



More Than a Permit:

The Armed Citizen-Guardian™ Standard

By

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The *Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC*, has a two-part mission: to provide legally qualified citizens with superior training that places them on the path to becoming Armed Citizen-Guardians™; and to serve as a significant thought leader for firearms education in Maryland and across the nation that we seek to accomplish by being firearms educators, not merely firearms trainers.

This essay supports the second part of that mission. It explains the Armed Citizen-Guardian™ standard and, more importantly, shows how its principles are translated into practical behavior rather than left as abstract theory.

The essay begins by defining the term “standard” in the context of the Armed Citizen-Guardian™. Next, an operational definition of the term Armed Citizen-Guardian™ is

provided. Finally, the essay goes deeper, showing how the standard is translated from principle into practice.

Standard Defined

A standard is defined as a level of conduct, judgment, preparation, competence, and responsibility that a person should continually strive to meet. It does not mean a government regulation, a shooting qualification, or a one-time checklist. It refers to a higher benchmark for responsible armed citizenship.

The Armed Citizen-Guardian™ standard requires a high level of awareness, judgment, restraint, skill, legal understanding, and personal responsibility from any citizen who chooses to carry a firearm for the protection of innocent life.

Operational Definition: Armed Citizen-Guardian™

An **Armed Citizen-Guardian™** is a legally qualified citizen who assumes personal responsibility for protecting innocent life and deliberately develops the awareness, judgment, restraint, knowledge, and practical capability required to prevent violence when possible, respond lawfully and effectively when necessary, and stop using force the moment the threat ends.

The Armed Citizen-Guardian™ is not defined by firearm ownership, a carry permit, or shooting ability alone. The person is defined by conduct. An Armed Citizen-Guardian™:

- Recognizes danger early and avoids unnecessary confrontation;
- Uses distance, movement, communication, de-escalation, and disengagement whenever they offer a safe and reasonable solution;
- Understands the legal and moral limits of defensive force;
- Carries, handles, stores, and uses firearms safely and responsibly;
- Develops defensive skills that can be applied under pressure;
- Controls fear, anger, pride, and ego rather than allowing emotion to drive action;

- Acts only when an imminent threat makes defensive force justifiably necessary;
- Uses no more force than is reasonably required to stop that threat;
- Continually reassesses the situation and immediately stops using force when the threat ends;
- Protects family members and innocent people without recklessly pursuing danger;
- Prepares to provide emergency medical care when needed; and
- Accepts responsibility for the legal, medical, emotional, and practical aftermath of a defensive incident.

In operational terms, an Armed Citizen-Guardian™ is a responsibly armed citizen who has developed the judgment to avoid violence, the discipline to remain within the law, the capability to act when innocent life is in immediate danger, and the restraint to stop when the danger has ended.

Finally, a permit authorizes carry. It does not establish competence, judgment, or readiness. Becoming an Armed Citizen-Guardian™ is a continuing process of education, training, practice, reflection, and responsible conduct.

The firearm is a tool. The guardian is the person who possesses the character, judgment, and capability to use it responsibly.

A Deeper Look at the Armed Citizen-Guardian™ Standard

A Permit Is Not Preparation

A firearm gives you a way to defend yourself. A permit allows you to carry it legally. That is all either one does. The permit does not teach you when to leave an argument alone. It does not help you control your temper or recognize when a threat has ended. It does not make you safe with a handgun, and it certainly does not make you wise. Those things take work.

At *Spartan Firearms Training Group*, we use the term Armed Citizen-Guardian™ because it more accurately describes the responsibility than “permit holder” or “gun owner.” The firearm matters, but the person carrying it matters more.

An armed citizen-guardian protects life. He does not carry a handgun to win arguments, demand respect, or settle a score. She does not seek opportunities to prove she is prepared. If trouble can be avoided, he avoids it. If she can leave safely, she leaves. That may sound obvious. In practice, pride gets in the way.

Carrying Changes the Stakes

Suppose another driver cuts you off, then pulls alongside your vehicle and starts shouting. You are angry. Perhaps he nearly caused a collision. Perhaps he is clearly at fault. None of that requires you to answer him.

Keep the doors locked. Do not lower the window. Leave enough space between your vehicle and the one ahead of you so you can move if necessary. If the driver follows you, call 911 and drive toward a police station or a busy public place. Do not get out of the car to explain who was right.

When you carry a firearm, even an ordinary argument can end badly. That does not mean you must tolerate an attack. It means you should be less willing to take part in pointless confrontations. The gun on your belt should quiet your ego, not feed it.

Awareness Without Fear

Avoidance usually begins before anyone makes a threat. It begins with noticing what is happening around you. This is where people sometimes misunderstand situational awareness. They picture someone constantly scanning the room, studying every stranger, and expecting an attack. That is neither healthy nor useful.

Awareness is much simpler. Look up from your phone while walking through a parking lot. Notice the person who changes direction when you do. Pay attention when an argument starts near your family. When you enter an unfamiliar building, take a moment to find the exits. You are not looking for a fight. You are looking for the chance to leave before there is one. As Bart, one of our Green Beret veteran friends, once profoundly said: “More lives are saved practicing situational awareness than by using a gun.”

The earlier you notice a problem, the less skill you may need to solve it. You can cross the street. Return to the store. Move to another table. Get into your car and lock the door. Take your family home.

Once someone is close enough to strike you, grab you, or reach for his weapon, the choices become fewer. Decisions have to be made faster. Mistakes become harder to correct. Your firearm cannot give back time that was wasted trying to decide what to do when facing an immediate threat you did not see coming.

The Situation Can Change

You have to pay attention even after a confrontation begins. Defensive situations do not remain fixed. A person may attack, stop, retreat, surrender, drop a weapon, or turn toward someone else. What was justified a moment ago may no longer be justified now.

Consider a man attacking another person with a knife. An armed citizen draws a handgun and orders him to stop. The attacker sees the gun, drops the knife, and steps away. The armed citizen cannot continue responding to the attack as it existed two seconds earlier. He has to deal with what is happening now. The attacker may still be dangerous, but the immediate need to shoot may have ended. One shot does not automatically justify the next one. The armed citizen-guardian has to keep looking, keep thinking, and stop using force when the threat stops. That is not easy.

Restraint Is Not Hesitation

Fear can make a harmless movement look dangerous. Anger can keep a person acting after the danger is over. Pride can turn a chance to leave into a contest neither person is willing to abandon.

Restraint is often mistaken for hesitation. They are not the same. Hesitation is failing to act when action is necessary. Restraint is refusing to go farther than the situation requires. It is the control needed to act decisively when life is in danger and stop when it is not. No classroom lecture can guarantee that kind of control. Training can help, but only if it requires students to make decisions rather than merely fire rounds.

Shooting Skill Still Matters

Shooting skill still matters. A person who carries a handgun should know how to handle it safely, load and unload it, clear common malfunctions, maintain muzzle discipline throughout the draw stroke so the handgun does not cover the shooter or anyone nearby, and fire with reasonable accuracy. She should be able to do those things without needing step-by-step coaching.

She must also understand that every bullet goes somewhere. A missed shot does not simply count as a low score. It may pass through drywall, glass, a car door, or another person. It may travel into an apartment, across a parking lot, or through a room where a family member is hiding. That is one reason paper targets can teach only part of the lesson. They are useful for learning grip, sight alignment, trigger control, recoil management, and follow-up shots. But the target does not suddenly surrender. It does not move behind a child. It does not turn out to be a family member coming unexpectedly into the house in the darkest hours of the early morning.

Real places contain people who are frightened, confused, and moving. These places contain poor lighting, narrow hallways, furniture, vehicles, pets, walls, and bystanders who may not understand what is happening. Accuracy is necessary. So is knowing when not to take a shot.

Training for Human Limitations

Stress makes all of this harder. A person who shoots well during an ordinary range session may struggle when someone is screaming or moving toward him. His hands may shake. His attention may lock onto one detail. He may hear some sounds clearly and miss others entirely. A simple task may suddenly feel unfamiliar. Training should account for that rather than pretend it will not happen.

Complicated techniques often look impressive when an instructor demonstrates them slowly. They may fall apart when a student is frightened, off balance, or trying to protect someone else. A better approach is usually built on a few sound actions practiced until they can be performed safely without much thought.

Dry practice is useful for developing a consistent grip, draw stroke, presentation, and trigger press. Live fire shows whether those actions continue to work when the handgun recoils. Both require care. Poor practice can make a bad habit more permanent. Neither dry practice nor live fire answers every question.

Decision-Making Must Be Practiced

At some point, the armed citizen-guardian has to decide whether the person in front of her is actually a threat. She has to recognize when a weapon matters, when it does not, when she should move, when she should speak, and when leaving is safer than drawing.

An effective training scenario may reveal that the student saw the weapon but missed the open exit beside her. It may indicate that she moved toward an argument rather than taking her family away. She may discover that she drew too early, spoke too much, or became so

focused on one person that she failed to see another. That is useful information. Better to find the mistake during training than during an emergency.

Communication Under Pressure

Communication is often neglected because people assume they will know what to say. Under stress, many do not. A clear “Stay back” may stop someone from moving closer (I have used that command twice, and it worked). “Take the children and go out the rear door” gives a family member a specific task. During a 911 call, the operator needs the location, the nature of the emergency, descriptions of the people involved, and whether anyone is injured. You do not and should not give a speech about what happened.

Communication becomes even more important when police arrive. Officers may have been told only that someone has a gun. They may not know who called or who started the confrontation. They may give loud commands, point weapons, or place everyone in handcuffs until they understand the scene. The armed citizen-guardian should expect that possibility. Keep your hands visible. Follow commands. Do not make sudden movements toward the firearm, even if you are trying to show the officer where it is.

The Law Examines the Whole Encounter

The law will examine more than whether you were afraid. Fear alone does not make force lawful!

Investigators will want to know who began the confrontation, whether the danger was immediate, whether the response was reasonable, whether safe avoidance was possible, and whether the amount of force matched the threat. They will look at what happened before the weapon appeared and what happened after the threat ended. This is why knowing the gun and self-defense laws in your jurisdiction is an important part of your learning as an armed citizen-guardian.

They may have more than your account. There may be video from a doorbell camera, a store camera, a vehicle, or a phone. Witnesses may have seen only part of the event, but their statements will still matter. The 911 call will be recorded. So may the words spoken at the scene.

Words and Habits Matter

Online behavior can matter too. People sometimes post jokes about shooting burglars or make comments about what they would do to anyone who threatened them. We occasionally see this kind of false bravado in social media posts. Although you may see it as harmless talk, someone reviewing a shooting afterward may see it differently. And you should remember that your social media posts will be scoured to identify whether or not you have violent tendencies.

There is another concern. The way a person talks about violence can also affect how he begins to think about it. If every disagreement becomes a story about drawing a gun from concealment and shooting an intruder on sight, the gun slowly becomes the answer to problems it was never meant to solve.

Violence is not entertainment. It is fast, confusing, and usually leaves damage that extends well beyond the people directly involved.

Firearm Security at Home

Responsibility at home begins with controlling access to the firearm. A handgun that is not being carried should not be left where a child, visitor, burglar, or unauthorized family member can reach it.

The appropriate storage method will vary from one household to another. A person who lives alone may face different security concerns than a family with young children in the home. A quick-access safe can provide both secure storage and reasonably rapid access, but

only if the owner is thoroughly familiar with its operation and checks it regularly to ensure it remains reliable.

Safe storage of firearms is important, but it is not enough. Your family needs a plan.

A Family Plan for Emergencies

During a break-in, family members should know where to go, who will call 911, and which room offers the best protection. Children need instructions they can remember while frightened. “Go to the bedroom, lock the door, and stay away from the doorway” is more useful than a complicated plan no one has practiced. We occasionally teach a home defense course that covers this.

In many homes, the safer choice is to remain behind a locked door, call the police, and cover the entrance from a protected strong-point position. Moving through the house in search of an intruder gives up that advantage. Not only that, if you start searching your home, you become the “hunter,” not the victim. Prosecutors will ask, “Why didn’t you just stay in a strong-point location to defend yourself and your family? Why did you go looking for confrontation?”

Homes are also very difficult places to search on your own. Doorways hide much of the room beyond them. Hallways restrict movement. Darkness makes identification harder. We have trained with Green Beret, Navy SEAL, and Army Ranger veterans. They all told us the same thing: don’t search your house looking for an intruder unless you absolutely have to do that. Why? Because even special operations warriors die clearing rooms.

Sometimes movement is necessary. A parent may need to reach a child in another room. That is a decision to protect a person in immediate danger. It is not the same as searching for someone who may be stealing property. (Remember two things: 1) in Maryland, and other states, you cannot protect property using deadly force; and 2) property can be replaced.)

Medical Skill Is Part of Preparation

Emergency casualty care training is a critical part of the armed citizen-guardian's training because the need to protect life does not end when the danger stops. A shooting may cause severe bleeding, but so can a vehicle collision, workshop accident, broken window, or serious fall. Knowing how to stop profuse bleeding is a life-saving skill.

Emergency help may be several minutes away. During that time, direct pressure, wound packing, or a properly applied tourniquet may keep an injured person alive. Medical equipment is helpful only when the person carrying it knows how to use it. A tourniquet sealed in its package is not a skill. Students should receive hands-on instruction and practice with training equipment.

We teach an Emergency Casualty Care Course, E-Triple C, which we consider one of the most important courses we offer because the skills it teaches can save lives in far more situations than a firearm-related injury. Severe bleeding can result from a gunshot wound, a knife attack, a motor vehicle crash, or even an everyday household accident, such as falling through a plate-glass shower door.

Adapt to the Person You Are Now

The armed citizen-guardian must also be honest about her own abilities. Strength changes. Vision changes. Injuries affect balance, movement, grip, and endurance. A technique that worked at forty may not work at seventy. A person recovering from back surgery may not be able to kneel, turn quickly, or remain in one position for long (I learned this lesson from personal experience).

Ignoring a limitation does not make it disappear. Someone with reduced hand strength may need a handgun that is easier to operate. A person with limited mobility may need to reconsider where he carries the firearm, how he accesses it while seated, and which location in the home offers the best defensive position.

We have trained students with a wide range of physical limitations, medical needs, and emotional concerns. Some have needed to use a walker on the live-fire range. Others have had to monitor and manage diabetes throughout the training day.

One student had previously suffered a knife wound at the bend of his elbow that severed a tendon and left his hand permanently contracted into a claw-like position. Another had lost a hand in a high-powered fireworks accident and now uses a prosthetic hand.

We have also worked with students who were deeply frightened by the thought of handling a firearm. Some experienced intense anxiety and began to cry when the first shots were fired. In another class, two students, each weighing more than 300 pounds, had considerable difficulty performing movement drills.

Each of these students presented different challenges, requiring patience, careful assessment, and reasonable adjustments to help them train safely and successfully. The point is not to lower the standard. Our advice to each one: find a safe and workable way to deal with it.

Capability Requires Maintenance

Skills fade. Equipment wears. Ammunition changes. Laws are amended. A person can remain licensed even as he becomes less capable than he was when the permit was issued. As the firearms training maxim says, firearms skills are perishable.

That is why honest self-assessment matters. What can you do reliably today? Where are you struggling? Which parts of your plan depend on an ability you no longer have? What needs practice, and what needs to be changed?

The Real Work

Carrying a firearm places responsibility for making decisions that may seem unrelated to shooting. It affects how you handle an insult, where you choose to park, whether you notice a disturbance, how you secure the gun at home, and whether you leave before a situation

becomes dangerous. Sometimes the responsible choice is to draw and fire. More often, it is to notice sooner, leave earlier, lock the door, call 911, move your family to a strong-point location, or keep the gun holstered. Knowing the difference is the real work. **This is the way of the Armed Citizen-Guardian™.**

About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA). He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to the preservation and advancement of gun owners' rights in Maryland. He is the co-founder and vice president of the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be contacted at 443-472-0216 or at frank@spartanftg.com.

Individuals who want to schedule a private, 1-on-1 firearms training session should contact Frank.

About the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC (www.spartanftg.com) is a Maryland-based Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015. At the end of March, 2026, we entered into our 12th year of business, and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training

- Long-distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is found at [Firearms Training Maryland | Events Calendar](#). Scheduling or training questions should be directed to Paul Duffy. He can be contacted at 410-707-2992 or at Paul@spartanftg.com.

YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING, NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS, WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT.

TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!