

Preparedness and Firearms: Weapon Selection for Emergency Situations



There is a great deal of debate on this subject, and the reality is that no single weapon is the best choice for all emergency situations. Circumstances and conditions vary, as does the use of firearms for self-defense vs. hunting. There is no universal solution. Yet, an understanding of the options available to you is the best place to start. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief summary of the options, and to identify the pros and cons of each firearm category, so that you can begin the process of making an informed choice.

Whatever firearm(s) you select, it's important to understand that a concealed handgun license (CHL) is necessary. You may not want to routinely carry a firearm, but if you want to be able to carry a handgun during an emergency situation, you need to have a license. And, you need to be trained in the proper use of that firearm and practice with it.

Handguns

Handgun Benefits:

- a) Can be concealed, so you won't be making others nervous;
- b) With concealed carry, criminals don't know that you are armed, which gives you the advantage of surprise and the option of restraint;
- c) Semi-auto pistols (top in photo) can be reloaded quickly (revolvers are far slower);
- d) Handguns are relatively light (12 to 42-oz).



Handgun Disadvantages:

- a) Far less accurate than a rifle;
- b) Limited to short-range use (typically 75-feet);
- c) Only modest stopping power;
- d) Revolvers are slow to reload (bottom handgun in the photo), but are easier to maintain and they can be fired from inside a pocket or purse.



Shotguns

Shotgun Benefits:

- a) Intimidating in appearance and sound;
- b) Require less accuracy in shooting;
- c) Devastating knock-down power (when loaded with 00-Buck shotgun shells);
- d) Loaded with 00-Buck shells, each shot consists of as many as 15-pellets (.33 inches in size);
- e) Loaded with the right ammunition, shotgun pellets can pose less risk in penetrating interior walls of a home (in comparison to a 9mm pistol loaded with FMJ ammunition).
- f) Different types of shotgun shells can be carried to meet the needs of self-defense, as well as for hunting of large and small game.

Shotgun Disadvantages:

- a) Not concealable (Mossberg #55340 is smallest);
- b) Even when equipped with an extension-tube magazine, a shotgun only holds 6 or 7 shells;
- c) Very time consuming to reload;
- d) Ammunition is much heavier, reducing the amount that can be easily carried when on foot;
- d) Shotguns designed for sporting purposes are difficult to use indoors as their longer barrel makes them ungainly. When the purpose is self-defense, a "tactical" or "home defense" shotgun should be used (illustrated on left);
- e) Medium distance effective-range (with most loads, typically less than 100', further with slugs).
- f) Heavy in weight, typically 8 pounds.

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Rifles:

Rifle Benefits:

- a) Longer effective range (400+ yards);
- b) Much greater accuracy;
- c) Combat-style or “assault rifles” are fast to reload, and durable;
- d) Ominous appearance can intimidate assailants.

Rifle Disadvantages:

- a) Cannot be easily concealed;
- a) Sporting rifles hold few cartridges, and reloading of sporting rifles is time consuming, making assault rifles the best choice for self-defense.
- c) Heavy to carry. Most assault rifles are 9-12 lbs, so they are heavy if carried for a long distance.
- d) Rifle ammunition is lighter than that of a shotgun, but spare magazines are bulky and the weight of extra ammunition is significant.

Special Purpose Guns:

Special purpose guns come in many forms, some designed for unique and limited self-defense purposes, while others are designed for highly specific hunting or survival use. These *special purpose* guns are far less versatile but may work well for the certain purposes.



The **NAA “Black Widow”** and other micro-guns are incredibly small, but though the .22 Mag is impressive for its size and can be deadly, it has almost no stopping power.

The **Taurus “Judge”** is a large revolver, chambered for both the .45 Colt handgun cartridge and .410 shotgun shell. Unfortunately, the .45 Colt is not available in the newer high-power hollowpoint self-defense



ammunition, and the .410 is a diminutive shotgun shell, but at close range The Judge can be very effective for self-defense, and for snakes and small game at very short range. For most people, this gun is far too heavy for concealed carry, but it is popular with backpackers and for survival kits.



The **Henry AR-7 Survival Rifle** (pictured above) stores the barrel and action inside its plastic stock. Only available in .22 LR, this gun is designed to be carried in a knapsack or survival kit. Though this caliber is best suited for hunting rabbits and squirrels, a well-placed shot can kill a small deer. And, a hundred rounds can be carried in a pocket.

Recommended Calibers

Handguns: 9mm and .38 Special are good for new gun owners as they have less recoil but still deliver reasonable stopping power. (We do not recommend using a caliber smaller than this for self-defense. This said, any gun is better than no gun.) Most self-defense handguns carried by police officers are in one these calibers: .357 Sig, .40 ACP, and .45 ACP.

Shotguns: 12-gauge is the gold standard. If concerned about recoil, use 2-3/4” shells. To increase your firepower but still carry the maximum number of shells in your gun, use 3” Magnum 00-Buck. For hunting small game, use birdshot, for large game use lead slugs. For longer range accuracy (rifle-like) use *sabot* slugs.

Rifles: 5.56 NATO (or .223) or 7.62 NATO (.308) are the standard cartridges for self-defense use. The 5.56 cartridge is lighter in weight, making it possible to carry more ammunition. The 7.62 is heavier and the bullet is not as easily deflected by branches and obstructions. Both are devastating for self-defense use, but the larger caliber is more popular for hunting, and better against vehicles and obstructions.