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## **Loaded... ready... safe! Can your home-defense gun be loaded and quickly accessible, yet still be safe? Our handgun editor says "Yes!" and offers several proven strategies.**

**Guns Magazine**, Jan 1, 2002, by [Massad Ayoob](#)

If you keep a gun in your home or workplace, it's only common sense that it be loaded and quickly accessible. The same common sense, however, also tells us the firearm should be inaccessible to children, incompetent adults and unlawful intruders. Having both at once is a tall order, but that doesn't make it impossible. Let's look at a broad spectrum of armed citizens and police officers in this country who have found that when it comes to this important matter -- you can have your cake and eat it too.

### In The Home

John is a detective and gunfight winner who works for a large, West Coast law-enforcement agency that serves a very high-crime community. He has investigated a number of violent home invasions, many of which had tragically fatal results. Though most of these were "drug dealer invading and ripping off rival dealer" situations, a disturbing number involved innocent, law-abiding citizens who were helpless once their doors were kicked in.

When John gets dressed for work in the morning, he clips the department-issue Safariland holster containing a Glock 17 loaded with Winchester 9mm hollowpoints onto his belt. When he comes home at night, the gun and holster stay in place.

"In virtually all the home invasions I've investigated, there wouldn't have been time for the victims to run into the next room and grab a loaded gun once the bad guys started kicking the door down, let alone time to get an unloaded firearm from one place and ammo from somewhere else and put it all together," says John.

If friends or neighbors come by to visit in the evening, they are not surprised to see John sitting on the sofa in his shirtsleeves, the Glock at his hip as conspicuous as the ever-present cigar in his hand. Anyone welcome in that household knows John is a cop and that the pistol is a tool of his trade. A postman, UPS delivery person, or other stranger at the door on legitimate business stops worrying about the handgun as soon as they see the badge that John keeps attached to his belt in front of the holster.

3,000 miles away lives Frank, a retired big-city detective who spent most of his career in heavy action precincts. He's a veteran of multiple shootouts, including one that occurred off-duty while he was putting out the garbage. His two service weapons, both privately owned, were Smith & Wesson .38 Special revolvers: a four-inch barrel Model 10 six-shooter and a five-shot Model 36 Chief Special, both meticulously maintained. He never leaves the house without the Chief strapped to his ankle or placed in his pocket.

He secures the full-size service revolver using a trick that is taught at his city's police academy. Frank's handcuffs aren't just souvenirs of 25 years of a tough job. One bracelet secures the Model 10 -- with the

solid half of one bracelet between the rear of the trigger and the back portion of the trigger guard -- and the bridged-half locks over the hammer spur. Though the revolver is loaded with 158-grain Federal Nyclad +P hollowpoints, it cannot be fired. The hammer cannot rise, and the trigger cannot come far enough to the rear to allow a discharge. The other bracelet is secured to a firmly mounted horizontal hangar pole in his bedroom closet.

For his entire career, on and off duty, Frank has carried a small keychain with keys to his house, his car and his handcuffs. That hasn't changed. The keys are always on his person. The one for the handcuffs is oversized to allow fast manipulation. Experience has taught him that he can quickly unlock the big Smith & Wesson and have it in hand and ready to go in the rare moment when the smaller five-shot S&W is not instantly accessible. My old friend Phil Engeldrum was among the first to promote this concept to law-abiding armed citizens, referring to the handcuffs in this application as "circular locks."

Jeff is a distinguished octogenarian who killed three more heavily armed enemy personnel with his handgun while honorably serving his country in time of war. In his younger days, he won numerous combat pistol awards and did much to advance the state of combat pistol doctrine. Only semi-retired even now, he is acutely aware that he is slowed down by old injuries from a physically strenuous and high-risk life. He doesn't worry about access to defensive handguns to protect himself and his lovely wife, however. A home defense system he developed decades before keeps the means readily at hand.

When Jeff puts on his pants in the morning, he puts on a customized 1911 .45 auto, cocked-and-locked, on his right hip, with a spare magazine on the opposite side. Even on the bad days when he needs a wheelchair, the .45 is instantly at hand. Not far away is a lupara, a short double-barrel shotgun, kept in a broken open condition. On its stock is tied a leather shell loop carrier filled with buckshot and slugs. It's the ideal tool, Jeff feels, to "repel boarders."

Jim is a retired sheriff in Texas and a certified gun expert. In his front trouser pocket a Smith & Wesson Model 640 "hammer-less" .38 Special snub will be found, as surely as his wallet will be found in his hip pocket. In addition, there's generally a fancy cocked-and-locked Colt .45 automatic in his waistband, sometimes replaced by a Smith & Wesson .357 Combat Magnum or even a single-action Colt or Ruger sixgun.

A lifetime in a dangerous profession taught Jim to always be armed, even at home. His wife -- a police officer back in the days when most cops were allowed only revolvers -- doesn't carry all the time, especially at home. However, since their children are grown and gone, Jim and his wife are comfortable keeping a K-frame Smith & Wesson revolver in a drawer or on a high shelf in every room in the house. Each is fully loaded with 158-grain +P all-lead hollowpoints, backed up by an HKS speedloader filled with the same ammo next to each gun. This assures Jim that even when he's away hunting or at a seminar, his wife will be able to reach a gun and effectively defend herself at any moment. When grandchildren come to visit, a household rule is that Jim and his spouse will be notified sufficiently in advance to make a quick sweep of the house and secure the loaded revolvers.

Ricky is a gunsmith and ex-cop. Each morning he slides a factory-tuned Colt Government Model .45 auto into an Ayoob Rear Guard holster by Mitch Rosen. The pistol, like the Federal Classic 185-grain JHP ammo he loads it with, was issued by his police department. He bought the gun when he retired. He and his lovely wife live in a remote backwoods home. And whether the problem is a human predator or one of the bears often seen on the property, he knows that he won't have time to run from the field to the house to access a gun if there's trouble.

Ricky also keeps handy a Smith & Wesson Model 65 .357 Magnum revolver. It has been fitted with a

MagnaTrigger, the one "smart gun" concept that not only actually exists but has actually been proven to work. He and his bride each have the special magnetic rings which are worn on the middle finger to activate

the gun. When either of them grasps that Military & Police .357, the ring activates the system, allowing the revolver to fire with a normal grasp as quickly as the trigger can be pulled. An unauthorized hand, however, can only pull the trigger far enough to the rear to allow the cylinder to rotate.

I used a Magna Trigger .357 Combat Magnum as my "nightstand gun" when my children were little. Neither they nor a burglar had the wherewithal to make the revolver discharge, but my wife and I slipped a ring on the middle finger of each hand before going to bed (in case weak-hand-only firing was necessary). Each of us had immediate access to a gun that would only fire at our command. This old Model 66 has been in semi-retirement for some years, but with the recent marriage of our oldest daughter; we know that grandchildren, can't be too far in the future. Thus, we expect that the gun we called "Fluffy, the pet revolver" (because it would only "speak" for its owners) may soon come out of retirement.

#### Points To Note

You have noted that each of the above-named professionals keeps his gun on at all times. This is because each has learned a basic truth: Only by wearing the loaded gun on your person at all times can it be instantly accessible while simultaneously secured from unauthorized hands.

Note also that many of the above have a fallback system of accessible weaponry. And each has ensured that every member of the household with the requisite competency level has a firearm of some sort readily accessible.

#### In The Workplace

Strangers are seldom allowed to enter your home at will. Your workplace -- particularly if it is a place of business open to the public -- has people of unknown competence and responsibility going in and out all the time. This can make securing a deadly weapon a much more daunting task.

Jack was a lawyer in the South. The secretaries at the firm thought he was like the star of the old TV show Father Knows Best because he never removed his suit coat or blazer in the office. Actually, fastidiousness in the name of men's fashion had little to do with it. The jacket was there to cover his custom Colt .45 automatic in its Milt Sparks inside-the-waistband holster.

As the managing partner of the firm, Jack seldom had to go to court. As a result, he could almost always keep the gun on, so long as it was concealed to keep from alarming clients. There were two occasions when he needed that gun, both times shortly after returning home from work. On one occasion, a vicious dog attacked him and a Glaser Safety Slug to the beast's throat at muzzle contact saved him from crippling injury. In a later incident, he was just leaving his house when a home invader entered his carport armed with a MAC-10 submachine gun. Jack drew his Government Model and delivered a hail of accurate rapid fire, winning the deadly contest. He is now retired and can always be found with a gun on his person.

Dee is the CEO of a conglomerate in the Northeast. The semi-relaxed dress code in the office does not leave her any good options for carrying a concealed handgun. Her solution is a lock box, the Gun Vault. It uses a fast-access, battery-operated, push-button release with a key-lock backup. It contains an

engraved Colt Detective Special .38 with which she is fast and deadly accurate. Because concealment is not a concern, she has fitted the revolver with hand-filling Pachmayr Compac grips, which give her maximum control for fast, accurate combat shooting.

Sandra is a West Coast attorney who survived a tragic multiple murder in which the disgruntled loser of a lawsuit burst into her law office shooting. People were killed before the berserker committed suicide. She remembers the helpless terror she felt as she huddled under a desk, listening to the gunfire and the screams of her colleagues.

Some other survivors of the massacre became crusaders for gun control. Sandra took a logical approach. Ever since the event, there has been a loaded handgun in the top drawer of her desk. The gun itself is sometimes a .357 Magnum S&W revolver, sometimes a 9mm HK auto pistol. She keeps the drawer in an unlocked condition, the key in place with the keychain hanging from it on a Kubotan self defense stick.

When she has to leave the room, she has made it an unailing ritual to lock the drawer of the heavy-duty steel desk and slip the Kubotan keychain into the waistband of her pantsuit. When she goes to court, the courthouse security guards obligingly hold the Kubotan for her in a secure place until she leaves the building. It's a system that works for this violence survivor who has sworn to herself, "never again."

Another survivor of a workplace massacre is Joel, a high school principal in Mississippi. He was vice principal of another school on the morning when gunfire broke out in the part of the school called The Commons. A 16-year-old monster had stabbed his mother to death that morning to gain access to her estranged husband's .30-30 hunting rifle, and now the boy was using it to kill and maim his schoolmates.

The school was a "gun-free environment," but under Mississippi law it was legal for Joel to have a gun in his locked car in the parking lot. He sprinted to his pickup truck, unlocked the door, and tore his Colt Officer's ACP from its carrying case. Moments later, he interdicted the young mass murderer and forced him to surrender at gunpoint. Though school policy had not allowed him the means to stop the horror immediately, Joel's courageous action and ability to reach a .45-caliber pistol had prevented more killing. At the time of his capture by this brave armed citizen, the youthful murderer was heading for the nearby middle school with the rifle and another 36 rounds of ammunition to continue the carnage.

Joel told me later, "There is no doubt in my mind that if I could have reached a gun without having to run to the parking lot, I could have stopped things much sooner."

Phil is a streetwise businessman who used to run a gunsmithing accessory shop open to the public in California. He didn't like the idea of loaded guns lying around behind the counters where an employee's child or some other unauthorized person might reach them. His solution: a bevy of Browning 9mm pistols stored in strategic spots behind the counters. The guns were stowed cocked-and-locked, with a live JHP round in the chamber, but with no magazine in place. The magazine disconnect safety incorporated into the Hi-Power design prevented the chambered round from being fired. Each authorized employee was required to carry a loaded Browning magazine in a pocket or an inconspicuous belt pouch. With a quick, practiced movement, the employees could snatch up a Browning with their dominant hand and snap in a full magazine with the other hand, instantly having a loaded pistol in hand and ready to fire.

My father, a gunfight survivor himself, owned a jewelry store in the Northeast. Dad was a Colt man, and whether he was greeting a customer behind the counter or fixing a watch or ring at his bench, a loaded 4-inch police service revolver was always within reach in a holster nailed to the counter or bench, unseen by customers. In the back room, inaccessible to customers, a cocked-and-locked Colt auto-pistol reposed in a holster nailed to a shelf in a similar fashion, and a Winchester pump gun loaded with 12-gauge Super-X buckshot was readily at hand. Yet another holster was attached to the ceiling of the safe. Here, if forced to open the waist-high vault at gunpoint, store personnel could grab the Colt Cobra .38. When he put the day's receipts and the diamonds from the showcases into the safe at night, Dad would slip that hammer-shrouded snubnose from its holster quickly (one practice repetition per day) and then put it into his pocket for the drive home. The next morning, as he opened the safe, he would return the gun to its resting place.

#### Points to Note

A "no guns" workplace code can leave those in the workplace vulnerable to assault and mass murder. Guns that are authorized must be stored, like home-defense guns, in a manner that makes them instantly accessible to authorized and competent personnel yet simultaneously inaccessible to those who are not authorized.

Loaded, ready, yet safe? Yes, it can be done, as the true examples above clearly show.

#### RELATED ARTICLE

Here's how handcuffs may be used to secure conventional double-action handguns. S&W Model 686 revolver has bracelet locking both hammer and trigger in place. The Ruger P90 .45 auto is similarly secured. External appearance fails to reveal that this S&W Model 66 .357 Combat Magnum has been altered to "smart gun" status by installing the MagnaTrigger device. Mossberg's newly-announced Loc-Box is the answer for keeping a shotgun loaded but safe from unauthorized use or theft.

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