

The Gun Doctor: Safe Storage of Firearms

By Wolfgang Rotbart

If you own firearms, safely storing them should be a priority. Doing this runs the gamut from full-scale home alarm/security systems and gun vaults to just ensuring the firearms are unloaded and kept separate from ammunition when not in use.

(Please refer to the "Resources" note in the last paragraph for more in-depth information online for this and other articles.)

Many people use full-size gun vaults/safes to secure their firearms. "Vault" is the more correct term as very few vaults can be considered "safes"; a true safe is much more resistant to attack than virtually all vaults.

There are two broad classifications for gun vaults. The first is used merely for secure storage from casual unauthorized use. This type is not intended to thwart a determined attempt or protect from fire damage. These usually start at under one hundred dollars and go up to few hundred dollars.

Then there are true security vaults, which run from several thousand to over ten thousand dollars. The two main features to assess in security vaults are attack resistance and fire protection.

Fire protection ratings are problematic because most companies conduct their own testing instead of using an independent laboratory or Underwriters Laboratories and so the results are somewhat unreliable or misleading. Suffice it to say, true house fire protection comes at a steep price.

Regarding attack-resistance, here are a few general points one should consider and research before buying. The smaller the gap between the door and the frame, the less effective pry bars will be. Check the weight of the actual steel used in construction, not just the total weight. Many vaults have substantial "filler" material that adds to the weight, but does not provide any meaningful security for the contents. Most of the reputable manufacturers have lifetime warranties against fire or damage. Having an internal framework, as opposed to just formed sheet metal, helps prevent brute force attacks. "Made In America" is usually a plus on several levels, including overall quality.

Many vault manufacturers offer a dehumidifier or internal lighting as options. Most provide for some sort of anchoring from within. This is important to prevent the theft of the entire vault and its contents and to make it more difficult to pry open. A vault laid on its back allows the attacker to use his weight on the pry bar; upright, he must supply all the force. However, given the proper knowledge, tools, and enough time, any vault can be breached.

There are numerous types of small vaults just for handguns and they generally provide better accessibility than full-size ones. However, they are more

susceptible to theft, even if they are lagged securely. The most common are key, combination, number pad, electronic and biometrics locking mechanisms. Each has its strengths and drawbacks, so ensure that you weigh these before purchase. If you are considering one of the electronic or biometric types, be sure there is some way to gain access if the battery fails.

Lastly, there is a great array of devices to render a firearm mechanically inoperable, but comparatively accessible. The main types are those that lock the trigger into position so it can't be pulled, cover the trigger area entirely and cable types which go through the action so that a cartridge can't be loaded. These are mostly key operated with a few having combination locks.

When firearms are being used for personal defense, they present a special problem – accessibility versus security. In general, the more secure a firearm is, the less readily accessible it is. Criminals rarely give notice of an attack and so one must have ready access in order to be effective. However, especially in the case of children in and around the home, having unsecured firearms about is a recipe for tragedy. Each gun owner must decide on the proper balance between the two.

Follow-up information to topics in this and other articles can be found on the "Resources" page on The Gun Doctor home page (www.wolfgangthegundocor.com).

I welcome ideas for topics for these articles. Please email them to: Wolfgang@WolfgangTheGunDoctor.com or call me at 503-429-7342 10:00 – 5:00 M – F

Wolfgang Rotbart is an AGI-certified Master Gunsmith and a NRA-certified Basic Pistol Course Instructor. He works as a gunsmith and as an Oregon Concealed Handgun Safety Course Instructor. You may visit The Gun Doctor website for more information at: <http://www.wolfgangthegundocor.com/>

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