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GUN CRAZY

Welcome to Starbucks. Would you like a box of nine mm's with your latte?



By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Here's a happy thought for criminal justice students who want to be cops. Criminals with guns won't be their biggest worry. Considering our country's increasingly permissive approach to carrying firearms it won't be long before every time that citizens come into conflict at least one will be armed.

Concealed carry was a privilege reserved for cops and a handful of other professionals, like couriers, who could demonstrate a pressing need. No longer. Thanks to politicians eager to curry favor with the NRA (or avoid becoming its target) packing heat has become an inalienable right. At present [forty states](#) allow citizens to carry concealed weapons, with a full thirty-six being "shall issue," meaning that all who meet minimum standards must be granted a CCW permit without having to demonstrate any need whatsoever.

[Arizona](#), for example, requires that applicants be residents, 21 or older, not felons or under indictment for a felony, not mentally ill, and complete a gun safety training program. (All but the last are what Federal law requires for buying handguns.) [A typical gun safety course](#) is eight hours long and costs \$79. Students must bring or rent a weapon, a holster and thirty rounds of ammunition. To make things convenient they complete their state concealed-carry application and get fingerprinted right on the spot. Once five years pass [a simple renewal form](#) is on the web.

Not easy enough? Then move to [Vermont or Alaska](#), which don't require a CCW permit. That's right: once you buy that handgun, pull out that shirttail and you're good to go! Last week the Arizona Senate preliminarily [approved a measure](#) that

would make it the third state to allow concealed carry without a permit. Considering the tenor of the times the law's prospects seem bright.

It's a deeply guarded secret, but packing heat is less fun than it seems. First there's the matter of a heavy lump on one's side. Secondly – and this is the big one for poseurs – no one's going to be awed by what they can't see.

So how better to impress than to carry openly? That's a far more sensitive topic than one might imagine. Knowing that the specter of citizens openly packing might be unsettling, [mainstream gun organizations](#) have done little to champion concealed carry's lesser cousin. The gun lobby's fringes, though, haven't been nearly as reticent. Operating under the umbrella of groups such as [Open Carry](#), armed citizens have staged numerous armed “show and pose” visits. Their destinations have included coffee houses, restaurants and at least [one house of worship](#), in Louisville, whose pastor is one of the movement's most, ahem, *spirited* advocates.

Everyone knows that California has some of the toughest gun laws in the nation. There's a ten-day waiting period and buyers are limited to one handgun a month. Localities have broad discretion in granting permits for concealed carry, and few are issued. But as long as handguns are unloaded, carrying openly is generally permitted.

That's more or less the rule in most States. Yet, except when they're on [field trips to Starbucks](#) (Peet's and California Pizza Kitchen have already said “no”) few open-carry advocates openly carry. Wearing guns is a pain. Doing so openly exposes them to ridicule, frightens children and brings unwelcome attention from the police.

All the “defensive” hoopla aside, the chances that someone may actually *need* a gun are infinitesimally small. During his law enforcement career your blogger pulled his sidearm exactly once while off-duty. Driving home after work, he spotted hoodlums grappling with a youth, and when they forced him into the back of a car he stepped in and detained the whole bunch for the cops. Even then it wasn't your writer who needed saving – it was a dope dealer who had apparently failed to pay for his goods in the normal way, and was getting set to pay for them in another.

Pulling a gun is dangerous. It was dark and Feds don't wear uniforms, so when police arrived your writer set down his pistol and raised his arms just like everyone else. Skittish officers have occasionally shot unarmed citizens ([as happened in L.A. last week](#)) and, during confusing plainclothes encounters, each other ([as has repeatedly occurred in New York City](#).) Lacking experience, training and backup amateur law enforcers are at grave risk. In November 2005 Brendan McKown, 38, a CCW permit holder tried to draw down on the [Tacoma Mall](#) shooter. McKown didn't get off a round; hit multiple times he wound up a paraplegic.

Ordinary life is full of problems, and when guns are readily available the consequences can be tragic. For every bonafide instance of defensive use there are countless examples of angry, depressed and mentally ill persons who used a weapon to settle grievances, both real and imagined:

- [A husband facing financial ruin](#) shot and killed his wife, mother-in-law and three sons, ages 19, 12 and 7, then committed suicide.
- [A mentally disturbed young man](#) armed himself with an assault rifle and killed three Philadelphia police officers and wounded a fourth as they responded to his mother's call for assistance.
- In yet another explosion of workplace violence, [a college professor denied tenure](#) gunned down six colleagues, killing three.
- Police suicides are all too frequent. In a recent case [a SWAT sergeant despondent over problems at work](#) killed himself with a shotgun.

In our permissive, gun-friendly atmosphere prevention is well-nigh impossible. And checking the criminal records of concealed-carry applicants is of little help. [Richard Poplawski](#), the twenty-two year old youth who gunned down the Philadelphia officers, had a CCW permit. A [study](#) by the Violence Policy Center revealed that during May 2007-May 2009 concealed-carry permittees feloniously shot and killed 42 private citizens and seven police officers, including the three mentioned above (for a current count, click [here](#).) Official reports confirm that the shooters in the [Virginia Tech](#) and [Northern Illinois University](#) massacres were hopelessly mentally ill, yet both passed checks and purchased their guns from licensed dealers. As for that demented college professor, she got the gun from her husband.

No pun intended, but this is a no-brainer. Encouraging fallible humans to carry guns wherever they go is an invitation to disaster. (If you still don't believe it, click [here](#).)

It really *is* that simple.