

Safe Storage and Efficient Staging

Part 3 in a multiple part series on the Safe and Proper use of your defensive tool

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FOAC News Letter

The cornerstone of all firearms training, no matter the context is safety. All Americans who exercise their 2A Rights must also exercise them responsibly; this begins with safe gun handling and continues with safe and responsible storage.

It is vitally important that gun owners accept the *responsibility* of being a *responsible* gun owner.

All training organizations agree that ALL guns must be stored or staged so that unauthorized individuals cannot gain access to them. How you store or stage your guns will depend on your lifestyle and how much responsibility you are willing to take on.

Lets me first make the disclaimer that, depending on your jurisdiction, you may need to comply with specific laws or ordinances that dictate how your guns or firearms must be stored. In Pennsylvania we have no such "storage laws" however, [Pennsylvania Title 18](#) does provide guidelines on who is "prohibited" from possessing firearms. This is important for all gun owners to know and to consider when they are deciding if someone is "authorized" or not.

[Title 18 Section 6105](#) states that people convicted of certain crimes as listed in 6105(b) are "prohibited" from possessing firearms and so are folks as defined in 6105(c) "other persons". This definition includes individuals who have multiple convictions of driving under the influence. If you allow a prohibited person access to your firearms, you may actually be committing a felony.

What does an unauthorized individual look like to you? Many individuals will immediately classify "the children" as unauthorized. This may be quite prudent in your household. However, once you have educated your "kids" on the safe and proper handling of guns, and you are willing to take on the responsibility for their actions, you may ultimately give your children some sort of access to guns in the home.

Will your children always follow the safety rules? Are you sure your kids will deny *their* friends access to your guns? Only you can answer these questions, however, it is prudent to reference PA [Title 18 section 6110](#) before choosing to "authorize" your kids.

§ 6110.1. Possession of firearm by minor.

(a) Firearm.--Except as provided in subsection (b), a person under 18 years of age shall not possess or transport a firearm anywhere in this Commonwealth.

(b) Exception.--Subsection (a) shall not apply to a person under 18 years of age:

- (1) who is under the supervision of a parent, grandparent, legal guardian or an adult acting with the expressed consent of the minor's custodial parent or legal guardian and the minor is engaged in lawful activity, including safety training, lawful target shooting, engaging in an organized competition involving the use of a firearm or the firearm is unloaded and the minor

is transporting it for a lawful purpose; or
(2) who is lawfully hunting or trapping in accordance with 34
Pa.C.S. (relating to game).^[1]_{SEP}

(c) Responsibility of adult.--Any person who knowingly and intentionally delivers or provides to the minor a firearm in violation of subsection (a) commits a felony of the third degree.

My child does have limited access to certain firearms. He is educated and I take on the *responsibility of his responsible-ness*. If a criminal breaks into our home and mom and dad are incapacitated or not at home, I want him to know where our tools of self-defense are kept and how he can access them. Consider that "the gun" is only one part of our home defense strategy and plan. It is important that the kids know the entire plan... not just the "gun" stuff. If your kids are not ready for the responsibility of gun access, make sure they know where to evade and barricade, how to call 9-11, how to administer first aid, and what to do in case of an emergency.

I have personally disarmed 50-something year old men on the firing line who had terrible attitudes towards safety, and I have also had 8 year olds handle guns on the firing line with impeccable safe handling. You cannot gauge responsible-ness solely upon age. Everyone has a goofy Brother in Law or Uncle that you probably feel it is prudent to restrict access to your firearms. Choose those "authorized" persons wisely.

Storage is a long-term activity. All guns should be STORED unloaded and separate from the ammunition, preferable LOCKED in a safe.

The NRA's 3rd rule for safe gun handling is "Always keep your gun unloaded until ready to use". You are not using your hunting rifle when it is in your gun safe; therefore it is unloaded. You load it when you are in your tree stand or at your hunting spot when you ARE using it.

A gun that is staged for personal defense might be loaded because it IS being used.

For example, my daily carry gun is STAGED on my body in a holster, in my direct control and it IS loaded. I AM using it as a tool of self-defense. "Use" does not always mean making it go Bang-Bang-Bang. We don't put on a seatbelt as we are crashing our car... we use the seat belt even if we are not crashing our car... we use our fire alarms even when they are not beeping....why should a defensive tool be any different. If you are uncomfortable carrying a firearm loaded on your person, I suggest that you re-evaluate your equipment and get some training so that you do feel comfortable carrying a loaded firearm. There are too many examples of when folks carried a gun with out a round in the chamber and it ended tragically for the gun owner.

Your "night stand" gun *may* be staged next to your bed. Remember how I mentioned that your lifestyle would play into your staging practices. If you live alone, having the gun in a drawer in the nightstand may be reasonable for you. Add more people in and around your house, then perhaps locked in a box might be more responsible. The most secure way to store a firearm is in a locked safe, however try and do the whole "3 to the left, 12 to the right" business in the middle of the night without your glasses while under stress. You must balance security with efficient access. There are many secure options available that are reasonably efficient as far as quick access is concerned. Lock boxes that utilize simplex locks, RFID or thumb print technology are proving to

be quite reliable and “easy-ish” to access under stress. With that said, no matter what device you choose to use to stage your gun, follow this rule:

If your gun has a round in the chamber the trigger guard MUST BE COVERED.

[Remember my previous article on the importance of trigger discipline?](#) Whether your gun is on the nightstand, in the nightstand, in a locking mechanism... if it has a round in the chamber... IT MUST HAVE THE TRIGGER GUARD COVERED. Keeping it in a holster or using a trigger cover will preclude you from accidentally hooking your trigger while retrieving your gun. If you don't have a way to cover the trigger guard, then it may be prudent to stage the gun with a magazine inserted but the slide locked open. However you choose to set up your defensive tool, take your locking box to the range and practice retrieving your firearm and getting it into a loaded condition while you practice shooting it.

Lastly, as I wrap up this installment, I remind you of “The Big Picture Rule”. Every time you pick up your gun, consider this:

Recognize that YOU are in control of a firearm, if YOU use this firearm carelessly, ignorantly, or with malice, YOU have the potential to harm or kill yourself or someone else.

Act accordingly. Don't just be an armed American, be a responsibly armed American!

Stay armed, alert, safe, and be well regulated!