



Gun control that works: Safe storage saves lives

BY DEVIN HUGHES, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 05/31/18 03:00 PM EDT
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In his [op-ed](#) on May 24, pro-gun commentator [John Lott](#) contends that Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws will cost lives and that making guns more readily accessible is the answer to gun violence. The opposite is true. Significant evidence shows that CAP laws save lives, and the defensive gun use myth fuels even more gun violence.

Lott's article is riddled with fabrications and falsehoods. For example, he opines that "every place in the world that has banned guns has seen an increase in murder." Yet Japan is the developed nation that has come closest to completely banning firearms, and it has seen its [homicide rate fall](#) more than 75 percent since it adopted its ban [in 1958](#). While correlation is not causation, Lott's correlative claim is unmistakably false. Further, a [2013 study](#) found that among developed nations, more guns per capita was associated with significantly higher rates of firearm deaths.

Lott's most glaring errors, though, surround the core theses that safe storage would cost lives by preventing defensive gun use and that unintentional child shootings are rare, with those that do occur being the result of criminal adults.

Although Lott correctly notes that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show an average of 59 children are unintentionally shot and killed each year, he fails to disclose that researchers have conclusively revealed that this number is a significant underestimate. The

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CDC [readily admits](#) that its estimate is low, so using this number can only be a tactic to minimize these deaths. A 2013 New York Times [investigation](#) found that fewer than half of unintentional shootings of children were recorded as such (often being mislabeled as homicides). And a more recent 2016 Associated Press and USA Today [report](#) found more than 1,000 deaths and injuries from unintentional shootings from Jan. 1, 2014, to June 30, 2016, 90 of whom were 3-year-olds.

The [Children's Firearm Safety Alliance](#) compiles unintentional child shootings that result from negligent storage. In 2016, 120 children ages 0-17 were killed and 175 injured. In 2017, 132 children were killed and 216 injured — all as a result of a child gaining access to an irresponsibly stored firearm. Between 2016 and May 26, 2018, 137 toddlers — between the ages of zero and three — picked up a loaded, unsecured gun and pulled the trigger, resulting in the deaths of 51 children and two adults, and injuring 74 children and nine adults.

Lott opines that “relatively few accidental gunshots take place in law-abiding, normal homes; most accidental gunshots resulting in the deaths of minors are fired by adult males in their mid-to-late 20s who have criminal histories.” This is an outright fabrication.

National Violent Death Reporting System [data](#) compiled by the Harvard Injury Control Research Center reveal that from 2003-2006, two-thirds of fatal unintentional shootings of children under the age of 14 were committed by other children. When self-inflicted unintentional deaths are included, the figure rises to 74 percent.

Lott's outdated, solitary study claiming that CAP laws increase crime relies extensively on dubious econometric practices. More reliable research reveals that not only does firearm prevalence [endanger children](#), but that [strong CAP laws](#) also help mitigate this risk and save lives. These laws help reduce both [unintentional shootings](#) and youth [firearm suicides](#).

Lott's research is also predicated on the [myth](#) that defensive gun use (DGU) is widespread and effective. Neither is the case. While small private surveys indicate there are approximately 2.5 million cases of DGU annually, they suffer from significant false positives and other methodological problems that [render their estimates unusable](#). Instead, the best available empirical data compiled by the Gun Violence Archive reveal there are [fewer than 2,100](#) verified DGUs annually. Further, Harvard [research indicates](#) that in the rare circumstance a firearm is used in self-defense, it is no more effective at preventing injury than doing nothing.

Further, the failure to store firearms securely is making it even easier for criminals to obtain firearms. More than [200,000 firearms](#) are stolen from gun owners each year, and [research shows](#) that more gun ownership increases levels of overall burglary.

It is important to note that this isn't an either-or situation. For gun owners who do feel the need to have firearms readily available for the exceedingly rare circumstance of self-defense, plenty of [gun safes](#) allow for rapid deployment yet keep the firearm secure at all other times. Self-defense is not a legitimate excuse for jeopardizing the safety of loved ones or allowing even more firearms to hit America's streets.

Lott's proposals encourage irresponsible gun ownership that would result in more dead children, gun theft, and violence on America's streets.

Devin Hughes is president of GVPedia, a comprehensive resource

providing public access to research on gun violence. Beth Roth is co-founder of Children's Firearm Safety Alliance and executive director of Safe Tennessee Project; Jen Pauliukonis is executive director of GVPedia and Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence.

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