

Firearm Maintenance for Officers

It's no mystery that you have to maintain your firearm or it won't function properly. None of us are strangers to why we have to clean them to keep them in tip top shape.

However, I've seen a few of these new practices recently, and I was intrigued to learn that they're not actually all that new or unique. They're things that all officers should be keeping up with regularly.

We should all be maintaining our firearms with the utmost care. A firearm that's inadequately maintained will be the cause of most of your gun failures. The accumulation of excess dirt in the barrel or the receiver will clog up the rifling, decreasing your accuracy.

This is super annoying when it matters most, like when you're taking that critical shot in the early morning fog, or when you're acting in self-defense. More importantly, this dirt can interfere with the operation of the firearm. It can lead to dangerous malfunctions, in more ways than one.

It may not seem all that critical if you trip and fall on the run, getting dirt lodged in your barrel. It might plug the end of the barrel, but dirt is softer than a bullet, right?

However, it decreases the bore diameter and increases pressure, which can cause bulging in your barrel. It's nearly impossible to fix. This proves very dangerous when shooting. The same goes for improper storage. Humidity and other damaging conditions will cause rust and corrosion that no amount of oil can fix.

Speaking of oil, you'll want to ensure that you use the right kind of oil when cleaning your firearms. However, military personnel can attest to their success in using motor oil in a pinch, when supplies aren't readily accessible on the front lines.

A dirty gun could result in a failure to fire or a failure to feed, which always has the potential to be fatal in a self-defense situation. You won't be able to shoot as many bullets as you want, and the bullets won't discharge as expected or when expected.

It also reduces bullet speed. Residual fouling over time leads to all kinds of malfunctions. Copper build-up in the barrel of your rifle reduces velocity and the reliability of your firearm. Every time you fire a gun, fouling residue forms in the barrel from bullets that are made of lead with a copper jacketing. Even lead-free ammo has copper content. It's difficult to find copper-free ammunition. You'll always deal with this sort of residue.

Cautionary Tales

Forgoing regular maintenance leads to some pretty dangerous side effects. There are some good examples of this in history.

War is the Worst



During the Vietnam War, U.S. troops were supplied with M16 rifles that were billed as self-cleaning. It's a ridiculous notion to think that any firearm could be self-cleaning, but no cleaning literature was

provided, and flaws in manufacturing meant that troops couldn't release an inevitable jam on their own once it occurred.

As you can imagine, being on the front lines with a jammed rifle wasn't a particularly pleasant experience. Once Colt walked back their claim that the M16 could clean itself and provided troops with cleaning kits, the problem greatly improved.

Today, the M16 is a highly successful and reliable rifle, thanks to plenty of improvements over time, just like any other produce being manufactured.

Don't Get on Your Sergeant's Bad Side

Okay, so maybe no one ended up getting hurt, unless we're talking about wounded pride. However, an officer did mention that during a routine firearm check, his sergeant laid into him pretty thick because his service pistol wasn't as clean as he thought it should have been.

Was anyone injured? No. Did the pistol misfire? Again, no. But his sergeant isn't wrong. The dirtier they get, the more you run the risk of something going wrong. And you're representing your department every time you step out on the street, so every part of you should look like you take pride in your job.

Keeping your pistol clean, whether you end up shooting it or not, could help you avoid a stern talking to in front of the rest of your crew.



Five Practices Officers Need to Implement

In a profession that puts you in harm's way every day, you need to make sure your firearm(s) remains fully functional at every second. You rely on it to keep you safe.

Here are five practices you should be implementing if you haven't already.

1. Know how to treat your firearm for the weather

You're out there every day, rain or shine, and you should be caring for your firearm every day just as you dress for the weather. You wouldn't dress your child in shorts and a T-shirt when it's snowing, so you need to ensure you don't take your gun out in freezing weather unprepared either.

Your gun will lock up or get damaged in cold weather for two reasons. The first happens when you take your gun from the warm indoor air out into the cold. A layer of frost will develop on the outside of your gun, which puts your gun at risk of condensation on the inside. When the condensation on the inside freezes, you have a frozen gun. You can alleviate this problem if you protect your gun under a layer of insulation. It can make it harder to draw your firearm when it's hiding under additional gear, but that's why practicing with this extra gear is essential.

The second reason your gun locks up in the winter happens when you bring it back inside. Just as your glasses fog up briefly when you enter a warm room from being outside in the cold, your gun will do the same.

Moisture will form on your gun and it's important to wait for your gun to warm up before wiping it all away. You may also need to disassemble it to wipe the condensation from the inside.

While the best cold weather maintenance solution is never to leave your gun exposed to the elements, this isn't practical, so you'll also need to be prepared to clean it daily, if not multiple times a day.

One of the most important things you can understand is how lubricants work in cold weather. Even the best lubricants will gum up at frigid temperatures, rendering your firearm inoperable. Make sure you're using something rated for sub-zero temps and don't use as much of it as you'd use in the summer.

2. Make sure your firearm is fully functional

Whether you use a standard issue pistol or your own personal firearm on duty, you need to be performing regular checks to ensure that your firearm still works. If, by the grace of God, you haven't fired your pistol on duty in a long while, you may not know.

Go to the range and shoot some practice rounds, just to make sure everything is in proper working order. You'll be glad you did the next time you have to use it on the job.

You can also perform these function checks after cleaning and reassembling your pistol, and it's a good idea to do this before every shift. Make sure you check the functionality of your trigger, sights, takedown, and magazine release.

You should always know what you're looking for and know how to identify something that fails the check.



3. Be able to identify and replace broken parts yourself

There are certain parts of a firearm prone to wear and tear. This includes chips, cracks, dents, bulging, rust, or anything else that could cause it to malfunction.

You should always know what you're looking for when identifying what these components look like, how they should function, and how they look when they're working and when they're broken.

If you have a department-issued firearm, you can check with your department to see if they have a collection of spare parts or training aids you can use for reference. Otherwise, familiarize yourself with what all of the components should look like.

Also keep a small stash of replacement parts on hand, or check with your department to see if they have what you need. It keeps repair time to a minimum if you already have common spare parts at your disposal.

Your service pistol will be out of commission for a lot less time.

4. Maintain your ammo

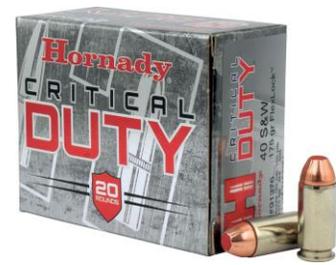
We're all well aware of how to maintain our firearms, but sometimes we're so consumed with doing that, we forget that we also need to be maintaining our ammo. It's likely that you're changing out your ammo every twelve months, at a minimum, especially when you have to shoot your firearm to qualify semi-annually.

However, carrying it daily means the ammo is subject to weather conditions, outdoor activity, the impact of your workload, and sweat from your body. Just like your service pistol, your cartridges are subject to tarnishing.

While it takes a lot longer for the impact of this wear and tear to affect your cartridges than it does your gun, it's still important to monitor them to ensure they look good and will function well if you need them.

Shuffle your cartridges around regularly, even if you don't switch it out more than once a year. This will keep the pressure off of the same rounds at the top and allow them to wear more evenly.

Changing your ammo out once a year will give you the opportunity to use your old rounds for practice. Rather than wasting them, they can still be put to good use, since you should always be aware of how your firearm is functioning, even if you rarely have to use it on duty.



As a general practice, you should check your firearm and your ammo every morning before securing it into your holster. That just makes sense.

5. Be one with your gun

There's no better way to keep up with your gun than to know it better than you know yourself. It should be an extension of you. A part of you that is so familiar, it's closer to you than second nature.

Part of your regular firearm maintenance practices should be to get to know your gun even better than you already do. This relationship means you know how it looks and feels when it's working properly, so you'll be in tune with it when something seems off.

Experiencing a malfunction while practicing or training is a much better scenario than while in the line of duty. It gives you the opportunity to get it fixed before it's too late. The better you know your gun, the more quickly you can identify the problem and find a solution.

Listen to your gun, feel your gun, and know your gun perhaps even better than you know yourself. It's your right hand man, your backup, and your best friend. You can't afford not to know it.

Implementing These Practices

By implementing these practices, you will have a firearm that functions better on a regular basis and you'll know more about it than you ever did before. Any new routine can be hard to put into practice, but dedicate yourself to putting these on your calendar and soon they'll become a habit.

It just takes five or ten extra minutes every day to learn something new about your firearm and an extra afternoon once a month to get some extra practice in. It's worth your life, and your life certainly depends on it.

