

The Weapon Safety: Use it or regret it

- While training with more and more law enforcement agencies, I have found that a potentially dangerous practice has been implemented into their SOP's. This being the ignoring of the weapon manual safety. Many tactical teams are moving from the Last Covered and Concealed (LCC) position to the breach point in a linear formation with a straight finger and the weapon on fire. Further, they conduct a great deal of interior movement and room clearing with the weapon on fire and a straight finger.

- **Why use the safety?**

First, it keep you from shooting yourself, your buddy or an innocent person. We are employed in a fast moving high stress job that requires doing the job right the first time. Early law enforcement training impressed upon me the idea that you cannot “unring a bell.” The same holds true for shooting. Once the hammer falls, you cannot bring that bullet back. It is something that is easy to correct with a good range practice. Next and as important is the discrimination issue. It is my belief that the safety requires you to do one more critical thought out act before taking a human life. It is one final thought process or “buffer” if you will, to ensure you have discriminated thoroughly and effectively and the target you are going to destroy absolutely bad and not an innocent civilian or your buddy coming in from a different angle.

- **What's wrong with this picture?**

Our local television station shows crime stopper commercials featuring local law enforcement personnel in a stack preparing to enter a breach point. Civilians probably don't notice but I have a tendency to watch their posture, weapon attitude, trigger finger and safeties. It scares me to see a stack with weapons at every angle and one or two of the shooters with the weapon off safe and even the finger on the trigger.

During ten years in military special operations, I can remember at several instances in live fire training where operators shot themselves because their weapon were not on safe and their reliance on a straight finger failed them. In one instance, a piece of gear snagged the weapon when it was dropped to its sling while the operator was fighting with a role player. In another instance, a shooter released a breaching shotgun to its sling to employ his primary weapon. Upon reaching back to re-employ the shotgun, his grab connected with the trigger, discharging a lock-buster round into his calf.

- **Why the change?**

Several reasons for this practice come to mind. Not to outright slam H & K, but for years the MP-5, the premier sub-machine gun in the world has had one problem. This being the short safety. Many law enforcement personnel's first exposure to sub guns are with the MP-5. Resulting from the inability to access the safety with the thumb, many people

have found it easier to ignore it's use and keep the weapon on fire with a straight finger. This is human nature, take the path of least resistance. In this case it can be dangerous.

Point personnel routinely leave the safety off and I understand this is a common practice in both the military and law enforcement arenas. This mentality trickles down to the rest of the shooters who would rather bypass the use of the safety to gain speed. Or, as the point person rotates jobs, he takes the habit with him and does not revert back to proper training. One must remember that the point person generally has only enemy to his front. This causes dangerous problems when the routine movement and stack formation is linear and everyone's weapon in the stack is pointed at the man in front of him. This comes at cost.

Early on in special operations, resourceful and talented armors would spot weld a metal tab on the safety to extend it to allow the shooter a natural grip in the deep muzzle down ready position. As the Car-15 and now the M-4 Carbine have taken over as primary weapons for most missions, the MP-5 and MP-5SD are used for only special operations.

- **My results:**

I believe actions speak louder than words so I put together a simple test to challenge the non-believers in the use of the safety. I picked three weapons off the rack that I had not fired before, a flat-top Car-15 w/collapsible stock, a H & K 53 .223 sub gun and a Navy model MP-5 submachine gun. All three weapons were fitted with standard iron sights. I shouldered and dry-fired each weapon about 10 times before going hot. It was a simple drill, one shot at a time from a low ready position at 7 meters, using the safety. The results speak for them selves. Average times from a low ready using the safety in all cases were under 1 second without throwing any rounds out of the "A" zone

- **Solutions:**

Proper range training is the only solution.

- **Conclusion:**

Someone put a lot of thought and time in designing safeties for a reason. Proper range fire and the use of cover will expand your reaction time and decrease the reaction time and visual angles of your opponents while giving you an added sense of confidence. Use the safety and keep your lead going where you intend it to go, not in yourself, your buddy or an innocent civilian.

**PERSONNEL
TO BE
TRAINED**

RUN	WEAPON	TIME	WEAPON	TIME	WEAPON	TIME
1	CAR-15	1.06	H & K 53	0.89	MP-5 N	1.08
2	CAR-15	1.00	H & K 53	0.94	MP-5 N	1.04
3	CAR-15	0.98	H & K 53	0.95	MP-5 N	1.00
4	CAR-15	0.98	H & K 53	0.80	MP-5 N	0.99
5	CAR-15	0.74	H & K 53	0.99	MP-5 N	0.81
6	CAR-15	0.93	H & K 53	0.80	MP-5 N	0.80
7	CAR-15	0.90	H & K 53	0.71	MP-5 N	1.01
8	CAR-15	0.90	H & K 53	0.86	MP-5 N	1.03
9	CAR-15	0.84	H & K 53	0.84	MP-5 N	0.96
10	CAR-15	0.85	H & K 53	0.85	MP-5 N	1.12
AVG:		.92		.86		.98

NOTES:

- 1 Shot drill, Daylight conditions, 7 Yards, all hits in "A" zone
- Each weapon dry-fired 10x prior to drill. Drill shot only once.
- CAR-15 Flattop w/Flip-up rear sight and large aperture, collapsible stock.
- HK-53, .223 w/folding stock. First time fired. "V" rear aperture.
- MP-5 Navy model. New gun, stiff safety. Required to cant gun to manipulate safety.

