



Crime and Courts: Cato report describes cases of self-defense with guns

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Posted: Wednesday, February 8, 2012 3:00 pm

The Cato Institute is singing the praises of gun ownership. The conservative think tank has released a report, "[Tough Targets: When Criminals Face Armed Resistance from Citizens](#)," that makes the case that law-abiding, gun-toting citizens routinely thwart criminal acts.

"The vast majority of gun owners are ethical and competent," say the authors. "That means tens of thousands of crimes are prevented each year by ordinary citizens with guns."

Cato's researchers reviewed eight years of news accounts of self-defense shootings, amounting to nearly 5,000 stories. The paper includes descriptions of several of these incidents, breaking them down into categories such as concealed carry permit holders, animal attacks, even pizza delivery drivers. The report, however, doesn't attempt to quantify the number of self-defense gun uses. Rather, it "examines instances of gun use in self-defense in order to provide a better understanding of their character."

The report references research done by others in the 1990s that estimates anywhere between 108,000 and 2.45 million defensive gun uses a year. The report brushes aside accidental shootings, saying "There were 535 accidental firearms deaths in 2006 -- every one unfortunate, but in a nation of almost 300 million people, that is not a particularly startling rate.

But while the authors claim that the vast majority of defensive gun uses are never reported, other research -- [this GAO study](#) for example, which suggests that there are more than 100 accidental injuries for each accidental death -- suggests that the same is true for accidental shootings. So people on both sides of the gun issue have ample opportunity to cherry-pick data.

I'll say this: The timing of the Cato report is spot on. It comes only days after Wisconsin's [first instance](#) of a crime averted by a concealed carry permit holder, during which a customer fired at an armed robber at a Milwaukee Aldi store.