it's up to me.**" As a kid in my early teenage years, I can remember thinking to myself, "Yeah, Dad, I got it. You've told me this a thousand times." But you know what? That phrase, along with a whole bunch of other brilliant wisdom from my dad, had a huge impact on me. Yep, my dad did an amazing job instilling in me that there is only ONE person responsible for my happiness, safety and security: **ME!**

Now, if you're reading this, I bet you can relate to this concept of personal responsibility. Heck, you and I probably have a lot more than just that in common. So you'll probably also understand how this wisdom revealed a huge frustration in my life.

WOULD THIS FRUSTRATE YOU?

You know, every person has certain defining moments in his or her life — times when normal, everyday events end up having a lifelong impact. I'll never forget those first few days after my first son was born. My mind was flooded with all kinds of new thoughts and feelings.

There were feelings of joy, amazement and wonder; feelings of gratitude and responsibility; and feelings of fear and frustration. I was completely overwhelmed by the idea that I was now responsible in every way for this new little life. Not only did I need to provide for my new son, it was also my duty to protect him from the evil that exists — and will always exist — in our world. *It hit me like a ton of bricks!*

You know, I think everyone has his or her own self-defense revelation experience. For some, it's a friend who was attacked or mugged. For others, it's witnessing a robbery. And for others, it's surviving a horrific experience that opened their eyes to the need to be able to defend themselves. You see, I got off easy. For some reason, my internal personal-defense switch was tripped by the simple circumstance of becoming a new father. I can only hope you'll be as lucky as I was!

I found myself becoming very protective and thinking a lot about what I would do in different situations. I started learning about self-defense. I started scouring the library, subscribing to magazines and buying books about guns.

I didn't grow up in a hunting family, but my dad did like guns (I'll never forget the first time he let me shoot his 5-inch-barreled Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum revolver!), and there were always guns in our house for protection. So my desire to learn how guns could help me protect my own family actually felt pretty natural to me.

And that's when it happened: I read an article that changed my whole outlook. The article was "The Constitutional Right and Social Obligation to Carry a Gun" by a guy named Robert Boatman. (Mr. Boatman has since passed away, but I did have a chance to meet him and tell him how much of an impact he had on me and my family.) This article opened my eyes to the idea of carrying a gun with me wherever I went. It made perfect sense to me, and I was astonished how Mr. Boatman presented carrying a firearm as a social obligation.

I was hooked. I needed to learn exactly how to do this as quickly as possible.

And what about you? Are you the type of person who accepts responsibility for your own safety and the protection of those you love?

Tim Schmidt
President & Founder, USCCA

2

WHY CARRY A CONCEALED WEAPON?

IN A WORLD THAT SEEMS TO GET MORE DANGEROUS EVERY DAY, A LITTLE FORETHOUGHT CAN GO A LONG WAY IN DEFENDING YOUR LOVED ONES.

Many honest citizens know that when seconds count, the police are minutes away — at best. These people take responsibility for their own safety and choose to carry concealed weapons for the protection of their own lives and those of their loved ones. They are not vigilantes, they are not cowboys or wanna-be cops, and they are certainly not wanna-be killers. They are people like you and me who realize that life and family are worth protecting in a dangerous world, and they want to have a fighting chance should crime come unbidden to them. By doing so, they protect not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. They do this by being a deterrent to those who would do them harm.

Before 1987 (when Florida laws set the standard for allowing "shall-issue" carry permits), criminals knew it was very unlikely that their would-be victims were armed. No more! With the majority of states now being shall-issue, and with more citizens carrying guns for protection on more American streets, criminals cannot know who is armed and who is not. This deters criminals and contributes to a decreasing trend in violent crimes nationwide. While the missions of the police officer and the armed citizen are different, guns in the hands of trained citizens can be just as effective against sudden attack as guns in the hands of trained police. The difference is that the responsibly armed citizen has the gun he or she carries immediately at hand when danger strikes and need not wait minutes or even hours for help to arrive. Most honest cops will tell you that most of the time, when they are called for help, they arrive after the danger has passed.

In general, violent crime has gone down in the United States for the last several decades, while the number of guns in civilian hands has gone up. But there is still more than enough violent crime to give the prudent citizen cause for alarm — and it can strike anytime and anywhere.

Statistics from the FBI show there were 951,270 violent crimes reported nationwide in 2022 — a whopping 80.79 percent increase from the number of violent offenses (526,166) reported just three years earlier in 2019. These numbers are hard for some of us to understand, but that's because we are rational, law-abiding members of society. We are the sheepdogs that have to help protect our loved ones, our friends and even complete strangers from the wolves out there.

Facing the prospect of criminal attack, many citizens choose to arm themselves with handguns for the same reason police do: to protect themselves and others from deadly danger. Handguns are more convenient for full-time carry than rifles or shotguns and, especially considering modern ammunition, those handguns can be effective for defensive purposes. There are other options for personal protection, such as martial arts, knives or less-lethal devices like OC pepper spray and noise makers. Such devices are sometimes less effective at quickly and decisively stopping an aggressor, and they have the added disadvantage of needing to be used at close-contact range if they are to be effective at all. By contrast, a gun delivers a powerful deterrent blow from a safer distance than a knife or pepper spray can. In the face of a potentially lethal attack, the No. 1 goal is the protection and survival of the innocent. That's *you*, someone you love or another innocent person.

951,270 VIOLENT CRIMES REPORTED NATIONWIDE

3 CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

FEW DECISIONS ARE AS PERSONAL AS SELECTING YOUR SIDEARM. WHETHER YOU GO REVOLVER OR SEMI-AUTO, REMEMBER TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU.

As an American, you have a huge advantage when you want to carry a concealed pistol. Every law-abiding citizen and legal resident has the right to keep and bear arms, and there are more firearms available to the average U.S. citizen than anywhere else on the planet.

Defensive carry handguns will typically be of two types: revolver or semi-auto pistol. While available calibers range from .22 to .50 Action Express, the usual caliber range for serious self-defense starts at .380 ACP and goes up to .45 ACP.

Until police departments moved to the semi-auto pistol to arm their officers in the 1980s, the six-shot revolver, usually in .38 Special — or its more powerful big brother, the .357 Magnum — was the standard sidearm for America's thin blue line. The modern double-action revolver is inherently safe. It is simple to operate, easy to learn to use (but difficult to shoot well), capable of excellent accuracy and, when loaded with today's ammunition designed specifically for self-defense, gives good service to the responsibly armed citizen. The chief drawback of the revolver is its capacity of five or six rounds, which some find to be too few.

The other choice is a semi-automatic pistol, most commonly in calibers .380 ACP, 9mm, .40 S&W or .45 ACP. The advantages of the semi-auto are larger ammunition capacity, faster reloads and greater ease of concealment. Since a semi-auto does not have a bulky cylinder, it is flatter and a little easier to conceal than a revolver. The downside is it having more moving parts and thus more things to go wrong, which makes for a greater tendency to malfunction than a revolver. But with modern production techniques, proper training and proper maintenance on the part of the owner, semi-automatic pistols are capable of great reliability and are widely chosen for concealed carry.

Try out several revolvers and pistols in the different recommended calibers. While shopping for your carry gun, you should know that what you enjoy holding in the shop might not feel quite so good in your hands when you shoot it. For this reason, if possible, get to a shop that allows you to rent firearms and try them out on its range before you buy. Your choice for a self-defense sidearm should be one you can shoot comfortably and accurately and that you will carry every time you walk out your door.

Given careful shopping and the wide range of handguns developed and tailored specifically for the U.S. concealed carry market, there is no reason your choice of a daily carry gun cannot be powerful and concealable. After you choose one, practice with it until you can quickly and consistently hit the center of a man-sized target at ranges from 3 feet to 25 yards.

4 CHOOSE YOUR AMMUNITION

FROM HYPER-MODERN FRANGIBLES TO TRADITIONAL JACKETED HOLLOW-POINTS, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A WIDER SELECTION OF DEFENSIVE AMMUNITION.

Self-defense ammunition is the next important component of a self-defense system. It must be accurate, reliable and capable of delivering a hard hit. Any effective defensive round must hit its target, preferably stay inside its target and deliver enough power on impact to stop that target from continuing aggressive action against the intended victim.

Your best bet for defensive ammunition includes a hollow-point bullet, which is designed to expand on impact. You might also choose ammunition with a frangible bullet, which is designed to come apart on impact. Both of these ammunition types dump the bulk of their energy into their target and deliver that energy with maximum force where it is needed most. Both of them put the brakes on when they hit the target, so they are less likely to go through the bad guy and hit an innocent bystander. All these factors combine to make hollow-point and frangible rounds good choices for civilian self-defense.

Modern hollow-point and frangible rounds hit the target accurately and provide a good chance of stopping an aggressor.

If you're not sure which ammunition or bullet shape to choose, check what your local law enforcement agencies are using. Police officers carry guns for a living, and their departments have a strong interest in ammunition that will help their officers stay safe. Whatever ammunition they adopt is likely a decent bet for you.

5 AMMO GLOSSARY

Ball - The military nomenclature for full metal jacket ammunition, as in "ball ammo."

BJHP - Bonded-jacket hollow-point. A style of self-defense projectile in which the jacket of the bullet has been specially bonded to the lead core, making for more reliable expansion and energy transfer.

EB - Enclosed base. This means there is no bare lead on the base of the bullet; it is jacketed in order to minimize lead exposure.

FMJ - Full metal jacket. These are bullets that have no exposed lead on the nose or sides and do not deform as dramatically as hollow-point or bare-lead bullets. These are the standard training load for semi-automatics and are not preferred for self-defense.

FPE - Foot-pounds energy. This is the measurement of the energy the bullet delivers to a target upon impact when fired from a test barrel at the factory. Your mileage may vary.

FPS - Feet per second. This will be the velocity at which the projectiles left a test barrel at the factory when samples from each lot of ammunition were tested. As above, your results might differ due to firearm barrel length.

Frangible - These are target rounds that are specifically designed to break apart on impact with a backstop. They are widely used at indoor ranges to reduce the risk of ricochets.

Grain - An archaic unit of measurement that is still used when referring to weights of projectiles (437.5 grains equals 1 ounce).

Hardened Lead - An alloy of lead and antimony. This alloy is used for bare-lead projectiles, providing better expansion control and less fouling in barrels than unalloyed lead.

HP - Hollow-point. This is a bullet that has a cavity carved out of its nose, and the intent is to make the projectile open up upon impact with a target in order to expend all of its energy in that target without passing through it.

JHP - This is a hollow-point bullet that is also jacketed. This is done to reduce fouling in the action and barrel of the firearm and to provide more consistent bullet expansion.

Low Flash - These are cartridges that have been specifically loaded to reduce the visible muzzle flash when the gun is discharged.

Low Recoil/Managed Recoil - These are cartridges that have been specifically loaded with a lower powder charge to reduce the felt recoil when the gun is discharged.

LR - Long Rifle, as in .22 LR. This is the most common type of .22 ammunition. Before it became the industry standard, there was also the .22 Long and .22 Short, both of which are still available but not nearly as common.

LRN - Lead round nose. These bare-lead, unjacketed bullets are most common in revolvers and are mostly used for target shooting.

+P and +P+ - These are designators identifying ammunition as carrying a heavier than normal powder charge. Certain firearms are designed to fire +P and +P+ ammunition, but not all are. Always consult your owner's manual before using any ammunition not specifically designed for use in your particular sidearm.

SJHP - Semi-jacketed hollow-point.

SJSP - Semi-jacketed soft point. These are projectiles that look like a SJHP but without the hollow points, and are commonly used for big-game hunting and self-defense when increased penetration is desired.

SPL - Special, as in .38 Special or .44 Special. Pay close attention, as cartridges marked "Special" are very different from other rounds with the same numeric designation but a different suffix, such as .38 S&W or .44 Magnum.

SWC - Semi-wadcutter. This is a type of flat-nosed bullet used mostly in target shooting but also for self-defense with hardened lead bullets.

SWHP - Semi-wadcutter hollow-point. These are bare-lead bullets with a hollow point; picture a SJHP but all lead. These are more common in the bigger-bullet, lower-velocity cartridges like the .45 Colt.

TC - Truncated cone. This is kind of the autoloader version of a wadcutter in that it has a flatter nose than a standard ball round.

TMJ - Total metal jacket. These projectiles are completely electroplated with copper so there is absolutely no exposed lead.

WC - Wadcutter. This is a flat-nosed, usually unjacketed projectile common in revolver cartridges that is usually used for target shooting but is also popular for self-defense in snub-nosed revolvers.

WMR - Winchester Magnum Rimfire. Also known as .22 Magnum or .22 Mag, it is a longer-cased .22 rimfire round. It is often used for target shooting and small-game hunting, though some self-defense-oriented sidearms are chambered for this powerful little round.

NOTE: *There will be acronyms and terms that are used to describe proprietary technologies. GDHP, for example, refers to the "Gold Dot Hollow-Point" bullets loaded in some cartridges sold by Speer. These aren't exactly universal cartridge nomenclature; they're marketing tools and will often have an explanation on the box.*

6 CHOOSE YOUR GEAR

OUTFITTING YOURSELF IS EASIER AND MORE AFFORDABLE TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE. FROM BUDGET TO PREMIUM, YOUR GEAR IS WAITING FOR YOU.

After you choose a gun to carry, you need to carry it. Your carry gear and mode is just as personal a choice as your handgun and ammunition. You want your mode of carry to be convenient, comfortable and very discreet. With proper design and construction of the holster/carry system, even a full-sized handgun can be carried comfortably and discreetly all day.

Carry modes vary from strong-side, back pocket, front pocket, shoulder, small-of-the-back, ankle, and off-body carry in a purse, briefcase or fanny pack to just about anything in-between you can think of. For example, one person might carry the Ruger LC9 in his strong-side front trouser pocket with an extra magazine of ammo in his weak-side pocket. Yet another might prefer strong-side hip carry for a full-sized 1911 Government Model .45 under a jacket or shirt. Still another might prefer a weak-side shoulder holster for a short-barreled five-shot Smith & Wesson Chiefs Special in .38 Special. It truly is a matter of personal preference.

Give thought to how you typically go through your day. Are you in your car a lot? If so, perhaps a shoulder holster might be for you. Are you usually in a coat and tie while at work? That might make it easier to discreetly carry a full-sized semi-auto pistol most of the time. Perhaps a small-frame semi-auto in .380 ACP or 9mm in a strong-side front pocket holster will fit the bill. Give thought to your typical routine and how you dress; try out different carry modes, and go with what works best for you.

If you are like most responsibly armed citizens, after a while, you will have a drawer or a box with holsters you tried and retired for something else. That's OK; being a responsibly armed citizen is a journey as well as a destination. If we're lucky, we all learn and grow over time. It's the same with guns and gear. It's an art form, not a science.

The important thing is to find what's right for YOU, to know when and how to use your gun to good effect and to carry that gun whenever it is possible to do so.

7 GLOSSARY OF HOLSTER TERMS

HOLSTER SHOPPING CAN BE AS CONFUSING AS GUN BUYING UNTIL YOU KNOW THE INS AND OUTS OF IT. HERE ARE A FEW OF THE MOST-OFTEN USED TERMS THAT WILL HELP YOU CHOOSE THE HOLSTER THAT BEST FITS YOUR DAY-TO-DAY CARRY NEEDS.

APPENDIX - This is more of a carry position than a style of holster. An "appendix carry" is an inside-the-waistband holster that holds your sidearm in the front left or right side of your abdomen. These holsters hang from your belt or otherwise clip onto your pants and allow for an extremely fast draw.

BELT SLIDE -This is a very basic type of holster that slides onto the outside of a belt. Yaqui and pancake holsters are of this type. When worn for concealed carry, they require a covering garment, such as an untucked shirt or a sports jacket.

HYBRID - These holsters are typically worn inside the waistband, but some outside-the-waistband varieties do exist. They are most often constructed from more than one type of material — usually polymer and leather.

INSIDE THE WAISTBAND (IWB) - Inside-the-waistband holsters allow a concealed carrier to carry a holstered sidearm inside his or her pants, allowing for more discreet concealment.

OFF-BODY - This refers to carrying a gun in a purse, briefcase, backpack or other manner in which the gun is not directly mounted to the clothing of the carrier. It is very important that when carrying off-body, the carrier remembers to use a holster rather than just dropping a loaded gun into a bag or pack.

OUTSIDE THE WAISTBAND (OWB) - An outside-the-waistband holster, such as a belt-slide or Yaqui model, mounts to a belt and carries the gun on the outside of the pants.

PANCAKE - This is a type of OWB holster that uses the pressure created by the belt and the holster itself to hold your gun in place. This type of holster is typically inexpensive and can sometimes be used with more than one model of pistol or revolver.

POCKET - A pocket holster is a sheath into which you place your handgun and then place into the pocket of a pair of pants or other garment. These are especially well-suited to small and hammerless guns. It is extremely important that a carrier use a pocket holster rather than simply drop a loaded gun into his or her pocket unsecured.

POSITIVE RETENTION - This refers to a holster that actively holds your gun and prevents it from being removed without intentional action other than simply pulling. These holsters are most common among uniformed law enforcement officers, though some private citizens prefer them from a security standpoint.

SHOULDER HOLSTER - A shoulder holster is a harness that carries a handgun on one side of the body and possibly spare magazines on the other. It is a traditional style of holster, well-represented in Hollywood, but most concealed carriers find that shoulder holsters do not fit their needs as well as other types.

YAQUI - The Yaqui holster is a specific style of belt-slide holster that basically covers the trigger of a sidearm and not much else.

8 EVERYDAY CARRY

A RELIABLE SIDEARM ISN'T THE ONLY PIECE OF EQUIPMENT YOU'LL NEED TO EFFECTIVELY DEFEND YOURSELF. WHEN IT COMES TIME TO STOP A DEADLY THREAT, THE SIDEARM IS IMPORTANT BUT ONLY PART OF THE NECESSARY GEAR.

Your everyday carry — or EDC — gear is the set of tools that you as a responsibly armed American carry every day wherever it is legal for you to do so. The core of your EDC will be a reliable sidearm and a quality holster in which to carry it, a powerful hand-held flashlight, extra ammunition in a magazine or speedloader, a cellphone, pepper spray or other less-lethal option, and a good knife. This might seem like a lot to carry around, but with the correct holster and clothing choices, you'll find that your EDC will melt into your daily life as easily as your wallet and keys.

Armed self-defense isn't free, but it doesn't have to be prohibitively expensive either. As far as sidearms go, there are perfectly serviceable autos and revolvers available for around $300, and there really isn't a top end of the price range for sidearms. Quality tactical flashlights can be purchased in stores and online for less than $30, and respectable knives and pepper sprays can be bought for approximately the same amount, sometimes even less. Don't worry about going all-out right away. Your tastes will likely change as you become more experienced, so you can expect to make some changes to your EDC as time passes.

9 WHAT ABOUT THE LAWS?

CONCEALED CARRY LEGISLATION IS YOUNG AND CONSTANTLY EVOLVING.

Until 1934, guns were unregulated in the United States. That was the year the National Firearms Act made it illegal to possess a machine gun unless a $200 excise tax was paid to the U.S. Treasury. Interestingly, Congress did not attempt to prohibit the possession, manufacture or sale of machine guns, instead opting to discourage and thus limit their ownership through the federal government's taxing authority. The equivalent of $200 in 1934 is about $3,277 today. Why do it that way? Simply because at that time, few people — including lawyers, judges and legal scholars — questioned that the Second Amendment meant what it said about the right of the people to keep and bear arms not being infringed.

That changed when the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA68) passed in the wake of the John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinations. To own a gun today, you must be a U.S. citizen or legal resident alien. Persons prohibited from owning firearms under GCA68 include:

- Those convicted of felonies and certain misdemeanors, except where state law reinstates rights or removes disability
- Fugitives from justice
- Unlawful users of certain depressant, narcotic or stimulant drugs
- Those adjudicated as mental defectives or incompetents or those committed to any mental institution and currently suffering a dangerous mental illness
- Non-U.S. citizens, unless permanently immigrating into the U.S. or in possession of a hunting license legally issued in the U.S.
- Illegal aliens
- Those who have renounced U.S. citizenship
- Minors, defined as under the age of 18, with the exception of those in Vermont, eligible at the age of 16 (applies to long guns and handguns)
- Persons convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence
- Persons under indictment for a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year (ineligible to receive, transport or ship any firearm or ammunition)

As long as you are not in one of the prohibited categories, you are federally eligible to own firearms in the U.S. and to apply for a concealed carry permit in most states.

State and local laws regarding gun ownership vary. Most closely follow the federal requirements, but some do not. Check the laws in your state for the particular requirements, and follow them scrupulously. For a complete listing of each state's attorney general and the specifics of gun ownership and concealed carry regulations, visit **USCCA.com/laws**.

With Illinois being the final state in the nation to approve and enact concealed carry legislation, all 50 states now allow some form of concealed carry. Several states allow "constitutional carry" (concealed carry without a state-issued permit); some of these states still allow citizens to voluntarily apply for a carry permit.

Most of the states in our nation are officially "shall-issue" states. In shall-issue states, the requirements for getting a concealed carry permit are laid down by law. If you meet the requirements, the state shall issue you the permit. Your right to carry in these states cannot be thwarted by a lone bureaucrat.

Unfortunately, several states practice "may-issue" permitting when it comes to concealed carry. May-issue states also have a list of requirements laid down by law, but when you meet these requirements, the state may issue your permit — or it may not, if the pertinent authorities decide not to.

Some states are shall-issue in practice but may-issue by law. That being said, legal wrangling in certain districts continues to make it very difficult for law-abiding citizens to acquire the proper permits.

10 GETTING YOUR PERMIT

If you live in a state that is shall-issue, your task is simple: Find out the legal requirements for a concealed carry permit, meet them, apply for your permit and enjoy your new concealed carry privileges.

Shall-issue states typically have eligibility requirements pertaining to:

- Age and residency
- Substance-abuse history
- Criminal history (felonies are an automatic disqualifier, as are domestic violence convictions)
- Firearms possession
- Training in the legal use of force, self-defense laws and marksmanship instruction
- Sometimes a requirement to demonstrate firearms proficiency

If you live in a may-issue state, getting a concealed carry permit is more difficult, and the outcome is far from certain. Most may-issue states have criteria similar to shall-issue states, but some do not. Find out the requirements of your locality, try to meet them and hope you get your permit. If you don't, if your jurisdiction has an appeal process, and if you can afford it, appeal the adverse decision as far as the system and your resources allow.

11

CARRY HERE, CARRY THERE, CARRY EVERYWHERE?

KNOWING THE LAW IS AS IMPORTANT AS BEING ABLE TO HIT YOUR TARGET.

Concealed carry permits are not recognized everywhere. The federal government and all states have places where they do not allow any firearms, much less concealed ones, regardless of the permits you have. The off-limits places usually include, but are not limited to, courtrooms, jails, police stations, school zones and the sterile areas of airports. Every jurisdiction has its own rules.

Unlike a driver's license, states are not required to honor concealed carry permits issued by other states (although some states do have reciprocity agreements with other states that have similar laws). Because of this, and because the off-limits areas differ from one place to another, you will need to be prudent when traveling outside your home territory.

If you're interested in the subject of traveling with a firearm, check out "Seeing the USA While Legally Armed" (**USCCA.com/seeing-the-usa-while-legally-armed**) from a past issue of *Concealed Carry Magazine* or "Best Practices for Traveling with Firearms" (**USCCA.com/traveling-flying-with-firearms**) from the USCCA blog.

Another great resource that includes thorough coverage of state laws governing concealed carry for all 50 states, the District of Columbia and New York City can be found at **USCCA.com/laws**.

Thanks to the dramatic increase in the number of concealed carry permits and rising public demand, many states have, as mentioned earlier, established reciprocity procedures that allow carry permits issued by one state to be honored in some other states.

The list of those states which honor permits from other states (and which permits they will honor) is constantly changing. Therefore, before you travel outside your own state, you should always check to see if your carry permit is valid in any states through which you plan to travel and if it's valid at your final destination. It's also a good idea to brush up on the rules of carry in any jurisdiction in which you plan to spend time.

The USCCA maintains up-to-date reciprocity information in a handy map found at **USCCA.com/travel**. The Reciprocity Map is a powerful tool for you to use and is always available to reference prior to traveling across any state lines.

12

TIPS FOR TRAVELERS

FLYING WITH YOUR SIDEARM IS LEGAL, BUT IT CAN PRESENT ITS OWN CHALLENGES. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ALL LAWS AND REGULATIONS SURROUNDING TRAVELING WITH A GUN.

OK, I know that a pistol must be in a secure case with a TSA-approved lock in order to fly with it in checked baggage.

My question is this: Is there a section stating that ammo can also be in that same secure case with the pistol? Can the ammunition be in a loaded magazine, or does it have to be in its original packaging? Would a GunVault or similar device be sufficient?

Art, via email

Art,

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Feds are a little ambiguous on this one. According to the TSA website (**TSA.gov**), "Travelers must securely pack any ammunition in fiber (such as cardboard), wood or metal boxes or other packaging specifically designed to carry small amounts of ammunition. Firearm magazines and ammunition clips must be securely boxed or included within a hard-sided case containing an unloaded firearm. Small arms ammunition, including ammunition not exceeding .75 caliber for a rifle or pistol and shotgun shells of any gauge, may be carried in the same hard-sided case as the firearm, as long as it follows the packing guidelines described above."

So even though I would consult the website personally and possibly make a phone call to a TSA agent or a 2A attorney, it certainly seems that you would be within your rights to transport loaded magazines in the same lockable hard-sided case as you are transporting the unloaded firearm — provided that they are packed "in fiber (such as cardboard), wood or metal boxes or other packaging specifically designed to carry small amounts of ammunition."

That said, I will be packing my ammunition in original factory boxes simply to streamline my travel and minimize my chances of running afoul of a TSA agent who maybe hasn't done his or her homework.

Stay safe.

Ed Combs
Senior Editor
Concealed Carry Magazine

TRAVEL CONFIDENTLY
WITH THE USCCA'S FREE

CONCEALED CARRY RECIPROCITY AND GUN LAWS MAP

FIND YOUR UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION NOW, VISIT:

www.USCCA.com/laws

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SOCIAL LIFE

IS THE ARMED LIFESTYLE FOR YOU?

Who do you tell about your defensive handgun? While some people might be understanding and supportive, others might not share your enthusiasm for carrying a firearm for personal defense; they might be uncomfortable, or even offended, by your carrying in their presence. Others might be unable to keep from talking about it and drawing unwanted attention to the fact that you're carrying.

It's usually a good idea to focus on the word concealed in the phrase "concealed carry" and choose to tell very few people that you routinely carry a pistol on or about your person almost every time you walk out your door. Your spouse or significant other will certainly know, and close friends might know, but you should keep the number of those in the know as small as possible. Most people don't need to know that you are carrying, and if a situation arises where its use is needed in their presence, they will find out soon enough.

This gives rise to another important social consideration of carrying a gun: What should family and friends do should you need to use your gun when you are with them? Unless you and they are properly trained in advance of the event, their presence can needlessly complicate things at best — and lead to possibly tragic results at worst. The short answer to this problem is: *The one with the gun is in command.* You should intend to only draw your weapon in dire emergencies — when there is no other choice except to use the gun or see yourself or other innocents die or be seriously harmed. Your spouse, children and close friends should know to do what you tell them in such situations and to get out of the way and under cover and stay there until you tell them otherwise.

Another important topic is your social contacts after a defensive gun use and any subsequent confrontation with the criminal justice system. You've defended your life with a gun, and the police have you in custody. Your one phone call is to your spouse. Does he or she know what to do in that situation? A full discussion of this topic, though of vital importance, is outside the scope of this survey report, but it is of such importance that it should commend to your attention the serious, deep and frequent study of the legal aftermath of a defensive shooting.

For now, give serious and sober thought to what you will do in the immediate aftermath of a defensive shooting. For example, what should you say when you call the police? Do you need to call an attorney? Should you ask your attorney to come to the scene? Probably most important is: Do you have an attorney lined up ahead of time that you can call as needed? The very worst of all possible times to look for a lawyer is when you are sitting in a jail cell after successfully defending your life with a gun. You need to think about it NOW: when you are calm, when your life and freedom are not in jeopardy and when you can take your time and evaluate your options.

You should study the products on the market designed to aid you in this very situation (including paying legal fees) and choose the one that best meets your needs and your budget.

It's a harsh reality to face, but there will likely be legal expenses associated with even a righteous shooting. Are you prepared for that inevitability? Are you willing to risk everything — including your freedom and your family's financial future — simply for doing what's right? You shouldn't have to.

The USCCA helps responsible Americans like you prepare for what happens before, during and after an act of lawful self-defense. Find out more at **USCCA.com**.

14 SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

STAYING ALERT AND FOCUSED IS THE TOP PRIORITY.

There is a phrase that you will hear again and again from the USCCA: "It's better to avoid a fight than to win one." What this means is that it's better for you to keep your head about you, pay attention to your surroundings and be able to avoid trouble than it is for you to be able to shoot your way out of a life-threatening attack.

With proper situational awareness and conflict avoidance skills, you can usually skate around situations less-aware individuals might have to shoot their way out of.

PAY ATTENTION

Just as the door only works if you lock it, your brain and eyes only work if you use them. Make sure that you're alert and watching your immediate area. Don't let clothing, eyewear or personal electronics block your vision or distract you from being able to see and hear your surroundings.

WATCH WHO'S WATCHING YOU

Predators size up their prey before attacking. This is true for crocodiles and sharks, and it's true for violent, predatory humans. Be aware of who is watching your movements, and if you notice that someone is watching, make eye contact so this person knows that you know he or she is watching you.

WHEN IN DOUBT, GET OUT

Conflict avoidance means just that: avoiding conflict. If you feel that you might be in physical danger, you need to do what you can to change that. If you feel like someone is following you, walk into the next open business or move to the opposite side of the street. Make sure whoever is following you knows that you see him or her, and if this person begins to approach, shine your flashlight in his or her face and tell the person to get away.

DON'T GO ANYWHERE WITH YOUR GUN YOU WOULDN'T GO WITHOUT YOUR GUN

This is one of the most important realities of the armed lifestyle: Your sidearm isn't a substitution for good common sense. Your gun is not magical, and your permit to carry doesn't make you a superhero. Your capacity to avoid trouble and the level of awareness you're willing to maintain will be measures of your success as a concealed carrier, not how quickly you can execute the draw and how many bullets you put into the 10-ring.

15 WHAT TO SAY TO THE POLICE IF YOU ARE FORCED TO DEFEND YOURSELF WITH A GUN

IN THE EVENT THAT YOU ARE FORCED TO DEFEND YOURSELF FROM A LETHAL THREAT WITH YOUR FIREARM, THE NEXT FEW MOMENTS ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

Some individuals claim that the best thing to do after you're forced to shoot in self-defense is to "not say a word until your lawyer is present." This is a recipe for disaster. If you are forced to defend yourself, and you are forced to do so by even just drawing your gun, you need to dial 911 immediately and report exactly what happened to police. In the vast majority of cases, the first party to contact law enforcement is seen by the justice system as the victim, so make that call right away.

After the police arrive, it is imperative that you no longer be holding your gun and that you physically cooperate with them in every way. You will likely be handcuffed, and you might even be placed in a police car until the law enforcement officers can physically secure the scene of the shooting and figure out what happened. Here's where what you say and how you say it become so consequential.

As soon as you have the opportunity, you need to alert responding law enforcement that you were attacked with deadly force, that you were in fear for your life and that you shot because it was your only course of action to prevent the loss of life.

Point out evidence, point out witnesses and never forget that law enforcement officers are tired, overworked and can miss things. Point out those cartridge cases on the ground, as the EMT who's coming in to see if you're hurt might kick them away otherwise. Point out the witnesses who recorded the shooting on their cellphones, as they might not just walk up out of the crowd and volunteer to tell the police what they just saw.

After you've given the law enforcement officers the bare bones of what happened — you were attacked with deadly force, in direct fear for your life and responded accordingly — you need to tell them that you intend to cooperate fully but will need to have a lawyer present to say any more than you already have.

Remember: If cops are forced to shoot someone, they're spirited away from news cameras and given time to cool down and collect their thoughts before telling their side of the story; you need to do the same.

16 TRAINING CHECKLIST

TO RESPECT YOUR INSTRUCTOR'S TIME IS TO RESPECT YOUR INSTRUCTOR, AND WHENEVER YOU HEAD OFF TO A CLASS, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU REMEMBER EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED ON HAND IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE THE EXPERIENCE.

Few feelings are as frustrating as arriving at your destination and realizing that something you needed to bring with you was sucked into your kitchen table, garage floor, home entryway or other such shooting gear black hole. I was well into my 20s before I finally acquiesced to the reality of the human condition:

I needed to use a checklist whenever I was attempting to leave my residence and accomplish anything beyond locking the door behind me.

But, hey, there's no shame in that. In fact, in-hospital deaths were reduced simply by having surgeons employ simple checklists before and during surgery, so there's no reason why you can't streamline your shooting and training through the addition of a training or range checklist.

Depending on your circumstance, there will be other class-specific gear that you'll include, but this list covers the bare-bones quantity of equipment that should accompany you to any training seminar or even just to the range.

Ed Combs
Senior Editor
Concealed Carry Magazine

- ✓ Proof of registration for the class you are attending and required class materials as designated by the instructor
- ✓ Eye and ear protection with backups
- ✓ Brimmed hat and shooting gloves
- ✓ Gunshot-specific emergency first-aid supplies
- ✓ Firearm with which you intend to practice and, if you have one, a backup
- ✓ Ammunition for this gun and extra magazines
- ✓ Multi-tool and cleaning rod for basic maintenance and barrel-clearing
- ✓ Targets and staple gun, thumbtacks or whatever you use to affix targets to a backstop
- ✓ Notebook or shooting journal with extra pens or pencils
- ✓ Extra batteries for lasers or weapon lights
- ✓ Permanent marker for target identification
- ✓ Seasonal items (sunscreen, insect repellent, warm clothing, rain gear, etc.)
- ✓ Lunch (if applicable)
- ✓ Water

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GUT CHECK: WILL YOU BE ABLE TO PULL THE TRIGGER?

SIMPLY OWNING AND CARRYING A FIREARM IS ONLY HALF OF THE EQUATION. THE OTHER HALF IS MENTAL, AND IT'S A DECISION YOU NEED TO MAKE BEFORE WALKING OUT THE DOOR WITH A GUN ON YOUR HIP.

Are you prepared to kill another human being in order to defend yourself or a loved one? Carrying a concealed weapon for self-defense is not for everyone. It is definitely not for the faint of heart — and using it is even less so. Deadly force should be your last resort, an action you take only when nothing else will work and only when you're faced with the imminent threat of death or grievous bodily harm.

Deadly force is called deadly because by its very nature, it is likely to kill the attacker. The point of deadly force is actually not to kill, although that might be the outcome of its use. It is meant to STOP a criminal attack that might reasonably be seen as likely to cause death or great bodily harm if it is not defended against.

If you defend yourself with a gun or any other deadly weapon, you might kill or maim someone. No normal person wants to take a human life (which is one of society's greatest taboos), but all normal people want to stay alive as long as possible. Sometimes, using deadly force is the only way to save your own life or the life of someone you love.

The time to think about your ability and willingness to take a life is before you take up a gun for self-defense, when you can consider it in the quiet of your home, with ample time to ponder it and ask questions of yourself and others. All those things will be time and effort well spent as you contemplate actions that will be life-changing for you and for the criminal — if he or she survives.

SCENARIO 1

A wanted parole violator armed himself with a knife and tried unsuccessfully to rob a man in a car in the parking lot of a Royal Oak, Michigan, convenience store. Scared off by someone shouting at him from a nearby vehicle, the knife-wielding bad guy turned on a young couple with a baby and demanded money. Hearing the commotion, a concealed carry license holder in the parking lot drew his weapon and confronted the would-be robber, ordering him to drop the knife. The robber reluctantly complied, and the armed citizen successfully held him at gunpoint for police. Investigators praised the armed citizen for his quick action.

SCENARIO 2

A Conway, South Carolina, convenience store owner was leaving his closed store one night when he was accosted by a man brandishing a gun and demanding money. The owner pulled his own legally carried pistol, and in the ensuing exchange of gunfire, killed the 29-year-old robber, who had a long criminal record. The robber's female getaway driver was arrested and charged with attempted murder and attempted armed robbery. Authorities ruled the shooting by the store owner justified.

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ARE YOU WILLING TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES?

IF YOU ARE FORCED TO DEFEND YOURSELF WITH LETHAL FORCE, YOU CAN, UNFORTUNATELY, EXPECT THINGS TO GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER.

Self-defense with a gun is a fight for survival. The stakes are, literally, life or death. Nothing less justifies using deadly force. But no one really wins a gunfight. The best you can do — the very best you can hope to achieve in a defensive gun situation — is to keep what you have: your life, your wellbeing and the lives and wellbeings of your loved ones.

There will be consequences of your use of deadly force for self-defense, even if it is successful. One of those consequences is having to live the rest of your life knowing you've seriously injured or taken the life of someone. There can be serious criminal and civil consequences for even the most justified of self-defense shootings. These consequences can best be summarized by observing that there are three separate and distinct problems associated with defensive gun use:

1. **Surviving the gunfight**
2. **Surviving the criminal justice system**
3. **Surviving the civil justice system**

Surviving the gunfight might be the easiest of the problems, but it is by far the most important. If you don't survive, there's nothing else for you to worry about. That makes surviving the gunfight **Problem No. 1**. You do that by being a responsible gun owner, being a responsible gun carrier and working diligently to achieve a level of skill with your gun so that you are in the best possible position to prevail if ever you must defend your life with a firearm.

19 SURVIVING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

You will almost certainly deal with the police after a defensive gun use. They will, in all likelihood, respond to the location of the shooting and treat it as a crime scene. They will treat you as a criminal suspect, until and unless they determine differently.

You will likely be handcuffed, you might spend a night (or more) in jail, and you will most definitely need to explain and defend your actions to the criminal justice system: the police, prosecutors and possibly a jury of your peers. How well you do that, and the resources you might or might not have at your disposal to help you through that process, will have a huge impact on the rest of your life.

Even the most justifiable shooting can be cast in a bad light by sloppy police work, anti-gun prosecutors looking to make a name for themselves by hanging your scalp on their belts or by you (if you cannot convincingly articulate why you resorted to deadly force at that place and time). If the police or prosecutor decides criminal charges against you are appropriate, you must defend those charges.

Even a losing criminal defense is expensive, and even bad lawyers don't work cheap! The average criminal defense costs around $100,000 — and it can be **much** more, depending on the nature and complexity of the case.

While a defense of criminal charges might not be necessary in your case, it might well be too. These things can never be predicted in advance, but they must be thoroughly considered before you decide to carry a gun concealed for self-defense and in advance of your pulling the trigger.

20 SURVIVING THE CIVIL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Have you ever heard the common warning, "If you shoot someone, you WILL get sued!"? Unfortunately, this statement is not far from the truth. Assuming you survive the gunfight and your encounter with the criminal justice system, the criminal (or his or her surviving family) might sue you for using a gun to defend yourself.

If you **are** sued, you must defend the suit or you lose by default.

The standard of proof required to win a civil suit is not *beyond a reasonable doubt* like it is in a criminal trial. That means that even if you survive the criminal trial unscathed, you could still lose the civil lawsuit.

That's right: Even after you have been successful in criminal court, *you can still be found liable for damages in civil court*.

That's one of the reasons why the USCCA helps responsible Americans prepare for what happens before, during and after an act of self-defense. Keep in mind that the full legal aftermath of a defensive gun use, with its range of possibilities and how to prepare for them, is beyond the scope of this article. Still, it is something you **must** consider — and consider well — as you think through and decide whether or not carrying a concealed weapon is the right choice for you.

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ARE YOU A RESPONSIBLY ARMED CITIZEN?

The responsibly armed citizen trains in the use of firearms. When you are a responsibly armed citizen, you maintain a high level of skill at arms. You study tactics and laws about use of force and self-defense. You learn to stay aware of your surroundings so you can avoid trouble or deal with it promptly and effectively if you need to. A responsibly armed citizen is not a law enforcement officer with a duty to deter crime or to seek out and apprehend criminals. That's not the goal! The goal is to defend innocent life: your own life and the lives of those you love. As a responsibly armed citizen, you know that guns should never be brandished without need. You know you will draw your gun only when you genuinely need to and that if you do need to use it, you will use it decisively and effectively and only as much as necessary. Carrying a concealed firearm for self-defense is a citizen's most basic right and most awesome responsibility. If, after careful consideration and study of the matter, you are not sure it is right for you, you should not do it.

22 BASIC TRAINING

ANY ELIGIBLE ADULT CAN WALK INTO A GUN SHOP AND BUY A PISTOL OR REVOLVER, BUT THE WISE WOMAN OR MAN WILL THEN TRAIN WITH THAT FIREARM.

Many states require some level of training before they will grant you a license to carry a concealed handgun. That training typically teaches safe gun handling, basic marksmanship and local laws about self-defense. The class teaches students where guns may and may not be legally carried. Many, but not all, states also require you to demonstrate that you can safely fire a gun.

This state-required training should be regarded as the beginning — not the end — of learning what you need to know. Permit-related training will familiarize you with the basics of handgun operation and use. It will give you a nodding acquaintance with self-defense laws, but it will not make you a responsibly armed citizen.

So, then, to become a responsibly armed citizen, what's a good goal? Try this: With your carry gun, shoot accurately (keeping all rounds fired in the center of mass of a man-sized target) out to at least 25 yards. Can you do it? Can you do it with your strong hand only? What about with your support hand only (in case your strong hand is injured)? This might sound hard to believe, but you have to prepare for anything. You have to be ready to defend your loved ones when they need it. If your "shooting hand" is injured, you have to be ready to fire with your less-dominant hand. To see articles and videos that will help you prepare for this situation, visit **USCCA.com/education**.

Another good goal is to learn the laws about self-defense well enough that you easily — almost reflexively — recognize situations where you are legally entitled to use deadly force. When you read the news, look for stories of violent crime. When could the victim have legally defended himself or herself with a firearm? When could he or she have not? What elements in the story would need to change to make deadly force appropriate and legal for the victim?

You will also want to become well-trained in situational awareness. This will help you recognize potential threats before they happen. When you see a problem coming, you can take action to AVOID a confrontation if at all possible.

This necessary level of skill comes only from study and practice at the hands of people who have themselves studied and practiced for a long time. For the responsibly armed citizen, such training never ends. There's always more to learn. Laws about self-defense change at the whim of legislatures and judges, and you must stay abreast of those changes. Maintaining your physical skills and your knowledge of the law is the duty you take up when you decide to carry a gun for the defense of yourself and your loved ones.

Finding a trainer is not difficult. A quick web search will yield many in your area. Finding a good one is a little harder, though. Check the gun store where you bought your firearm to see if it offers courses in self-defense and handgun tactics. Ask around at your gun club or shooting range. You can even ask local police for suggestions.

Check gun magazines for ads and training reports for nationally recognized firearms instructors. The trainers featured in those ads and magazines have national reputations for a reason, and instruction from them is usually well worth the price. "You get what you pay for" is as true in the gun world as anywhere else, and getting good training in gun-handling skills is more important than in almost any other endeavor. The USCCA works closely with some of the top trainers in the country and even has its own Certified Instructor Program. Check out **USCCA.com/training** for more information.

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WHAT YOU MUST DO NOW!

If you don't do anything else recommended in this report, do these three things:

1. Get good, professional instruction in firearms handling, usage and tactics, and practice regularly with your carry gun.

2. Study the rules of self-defense and the use of lethal force in your area.

3. Make adequate arrangements ahead of time for the criminal and civil aftermaths of a defensive shooting, including identifying and retaining an attorney who will advise you and defend you in court if needed and securing one or more of the products on the market for meeting and paying for those legal needs.

As you start your journey to becoming and staying a responsibly armed citizen, range buddies and friends from shooting clubs and gun-rights organizations can be good sources of information and support. They can point you to good training sources in your area, and they can keep you from reinventing the wheel in many ways. You still must do your own due diligence to make sure their advice will work for you. There are numerous internet sites catering to the needs — serious and social — of concealed carry license holders and gun enthusiasts in general. The USCCA has a wealth of pertinent information available with membership, and much advice is also free for the taking from our website at **USCCA.com**.

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HELPFUL RESOURCES

A good starting point for your self-defense journey is the USCCA. The USCCA helps you avoid danger, save lives and keep your loved ones safe. To access top-notch concealed carry resources and to find out how you can become the most prepared protector you can be, visit the USCCA at **USCCA.com**. You might also be interested in learning more about *Concealed Carry Magazine*, the ultimate resource for responsibly armed Americans. Become a subscriber at **ConcealedCarryMagazine.com**.

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