

Research

Professor David Kopel on Defensive Gun Uses

There is usually some discussion concerning defensive gun uses by armed defenders that stop potential spree killings. We sometimes hear that defenders have not stopped a single mass shooting. This is not the case.

Since most spree killings occur in “gun free” zones, more properly named, “criminal-safe free fire zones,” it is remarkable that defenders have been able to react at all in time to defend innocent would-be victims; however, David Kopel, Second Amendment expert, author, law professor, and Director of Research at the Independence Institute, has identified a number of cases where armed citizens have stopped spree killings. To quote Professor Kopel at length:

“Over the last 25 years, there have been at least 10 cases in which armed persons have stopped incipient mass murder: a Shoney’s restaurant in Alabama (1991); Pearl High School in Mississippi (1997); a middle school dance in Edinboro, Pennsylvania (1998); Appalachian School of Law in Virginia (2002); Trolley Square Mall in Salt Lake City (2007); New Life Church in Colorado (2007); Players Bar and Grill in Nevada (2008); Sullivan Central High School in Tennessee (2010); Clackamas Mall in Oregon (2012; three days before Newtown); and Sister Marie Lenahan Wellness Center in Darby, Pennsylvania (2014).

Gun prohibitionists insist that armed teachers, or even armed school guards, won’t make a difference, but in the real world, they have- even at the Columbine shooting, where the armed school resource officer (a sheriff’s deputy, in that case) was in the parking lot when the first shots were fired. The officer fired two long-distance shots and drove the killers off the school patio, saving the lives of some of the wounded students there...

The contrasts are striking and tragic. The attempted massacre at New Life Church in Colorado Springs was stopped by a private citizen with a gun; the massacre at South Carolina’s Emanuel AME wasn’t. The mass murder at Pearl High School was stopped by a private citizen (the vice principal) with a gun; the mass murder at Newtown’s elementary school wasn’t stopped until the police arrived. The shootings at Appalachian Law School ended when private citizens (armed students) subdued the gunman; the shootings at Virginia Tech continued until the police arrived. More licensed-carry laws that reduce the number of *pretend* gun-free zones are an effective way to save lives.”

Some arguments put forth by proponents of “criminal-safe free fire zones” rest on the premise that innocents will be caught in a “crossfire” between the defenders and the criminal or terrorist involved in a spree killing. The most deadly position for an innocent adult or child is to be at the mercy of a killer without effective opposition by defenders, who has the time to select his or her victims and slay them without regard for his or her own safety. Even individuals protected by upper body armor are vulnerable to wounds to the pelvic region and legs, or to well-directed head shots. Even rounds deflected by body armor may confuse and distract the criminal or terrorist and allow potential victims to escape.

Kopel, David, *Costs and Consequences of Gun Control*, Cato Institute Policy Analysis # 784, 12-01-2015.

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