



## Firearm Safety Certification

Protecting All by Ensuring Knowledgeable Firearm Owners

### Why is firearm safety training important?

Today, a Pennsylvania resident who is 21 years old and can pass a background check may walk into a firearms dealer and walk out 15 minutes later with a gun.

That individual may have no knowledge of the types of guns and their best uses, gun law, gun operation, safe shooting practices, or safe storage.

To quote the National Rifle Association, "At the NRA, firearm education and safety is paramount." We agree.

We recently heard about a Chester County gun owner who had purchased a new firearm. He was not familiar with the gun, so asked a friend to come over to help him learn about it. While the owner was handling the weapon, it accidentally discharged, killing him.

Guns can be fun and guns can be fatal.

While there are many legitimate reasons to want to own a firearm, most gun owners will readily admit that guns can inflict injury or death when used by someone who is not trained.

Therefore, we would like Pennsylvania to require that a gun purchaser pass a one-time firearm safety certification. The certification would involve demonstrating mastery of core content in several key areas. Knowing this safety information can help protect both the gun owner and those around whom the gun owner will handle the gun.

### What is firearm safety certification?

Since 1982, Pennsylvania has required that those who want to get a PA Hunting License **for the first time** to pass a Hunting Safety Training Program. This was put in place with the goal of reducing hunting accidents leading to injury and death. And, it has worked. Over the past 35 years, the injury rate has fallen from 181 hunting injuries and deaths in 1982 to about 23 in 2015. (Statistics are from the PA Game Commission.)

We'd like to implement a similar process with a similar goal -- implementing a firearm safety knowledge requirement to reduce gun injury and death.

Topics to be included in the certification would include:

- Types of firearms and appropriate uses
- Firearm operation: parts, features, ammunition, loading, unloading

- Safety rules: Safe handling and marksmanship
- Child safety awareness and safe storage – Importance and options
- Firearm suicide awareness and prevention
- Domestic violence and firearms
- Safe interaction with law enforcement while carrying a firearm
- Firearm law

## How would it work?

As the Hunter Safety Training has operated successfully for decades (34,000 people completed it last year, 1.5 million since it first started) we propose a similar model.

Those needing to complete the certification could pursue one of these options:

- Take a free “live” course
- Take an on-line program, for, a modest fee (\$20 for hunting training)
- Review the course content on their own (available by PDF file on line)

The certification would be attained by taking a written assessment and achieving an 80% correct rate. Experienced gun owners, who may already have completed some form of training, may find that they know most of the content already. In this case, they may choose to review the material on their own and simply arrange to take the assessment.

Once the assessment is passed, we propose that the certification would be stored with records that make up the PA Instant Background Check System (PICS). The gun purchaser or owner would only need to pass the certification once.

## Who supports this idea?

A 2015 survey revealed about 60% of gun owners have received some training in firearm handling, leaving 40% who have not. In a state with an estimated 88,000 gun owners, that is about *35,000* untrained gun owners.

The survey also found broad agreement that gun owners should have training, with 80 percent of respondents agreed individuals should have training before owning their first firearm.

Analysis conducted by Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Washington School of Public Health and reported in [Injury Prevention](#).

## Who opposes this idea?

Some individuals oppose required certification because they are already knowledgeable about guns. In this case, simply completing the certification assessment would demonstrate their knowledge. Others believe it is an infringement on their Second Amendment Rights. There are also concerns that the training would not be effective. Clearly, hunter safety training met its goal of reducing injury and death. We see no reason this would be any less effective.

**Want to know more? Visit [www.gunsenseus.org](http://www.gunsenseus.org)**

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## Requiring Firearm Safety Certification in PA

We are currently working to build support for firearm safety certification legislation.

If you'd like to encourage your PA elected official to support this initiative, consider the following message:

Dear Senator/Representative NAME:

Safety is a word that is often mentioned concerning firearms. Many owners have a gun for personal protection. Others feel safer when there is not a gun present.

However, 80% of residents agree that if a person is going to own a gun, it's important that they receive training. As the National Rifle Association says on their website, "...safety is paramount."

Therefore, I encourage you to work with GunSenseUs and your fellow legislators to craft and pass a bill that would require a one-time firearm safety certification before gun purchase.

More information about this initiative is available at [gunsenseus.org](http://gunsenseus.org).