



Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

Training to Use A Handgun for Self-Defense: A Matter of Legality, Safety, and Moral Responsibility

By

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It is important for people who legally carry a handgun for self-defense in public, open or concealed, to recognize that gun ownership bestows upon them significant legal, safety, and moral responsibilities. An important way for them to comply with those responsibilities is to ensure they: understand the legal requirements for using a firearm in self-defense in their state; practice safe gun-handling skills; and recognize moral obligations attendant to carrying a firearm in public. This article offers guidance for using a handgun in self-defense legally, safely, and responsibly.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

All states have legal requirements for using a handgun in self-defense; some more stringent than others. Maryland, where we live and instruct, is no exception. Maryland is not a gun-friendly state and, consequently, its carry and self-defense laws are stringent.

There are also many states that practice what is known as Constitutional Carry. That practice allows citizens to carry a handgun without a permit.

Some states allow "open carry" where the handgun is visible without a permit, but require a permit to carry concealed.

The point is that a person who wants to carry a firearm—open or concealed—must know their state's firearms laws; and if they plan on travelling, they need to know the

laws of the states they travel to and through. One excellent source of gun laws information for all 50 states is www.handgunlaws.us. That site is updated monthly.

Use of Force

Police must follow use of force laws. The military requires warriors to comply with rules of engagement (ROEs). Most states have use of force laws governing when citizens can and cannot use force in self-defense.

As an example, Maryland's legal requirements for using force for self-defense are found in *State v. Faulkner*, 301 Md. 482, A.2d 759 (1984). The paraphrased criteria are:

- Innocence—the person using self-defense must not be the aggressor.

- Imminence—the person must believe the threat is going to happen—right now!
- Reasonableness—the person must believe self-defense was reasonable (under the legal concept of the "reasonable person," legal systems decide whether a person's feelings and experience of imminent danger justify the use of force as a response to a threat)
- Avoidance—the person must retreat as long as it is safe to do so; but it is not necessary to retreat in one's house.
- Proportionality—the person must use only enough force to stop the threat.

Even if all of these conditions are met, a person could and probably will face legal consequences. (For a comprehensive review of Maryland's use of force laws please see (Harris & Cohen, 2024). We highly recommend this book for Maryland

gun owners. It is not limited to self-defense with a handgun).

Accountability and Liability

Gun owners are accountable for their actions, even in self-defense. If they are involved in self-defense incidents or accidentally discharge their firearms, they may face civil or criminal liability. Police officers have qualified immunity that shields them from prosecution for firearms incidents that harm others. Citizens do not have the protection of qualified immunity.

It is also very important to document training because of the legal implications of using a firearm in self-defense. Training demonstrates that responsible steps to ensure safety and the safety of others were taken. A useful resource for documenting training is found in the Concealed Carry Book of Drills – Handgun Training Drill Cards and Log Book (Concealed Carry Inc. (date unknown)).

Completing firearms training courses could provide some level of liability protection. Training courses are available through organizations like the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA). (visit USCCA Academy).

GUN HANDLING

Firearms Safety Rules

The safe-handling of firearms before, during, and after training is very important. Failure to comply with the rules can result in injury to oneself or others. Negligent

discharges, misfires, and other careless actions can have devastating consequences. The five rules that we teach at *Spartan Firearms Training Group* are:

- Every firearm is loaded until personally verified that it is not
- Do not point the firearm at anyone or anything you do not wish to destroy
- Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target or you are ready to shoot.
- Be sure of your target and what’s behind and around it
- Know the condition of your firearm.

Proficiency and Effectiveness

Carrying a handgun in public requires gun owners to be proficient in using their handgun. This includes:

- Defensive shooting skills
- Malfunction clearing—tactical and emergency
- Tactical techniques—scanning and moving
- Low-light shooting

Training also helps develop safe gun-handling skills, including:

- Proper grip and stance
- Trigger discipline
- Muzzle awareness
- Loading and unloading procedures

Types of Training

There are various types of training available for gun owners who carry open or concealed, including:

- Basic pistol training
- Carry training
- Defensive shooting training
- Simulator training
- Scenario training
- Tactical training
- Stress inoculation training
- Situational awareness and threat management training

Spartan Firearms Training Group strongly recommends training that focuses on defensive shooting. While shooting paper or steel targets on a range is fun, those targets don’t shoot back. Learning how to engage targets while moving, kneeling, lying prone, lying on one’s back, seated, and so on, should be part of a training regimen. The challenge gun owners face when looking for those training opportunities is to find a location that allows that kind of training and finding qualified instructors.

Finding a Qualified Instructor

When seeking firearms training, it's essential to find a qualified instructor with experience teaching defensive shooting skills. Also, look for instructors who are certified by organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA), the International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA), and by the state agencies such as the state police.

Additionally, consider the following factors when selecting an instructor:

- Knowledge and Skills: knows and understands how firearms operate and demonstrates shooting skills.
- Experience: extensive experience teaching handgun skills and a proven track record of success.
- Qualifications: certifications from reputable organizations.
- Safety record: has a history of conducting safe and responsible training sessions.
- Communication skills: ability to describe complex ideas simply.

Training Frequency

We strongly encourage our students to create and maintain a training regimen. Training is not a one-time event; it's an ongoing process that requires regular practice and maintenance. The following training frequency guidelines are offered for consideration.

- New shooters: live-fire train at least once a month for the first six months to develop muscle memory and basic skills; dry practice weekly, including drawing from a holster.
- Experienced shooters: train at least every 2-3 months to

maintain proficiency and remediate any skill degradation; dry practice weekly.

- People carrying a firearm: train weekly using dry practice drills for gun handling skills, including drawing from a holster and live-fire training at least once a month to maintain skills.
- All shooters: stay up-to-date on firearms laws. Getting in legal trouble because of not being informed about changes in the law is a very real possibility (see is www.handgun-laws.us).

INHERENT MORAL OBLIGATIONS

A moral obligation is a duty or responsibility that arises from ethical considerations. It obliges people to act in ways perceived as right or wrong.

Legally carrying a handgun in public has moral obligations attached to it. We identified seven moral obligations for gun owners who carry their handgun in public. In our opinion, these moral obligations are reflections of the mindset, knowledge, and skills that responsible gun owners must develop.

Moral Obligation #1

A firearm is a deadly weapon. It does not discharge itself. It first must be loaded, the safety disengaged (if there is one), then pointed at a target, and then the trigger

must be pressed. Gun owners are responsible for the safe use of their firearms.

Moral Obligation #2: Make sure firearms are inaccessible to children and at-risk and prohibited adults. This is also a legal obligation in many states.

Moral Obligation #3

Owning, carrying, and shooting a firearm is not like what people see in the movies. Those who legally carry a handgun are not Dirty Harry, Rambo, or....When carrying a firearm don't act like a movie actor or a street thug with a gun.

Gun owners must also avoid brandishing their firearm, which means displaying it to intimidate others. Brandishing a firearm is a crime in some jurisdictions.¹

Moral Obligation #4

Gun owners must know how their firearms operate so they can use them safely and effectively.

Moral Obligation #5

Learn how to shoot accurately. If a person legally carrying a handgun in public shoots at a target and misses an innocent person may be injured or killed.

¹ Brandishing is a felony assault in Maryland. "...displaying the firearm in the commission of an Assault is enough to get someone convicted..." of assault in the first degree (Harris & Cohen, 2024, p. 21). MD Code, Criminal Law, § 3-202, states clearly "A person may not commit an assault with a firearm...A person who violates this section is guilty of the felony of assault in the first degree and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 25 years."

Moral Obligation #6

Not all firearms training is of equal quality. Seek out skilled trainers who provide superior training opportunities. People set themselves up for failure and legal consequences if they buy a handgun to carry in public and then get low quality training.

Moral Obligation #7

People who legally carry a handgun in public should reflect on who they are and what their firearms skill-levels are. They should also assess their personal moral and religious values to determine if they have the will to shoot another human being in self-defense. They also need to decide if they have the mindset and courage to engage an attacker when their lives or the lives of their loved ones are at stake.

CONCLUSION

Training to legally carry a handgun in public and use it for self-defense is absolutely critical in the event of a deadly force threat. The training, if provided by qualified instructors and focused on important skills, ensures that gun owners can handle their firearms effectively.

Remember, legally carrying a handgun in public burdens gun owners with significant legal, safety, and moral responsibilities.

REFERENCES

Concealed Carry Inc. (date unknown). *Concealed carry book of drills – handgun training drill cards and log book*. Available at [Training Log](#)

Harris, IV, R. S. & Cohen, M.E. (2024). *The Maryland use of force handbook*. Available on Amazon Prime at [Maryland-Use-Force-Handbook](#).

MD Code, Criminal Law, § 3-202, Formerly cited as MD CODE Art. 27, § 12A-1 § 3-202. *Assault in the first degree*.

State vs. Faulkner (1984). Available at <https://casetext.com/case/state-v-faulkner-35>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA).

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to the preservation and advancement of gun owners' rights in Maryland.

He is the co-founder and vice president of the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be contacted at 443-472-0216 or at frank@spartanftg.com.

Individuals who want to schedule a private, 1-on-1 firearms training session should contact Frank.

ABOUT THE SPARTAN FIREARMS TRAINING GROUP

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC, (www.spartanftg.com) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015. At the end of March, 2024, we entered into our 10th year of business and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is found at [SFTG Training Calendar](#).

Scheduling or training questions should be directed to Paul Duffy. He can be contacted at 410-707-2992 or at Paul@spartanftg.com.

YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING; NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!