



U.S. Department of  
**JUSTICE**



# SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS

Unload it, Lock it, Store it.

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## **SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS**

**Unload it, Lock it, Store it.**

### **FOR FIREARMS OWNERS**

The following suggestions for safety and security are recommendations only. However, please be aware that there may be state or local laws pertaining to the possession or storage of a firearm.

- Safely storing firearms is crucial to preventing the risks of unintentional death, injury, or damage.
- It is your responsibility to know how to properly store your firearms in your home.
- Your firearms should be readily available to you, yet inaccessible or inoperative to others. This will protect you, your loved ones, and others from the misuse, theft, or loss of your firearms.

Familiarize yourself with and obey all federal, state, and local laws regarding the purchase, possession, carrying, use, storage, and disposition/sale of firearms.

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## Handling Firearms

- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Always keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard unless you intend to fire the weapon.
- Always keep the muzzle of the firearm pointed in a safe direction. A “safe direction” means that the gun is pointed so that if it were to fire, it would not result in an injury.
- When you pick up a firearm, first point it in a safe direction and make sure it is unloaded. Open the action and look into the chamber(s), which should be clear of ammunition. If the gun has a magazine, carefully remove it before opening the action. Then open the action to be sure the chamber is clear of ammunition.
- You must always exercise full control and supervision over a loaded gun. This means the gun must be unloaded and placed in secure storage whenever you leave the gun unattended.

## Storing Firearms

Nearly all firearm accidents in the home can be prevented by making sure that guns are kept unloaded and locked up when not in use.

- Unload each firearm before storing.
- Store unloaded firearms in a locked cabinet, safe, gun vault, or storage case. (A locked storage case should be kept in a location inaccessible to children.)
- If storing a disassembled firearm, parts should be securely stored in separate locations.
- Keep ammunition locked in a secure location away from the firearm.
- Make sure to take special safety precautions if you must have quick access to a **LOADED** firearm in your home. Many firearm accidents occur in the home as a result of unauthorized persons discovering loaded firearms that were left out in the open. Use trigger locks, cable locks, or other locking mechanisms, and/or keep your firearm locked in a secure location accessible to responsible adults only. A gun lock should be used as an **additional** safety precaution and not as a substitute for secure storage.
- Always re-check firearms carefully and completely to be sure that they are **still** unloaded when you remove them from storage. Accidents can happen if a family member has borrowed or loaned a gun and then carelessly returned it to storage while it was still loaded.

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If you must have quick access to a loaded firearm in your home, you need to take special safety measures.

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## **What qualifies as a secure gun storage or safety device?**

- 1.** A device that, when installed on a firearm, is designed to prevent the firearm from being operated without first deactivating the device;
- 2.** A device incorporated into the design of the firearm that is designed to prevent the operation of the firearm by anyone not having access to the device; or
- 3.** A safe, gun safe, gun case, lock box, or other device that is designed to be or can be used to store a firearm and that is designed to be unlocked only by means of a key, a combination, or other similar means.

Zip ties, rope, and string do not meet this definition.

## **Temporary Storage Outside of Home**

If you will be traveling to a place that does not permit possessing a firearm, you may want to store your firearms at a federal firearms licensee's (FFL) premises while you are away.

Other reasons may arise to temporarily remove your firearms from your home, during which you may decide to store your firearms with an FFL. (See the sections on "If Children Are in the Home" and "If At-Risk or Prohibited Persons Are in the Home.")

FFLs can help in such cases, if they adhere to federal, state, and local laws for storing and returning firearms.

Where allowed by law, friends who are gun owners could be another option for temporary storage.

## **Options for Securely Storing Firearms**

### **Gun Safe**

Gun safes provide the most secure storage for firearms. Certain models can be heavy and expensive but they are available in all price and security levels. Keys and combinations should be stored separately from the gun safe in a location inaccessible to children, at-risk persons, and prohibited persons.

### **Lock Box (Mechanical and Electronic)**

Lock boxes conceal and protect the firearm. It provides secure storage for loaded and unloaded firearms. Depending on size, the lock box can be stolen. Keys and combinations should be stored separately from the lock box in a location inaccessible to children, at-risk persons, and prohibited persons.

### **Disassembling Firearm**

Disassembling a firearm makes it so the firearm cannot be fired. This is not practical with all firearms and requires knowledge of correct assembly and disassembly procedures.

### **Trigger Lock**

Trigger locks block the trigger but do not prevent the firearm from being loaded. If the lock is used on a loaded firearm, it may cause the firearm to fire under certain circumstances. The lock cannot be used on lever-action firearms. Keys and combinations should be stored separately from the firearm in a location inaccessible to children, at-risk persons, and prohibited persons.



## Cable Locks

A cable lock is intended to discourage unauthorized access to a firearm, particularly by young children. This lock should be used in addition to, and not as a substitute for, proper firearm storage. This lock may be defeated by a determined individual using tools or other aggressive means and may not prevent the intentional misuse of a firearm.

A cable lock consists of an armored steel cable with one end permanently secured to a keyed padlock. When the lock is properly installed, the firearm is unloaded and the lock prevents the firearm's action from closing.



## Cable Lock Safety Tips

- Always keep the cable and lock outside of your firearm's trigger guard.
- Always ensure that the cable is fully/correctly seated in the padlock after locking.
- To prevent damage to your firearm or your cable lock, never attempt to work the action of a firearm already equipped with a lock.
- Always replace a cable lock that shows signs of damage or extensive wear.
- Always store the key separate from any firearm equipped with a cable lock. Ensure that the key is kept in a location not accessible by prohibited and at-risk people (especially children).

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## Cable Lock Installation Instructions by Firearm Type

**Warning:** Make sure the firearm is completely **UNLOADED** and the safety is on **SAFE** before installing any gun lock. When installing the lock, always point the firearm in a safe direction and keep your finger off the trigger.

**To unlock:** Turn key clockwise. Remove loose end of cable from padlock and thread it through **unloaded** firearm as explained and shown below.

**To lock:** With key turned to farthest clockwise position, insert loose end of cable into padlock. Turn key counterclockwise and remove key. Check that cable is secure.

## Autoloading Pistols

Remove the magazine and move the slide back into its locked position. Insert the cable downward through the ejection port so that it feeds out through the magazine well. To lock the cable, turn the padlock's key to the farthest clockwise position and insert the loose end of the cable into the padlock's opening. With the cable inserted, turn the key counterclockwise and remove the key. Verify that the cable is seated in the proper, locked position.



## Revolvers

Release/open to expose the cylinder. Insert the cable through either the barrel or the empty cylinder chamber. To lock the cable, turn the padlock's key to the farthest clockwise position and insert the loose end of the cable into the padlock's opening. With the cable inserted, turn the key counterclockwise and remove the key. Verify that the cable is seated in the proper, locked position.



## Autoloading and Pump Action Shotguns

Slide action back into locked, open position. Insert the cable through the ejection port and down (out) through the loading port. To lock the cable, turn the padlock's key to the farthest clockwise position and insert the loose end of the cable into the padlock's opening. With the cable inserted, turn the key counterclockwise and remove the key. Verify that the cable is seated in the proper, locked position.



## Autoloading and Bolt Action Rifles

Remove the magazine and place the action into the open/locked position (you may also opt to remove the bolt in a bolt-action rifle). Insert the cable through the ejection port and down (out) through either the receiver assembly or the magazine well. To lock the cable, turn the padlock's key to the farthest clockwise position and insert the loose end of the cable into the padlock's opening. With the cable inserted, turn the key counterclockwise and remove the key. Verify that the cable is seated in the proper, locked position. OR: Remove the bolt

from the rifle. Insert the cable through the ejection port and out through the end of the receiver assembly. To lock: With key turned to farthest clockwise position, insert loose end of cable into padlock. Turn key counterclockwise and remove key. Check that cable is secure.

## Lever Action Rifles

Empty the magazine, place the lever in the closed position and wrap or intertwine the cable around both the stock and the lever to prevent the lever from being cycled. To lock the cable, turn the padlock's key to the farthest clockwise position and insert the loose end of the cable into the padlock's opening. With the cable inserted, turn the key counterclockwise and remove the key. Verify that the cable is seated in the proper, locked position.



**Note:** No single lock will fit all firearms. If the lock does not fit your firearm, contact the manufacturer of your firearm to find out the type of lock recommended for it. A local firearms retailer or law enforcement agency can help you as well.

### **If Children Are in the Home**

As a gun owner, you are responsible for ensuring that unsupervised children do not have access to firearms and teaching them safe practices if they do come into contact with firearms.

- Make absolutely sure that guns in your home are stored so that they are not accessible to children or other at-risk or prohibited persons. Hiding a gun in a closet, drawer, or similar location is not safe storage. Children are extremely curious and might find a gun in your home that you thought was safely hidden or inaccessible.
- Use a combination of safeguards to provide extra layers of security against unauthorized use and create a more secure environment for firearms in the home.
  - Use trigger or cable locks on your firearms and/or keep your firearms locked in a secure location accessible only to adults.
  - Keep keys/combinations to the gun storage (cabinet, safe, storage case, etc.) or gun locks, as well as the keys/combinations to ammunition storage, in separate locations and out of the reach of children.
- Check with neighbors, friends, relatives, or adults in any other homes that children may visit to ensure they are following safe storage practices for any firearms in their home.
- In addition to the above, teach children never to touch or play with a firearm and to tell an adult if they find a firearm. Talk to them about the hazards of improper firearm use.

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## **If At-Risk or Prohibited Persons Are in the Home**

If you live with a person who is at risk or legally prohibited from possessing a firearm, you should consider upgrading your storage levels. You must be absolutely certain that no firearm can be accessed by an at-risk or prohibited person. **Simply hiding a firearm is not secure storage and poses a risk.** Firearm owners should consider out-of-home storage when someone in the home is at-risk for suicide or is likely to do harm to themselves or others.

You must be absolutely certain that no firearm can be accessed by an at-risk or prohibited person.

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## **At-Risk Persons**

Risk factors and warning signs for someone who you believe is likely to do harm to themselves or others include:

- Changes in usual patterns of behavior.
- A history of treatment for mental illness.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Self-isolation.
- Violent or reckless behavior.
- A recent major life event, such as divorce, job loss, or financial trouble.
- Expression of suicidal thoughts, feelings, or behavior.
- Expression of feelings of hopelessness or of being a burden to others.

## **Prohibited Persons**

Individuals legally prohibited from possessing a firearm may include any person who:

- Has been convicted of a crime punishable by more than one year in prison.
- Has been convicted of a ***misdemeanor crime of domestic violence***.
- Is a fugitive from justice.
- Is under a qualifying order of protection.
- Is a user of illegal drugs or addicted to such.
- Has been adjudicated as mentally ill and/or has been committed to a mental institution.
- Has been dishonorably discharged from the military.
- Is an alien illegally or unlawfully in the United States or is an alien admitted to the United States under a nonimmigrant visa (some exceptions).
- Has renounced his or her United States citizenship.

## **Secure Storage Options**

- Store unloaded firearms in a locked gun safe or other appropriate security device that is resistant to tampering by an adult.
- Use a locked gun safe, gun cabinet, lock box, or storage case. For added security, portable storage devices can be secured to a wall or the floor, or both, to prevent removal.
- In addition to locked storage, use trigger or cable locks to render the firearms inoperable.
- Firearms can also be disassembled, with parts securely stored in separate locations.
- Temporary off-site storage is an option that should be considered if an individual living with you is in emotional crisis or exhibits significant behavior change.

## **Additional Measures**

- Take steps to deny access to your firearm by people who may be at risk:
  - Make sure all lock keys are accounted for and move them to a secure location unknown to the person at risk.
  - If you yourself are at risk, consider asking a responsible and knowledgeable person to take temporary control of your keys or firearm.
- Educate yourself about domestic violence resources (e.g., the [\*\*National Domestic Violence Hotline\*\*](#)) and how you can help yourself, a friend, or family member who is being abused. While all persons suffering from domestic abuse or caring for someone who may be in an abusive situation should seek help, if there is an incident of domestic abuse and a firearm is present in the home, it is especially important to seek help and inform local law enforcement if and when you can do so safely.
- Consult a licensed physician or mental health expert if you or a household member are suffering from a mental health condition that could affect personal judgment or increase the risk for personal injuries.
- Review the signs of depression and other conditions by visiting a mental health website (e.g., [\*\*American Psychiatric Association\*\*](#) or the [\*\*American Psychological Association\*\*](#)).

## **Storing Firearms in Vehicles**

Thefts of firearms from vehicles are on the rise. The last thing you want is to have your firearm stolen and potentially misused by a criminal. In some states, you could be subject under the law to serious penalties and fines for failure to properly secure a firearm.

- Always check, and then double check, that firearms are unloaded before placing them in a car or truck.
- Never leave firearms in an area of the vehicle where they are accessible to children or pets.
- **Locking the doors on your vehicle does not count as secure firearm storage.**
- The glove compartment or console of your car or truck, even if lockable, should not be considered a secure storage device, as they can be pried open easily.

- If you must temporarily store a gun in your car or truck, take steps to properly store them:
  - Use a secure storage device and keep it out of sight.
  - Try not to be away from the vehicle for an extended period of time.
  - When you arrive home, remove the firearm from the vehicle and return it to your secure home storage area.
- Consider using a lockable gun case or a lock box to securely store a gun in a vehicle. These come in a range of prices and models. Some companies make custom concealed compartments for specific model vehicles.
- If you're concerned about quick access to your firearm, many types of lock boxes allow for fast access to your gun while preventing unauthorized access.
- Secure the lock box to the vehicle, if possible.

### **Other Laws and Regulations**

- Keep in mind that you may also have state and/or local laws on owning and storing firearms.
- Familiarize yourself with and obey all federal, state, and local laws regarding the purchase, possession, carrying, use, storage, and disposition/sale of firearms.

## **FOR FEDERAL FIREARMS LICENSEES**

### **Business Hours Store Layout**

Keep display cases locked unless an employee is displaying a firearm or other item from the case. Avoid displaying unsecured firearms within reach of customers, blind spots where customers can access inventory, or situations in which all your employees either have their backs to the customers or leave customers unattended.

### **After Hours Business Practices**

Consider removing all firearms from display cases and racks and placing them in a gun vault at night or using reinforced display cases with shatterproof glass.

### **Door and Window Locks**

Can any door or window be opened from the outside without keys? Do any former or non-employees have access to the keys? Are keys stored or kept near door for which they are used? If any of your business keys have been lost or stolen, it may be time to replace, re-key, improve locks, and improve procedures for storing and tracking keys.

### **Windows and Doorjamb**

Consider reinforcing or replacing windows/doors or investing in burglar bars or roll-down security gates on windows, doors, and vents. Barriers such as concrete filled posts may deter thieves who would consider using a vehicle to smash into the building to gain access. Consider replacing any exterior hollow core doors with solid metal or sheet metal faced solid wood doors.

### **Unsecured Openings**

Air conditioning units in open windows, holes in exterior walls, chimneys, and other vents should be blocked or narrowed sufficiently to prevent entry.



### **Walls and Ceilings**

Poorly protected adjoining businesses may provide an easy entry point for criminals who choose to go through unreinforced walls. A common precaution is to install floor-to-ceiling steel mesh in the gun vault and exterior walls. Can the roof of your establishment withstand an attempted break in? If circumstances warrant it, consider moving to a more secure building.

### **Exterior Lighting and Surrounding Structures, Shrubs, and Trees**

Are any structures or objects such as dumpsters next to the building that may provide cover or easy access to the roof or windows? If possible, ensure that your business and the surrounding area are well lit at night and that there are no areas where criminals could conceal themselves to monitor your business or enter/leave the building unseen or after dark.

### **Front Windows and Entrance**

Can employees see persons approaching the store or vehicles parked outside? Can a passersby see into the store, or would a robbery go unnoticed?

### **Alarm System**

Many states require an alarm system on specific firearms dealer establishments. If you have an alarm system, is it sufficient for your business and do you test the system on a regular basis? Are all points of entry protected? Do you have, or need, a panic button, tamper alarm, or cellular backup?

### **Protect Your Alarm Codes**

Limit the number of people who know the codes. Change the codes on a regular basis and whenever there is employee turnover. Do not write/leave the codes where they are accessible to unauthorized persons.

### **Video Camera System**

Video cameras on the premises should face in a direction that will capture people's faces and features. Recording systems should be protected from viewing, tampering, and/or theft and be always recording.