

# Gun storage laws could come to Oregon

Restrictions could follow other states

By JONATHAN LEVINSON

Oregon Public Broadcasting

In his Portland home, Austin Meyers stood in front of his gun safe showing how he stores his ammo, his pistols and his rifle.

He was putting a cable lock on his matte Glock handgun and prepared to demonstrate how fast he could unlock it and load a magazine if he had to in an emergency.

The cable lock is essentially a metal cable with both ends connected to a padlock, forming a secure loop. One side of the cable goes in through the chamber, down the magazine well and then loops back into the locking mechanism. With the cable lock in place, a magazine cannot be loaded into the gun and the gun can't fire.

Meyers locked his gun, put a magazine a few feet away and stashed the keys in a safe place. For security reasons, Meyers did not want to disclose where he keeps his key.

State laws regarding gun locks vary widely. Twenty-three states, including Oregon, don't have any laws about firearm storage.

But that could change.

The state Legislature has introduced two different bills requiring gun owners to lock their firearms when not in use. If one of the bills is passed, gun owners in Oregon will have to think about this scenario if they haven't already.

Meyers walked through what he would do if someone broke into his house.

"If you hear a window break, first get your keys," Meyers said, reaching for the keys he hid moments before. "Get the gun from your your nightstand. Get the key into the lock."

He struggled for a moment to get the key in the lock the right way.

"Open the lock up, pull that out. Get a mag in and then you're good to go," he said.



Jonathan Levinson/Oregon Public Broadcasting

**Sgt. Brandon White of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office puts a cable lock on a training Glock. The sheriff's office gives out gun locks for free to anyone who wants one.**

In all, for Meyers — who's been a competitive shooter for five years — it takes 16 seconds.

And while that might not be fast enough for some people, Meyers thinks that's plenty of time. He says you'd probably hear someone breaking in before you had to use your firearm.

"I don't think that it's extreme at all. It is pretty common sense you know, if you're not using it — keep it locked up," he said.

## Oregon's approach

Common sense is exactly how state Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, D-Portland, described it, too.

She and state Sen. James Manning, D-Eugene, are sponsoring one bill: the Cindy Yuille and Steven Forsyth Act, named for the two victims killed in the 2012 Clackamas Town Center shooting.

Gov. Kate Brown has also introduced a bill that would create a new crime called "endangering a minor," punishable by 364 days in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

Smith Warner compares her safe storage bill to the campaign to make seat belt use more commonplace.

"It takes kind of a public health approach," Smith Warner explained. "You create an expectation, you do a broad public education campaign

about it and you have that become the default activity."

She said no one is going to be busting down doors to check gun safes.

But if something happens — say a child gets hold of your gun or a stolen gun is used to commit a crime — then, she said, it will be a violation.

"It's like a traffic ticket," Smith Warner said.

The new law would require all gun owners to secure their firearms when not in use. That means locking them up and keeping them out of the hands of people who are prohibited from owning guns, like minors or felons. It also requires gun owners to report a stolen gun within 24 hours or face liability for any damages.

Safe storage and mandatory reporting hit close to home for many Oregon residents in 2012. That year, a man used a stolen AR-15 to kill two people and injure a third at the Clackamas Town Center, a shopping mall just outside of Portland. The rifle wasn't secured in the owner's home and was never reported stolen.

"Nobody prepares for a moment like that," said Paul Kemp, remembering that afternoon.

His sister had been at the mall visiting her husband with their daughter.

"They had just left and

then the shooting started and she couldn't get a hold of Steve," Kemp recalled.

Kemp's brother-in-law, Steve Forsyth, was one of the two people killed that day.

Kemp is lobbying for Smith Warner's safe storage bill. He said that law could have saved Forsyth's life had it been in place at the time.

## The national picture

Oregon isn't the first state to pass a safe storage law.

Some states, like California, are more strict, requiring owners to keep firearms locked if they live in a home with people prohibited from owning them.

Other state laws are more relaxed. In Ohio, a gun dealer is only required to offer a lock with every purchase.

Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have a version of safe storage called a child access prevention law.

Andrew Morral, a senior behavioral scientist at the RAND Corp., was part of a team of researchers that looked at how different kinds of gun laws impact things like homicide and suicide.

"There's variation," Morral said, "but the basic idea is you've got to keep your guns locked if there's any chance of a kid accessing them."

Massachusetts is the only state that requires all guns to be locked when not in use.

## Alternative to NRA insurance has early support

By JONATHAN LEVINSON  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Marine Corps officer and 2020 candidate for Washington state representative, said he has a better idea.

This month, Washington become the second state in the country to ban the National Rifle Association's Carry Guard insurance. The policies are liability coverage for gun owners who use their firearms for self-defense and are sometimes referred to as murder insurance.

The insurance gives an upfront payout to cover the cost of legal fees if a policy holder is involved in a shooting. The policies extend coverage even if a person ends up pleading guilty or is convicted of a crime, such as homicide.

Washington state officials said the Carry Guard policies are illegal because you can't insure a criminal act.

But Chris Thobaben, a

Thobaben proposes requiring gun owners to make a one-time payment at the point of purchase. That payment would be for an insurance policy that would stay attached to the gun for its lifespan, even if it's sold.

"So if gun No. 11567 is used to kill John Smith, John Smith's family is subject to receive the payout of John Smith's life value," Thobaben explained.

The policy upends the traditional insurance model. It doesn't cover the shooter, only the victim of gun violence.

And Thobaben's plan might catch on.

He said his proposal has support from the gun control group Moms Demand Action and members of the NRA.

A gun owner there can face up to \$15,000 in fines or 12 years in prison for storing a firearm where a child may have access to it.

There are a few states — Utah, Mississippi and Tennessee — where there's no legal requirement to lock up your guns, but it's a misdemeanor to recklessly or knowingly provide firearms to a minor.

Smith Warner's proposed legislation is a hybrid. The requirements are strict but the penalties are not. Like Massachusetts, it requires gun owners to securely store all firearms, but the penalty is only a fine up to \$2,000.

Morral said that of the 13 types of gun laws they studied, the child access prevention laws had the greatest impact.

"It does look like safe storage laws can reduce lives lost to suicide and unintentional injury," he added, "and

you know that's an endorsement, definitely, for safe storage."

Massachusetts' safe storage law is one law among many contributing to the state's low gun death rate — at 3.6 gun deaths per 100,000 people in 2016, it's the lowest in the country. Massachusetts' death rate is five times lower than the highest rates in Alaska, Alabama and Louisiana, where there were over 20 deaths per 100,000 people. And it's three times lower than Oregon's.

But with Democratic supermajorities now holding power in both houses of Oregon's Legislature, some are hoping new laws might reduce those numbers.

They're also hoping Oregonians won't punish them next election for the extra 16 seconds it will take to access their firearms if the safe storage bill becomes law.

# Oregon bottle deposit system hits 90 percent redemption rate

By CASSANDRA PROFITA

Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon's bottle deposit system is recycling more containers than ever before despite major disruptions in global recycling markets.

Last year, Oregon recycled 90 percent of the beverage containers covered by its bottle deposit system. The rate has jumped from 64 percent just two years ago and the total number of bottles recycled reached an all-time high of 2 billion in 2018.

"That's a really interesting thing given how much change is happening in recycling markets right now," said Joel Schoen-

ing, with the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, which runs the state's bottle deposit system.

Schoening said the program isn't suffering from the same problems as curbside recycling.

"Because we deal only in glass, plastic, aluminum with very few exceptions we have a very clean recycling product," he said, "which makes it easier to sell and recycle domestically."

The new numbers reflect the recent expansion of the program to include more types of beverage containers, including energy and sports drinks, tea, coffee and kombucha, as well as an increase in the deposit value from 5 cents to 10 cents.

In 2018, the program also saw a 50 percent increase in sign-ups for the BottleDrop service that allows consumers to drop off their bottles to be counted and credited to their accounts. According to the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, more than 300,000 Oregonians now have BottleDrop accounts.

Peter Spendelow, a natural resource specialist with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, said the bottle deposit program is helping the state keep its recycling rate up even as some recycling companies across the state are having to send some of their recyclables to landfills for lack of buyers.

"We can see good increases in aluminum, glass and rigid plastic containers — three materials that are dominated by the bottle deposit system," Spendelow said.

In 2017, China — the world's largest buyer of recyclables — severely restricted the amount of recyclable material it allows into the country because commingled recycling shipments had too much nonrecyclable trash in them. That left recycling companies with a much smaller market

for recyclable material.

Spendelow said the bottle deposit system benefits from cleaner mix of recyclable materials than curbside programs.

"People do not put coffee cups in when they return their bottles through the redemption center," he said,

"whereas you do see those in curbside bins."

Spendelow said the success of the bottle deposit system proves that deposits can work to incentivize proper recycling, but it isn't the solution for everything that's going in curbside bins.

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