

Safe Carry

Part 4 in a multiple part series on the Safe and Proper use of your defensive tool

By Klint Macro

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, responsible storage, and continues with safe and proper carry.

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

Carry options are vast and are often dictated by lifestyle and context. I generally advise anyone who chooses to carry a gun to do so on the body, if possible. Although other options may be viable, a firearm that is holstered and *secured on the body* is the safest it can be.

The most popular modes of carry that allows for maximum control, accessibility and efficient presentation is either strong side hip or centerline carry. This can be done inside the waist band (IWB) or outside the waist band (OWB). Generally IWB is better for deeper concealment and OWB is often slightly more comfortable. This is of course affected by your clothing choices, body shape, lifestyle, and physical routines.

Generally holster construction options are leather, kydex, or a hybrid of the two. Kydex is a polymer that is extremely durable and will not collapse when the gun is removed from the holster. Leather, on the other hand, is often more comfortable but leather IWB holsters often collapse when the gun is removed from the holster and may loosen and stretch over time. The hybrids are typically a leather panel that goes against the body with a kydex shell that is fastened onto the panel. Hybrids are often comfortable and are NOT prone to collapse but they are sometime difficult put on or take off. Whatever you choose, be sure that the holster COMPLETELY covers the trigger guard when the gun is in it.

If you are training often (as you should always try to do) you don't want to have to pry the holster apart with your thumb to re-holster your pistol because it collapsed. Remember that safe direction concept we spoke of in the [first article](#)? In the context of a dynamic critical incident, we don't want to make life harder by having to deal with stress, adrenaline, shaking, AND a collapsed holster when law enforcement is on the way.

With IWB, the retention, or the amount of friction holding the gun inside the holster is generally determined by the tightness of the belt. Kydex and hybrid holsters often have some kind of adjustment to hold the pistol tighter and are usually molded for the specific model of firearm allowing for a precise fit. This friction, from belt or mechanical tightness, combined with the gun being under a layer or layers of clothing helps to secure the gun.

If you are carrying OWB, I recommend using a holster with some type of manual retention. If you happen to be "open carrying" then I INSIST on using a holster with a manual retention device. Be advised... under the current "state(s) of emergency" in Pennsylvania, [open carry is ILLEGAL without a PA License To Carry](#). Many leather holsters will have thumb snaps, many kydex models, such as the Safariland ALS or GLS series, have a thumb release that defeats a lever that locks the gun inside the holster. Although they CAN be used safely, I generally do NOT recommend holsters

that have a retention release that is actuated by the trigger finger. If the gun is not lifted completely clear of the holster before orienting the gun towards the threat, trigger fingers can easily find their way into the trigger guard area and potentially induce a negligent discharge. Whatever your choice, remember that defeating a retention device will require one more step to getting your gun out of the holster.... so.... practice, practice, practice.

One of the benefits of many kydex designs are that you can put the holster on or remove it without taking your belt off or taking the gun out of the holster. The less “handling” we do with the gun the less likely we are to “mishandle” it. Secondly, being able to efficiently remove the holster with the gun inside the holster allows you to place it in your staging device at home or the lock box in the car while keeping the trigger guard covered. If you have to run into the Post Office removing your belt and undressing in a parking lot or leaving an unsecured un-holstered gun in a vehicle are not good ideas.

Whether it be IWB or OWB, “strong side hip” carry is considered (if you visualize your belt buckle as noon and your tailbone as 6 o’clock) from 3 o’clock to 5 o’clock for right handers, and 7 o’clock to 9 o’clock for left handers. This is a good option for most folks.

Another option, and how I carry, is centerline carry. This would be considered carrying the holster from Noon to 2 o’clock for right handed or 10 o’clock to Noon for left-handers. This is NOT to be confused with cross draw. I do not advocate drawing the gun ACROSS your pelvis or abdomen when presenting from the holster. Centerline often allows for great concealment, a very efficient presentation and the gun, being in your front, is much more readily controlled and protected. Also, I have personally experienced less back pain issues since moving to centerline from strong side hip.

I mentioned lifestyle as being a factor. If you are a lifeguard and wear a bikini everyday, you will be very limited as to your concealed carry options or may have no “on body” options at all. If you wear a sport coat or suit everyday, you may find that strong side OWB may work well. If you wear t-shirts everyday then IWB will likely be your answer. If you are bending over at work picking up boxes all the day then centerline may not be the most comfortable option, however, if you stand all day or are getting in and out of a vehicle all day long the centerline may be more comfortable and more accessible while wearing a seatbelt.

Once you choose a mode of carry and purchase the appropriate holster, be sure to check (with an unloaded gun) that the retention is going to be adequate. Wear the gun in the holster, get in and out of your car, roll around on the floor with the kids, and get up and down from your favorite comfy chair and make sure the gun stays in the holster and that the holster does not shift on your body.

Safe and Efficient Presentation from the holster is a complex task and requires some consideration. “Lead puncture wounds” on the range are very rare, but when they do happen OFTEN they happen in the context of holster work. I talk about this in detail in one of [my articles on Personal Defense Network](#). How we take the gun out of the holster and put it back in must be done with care.

To get an idea of how I teach presentation from the holster in the USCCA AND I.C.E. Training classes, [check out this instructional video](#). Be sure when you re-holster the gun you do it SLOWLY

and DELIBERATELY, with your finger somewhere other than the trigger and look at your holster while you re-holster the gun. Be careful that NO clothing is in the way of the holster.

Lastly, as I wrap up this installment, I remind you of “The Big Picture Rule”. Every time you take a gun from or put it back into a holster 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!