

SHOULD JEWELLERS BE ARMED???

Since I started my career in Loss Prevention and specifically in the jewellery industry, I have for over 25 years heard arguments that jewelers should be armed with firearms. I have always tried to respect the opinions of others even if I do not agree with them, and I would hope that others would feel the same about mine. I have for many years believed that those individuals that have this ill advised mind set are not impressed by the true facts and statistics from reliable sources.

Let me make it clear that I am not against the right of a citizen to legally own firearms and to justifiably use such weapons in self defense. I have two firearms legally registered to myself.

However, if I owned a retail jewellery store I would not have one strapped to my hip or hidden under the counter. The reason I say this is because I have studied, and been involved in investigations of thousands of industry robbery events over the last 25 years in the Loss Prevention field and in my earlier 20yrs in law enforcement, the last 5 of those years in the Toronto Police Holdup Squad. There is irrefutable documented evidence that very seldom is a jeweller physically injured during a robbery if they offer no resistance.

Statistics in the US and on a much more limited scale in Canada have indicated that since 1995 over 100 jewellers have been murdered during robbery events. The violence was preceded by some level of resistance on the part of the victim. As an example, in Richmond Hill, Ontario a Jeweller entered his store early one morning and after shutting off the alarm three men dropped down from the ceiling with the intent of robbing the victim. The victim began fighting with the men and was killed. The important message from these deadly statistics is very clear and requires no further explanation.

The idea that armed bandits may enter your home and business bent on causing you or your loved ones or employees, bodily harm", is flawed, and is designed to inflame and frighten. Based on my experience armed bandits who are bent on causing bodily harm may be something other than jewellery criminals and stealing jewellery may be secondary on their agenda.

Of course there are exceptions to every rule, but this hypothetical statement regarding the intentions of armed bandits is not based on realities and historical records of crime in the jewellery industry in both Canada and the United States. The truth of the matter is that jewellery criminals, based on my Police experience as well as my Loss Prevention experience in the jewellery industry are not bent on causing their victims harm. The rule and not the exception is that they are bent on stealing jewellery to turn into cash and to escape without

adding to the severity of the crime by assaulting someone. In some cases they are certainly willing to use deadly force but generally only when provoked or to prevent their apprehension.

With that said I have found those who are convinced the use of firearms as the best way to protect themselves, their employees, their customers and their family, unfortunately, will not be swayed by the facts. When informed that jewellers are arrested and charged with using a firearm improperly, illegally or for endangering the lives of innocent people by shooting at a petty thief while running through a crowded mall, the response is usually a tirade against the police and prosecutors, as was the situation in Port Alberni a few years ago. I can only assume what would have happened if innocent adults or even children had been hit by stray bullets from the jeweller's discharge of his firearm at the bandits.

My position is clear and requires no defense. I believe people of this mind set will become very antagonistic. I have learned to offer my thoughts based on the facts, and not to engage the antagonists other than to wish them good luck.

I have found that most of the people that support firearms for protection have very little training in regards to firearms or knowledge regarding legal use of deadly force. The most common answer to questions regarding their experiences. "I was in the army for...years and I have fired perfect scores at the local firing range". Having spent time in the US Marines and serving 3 terms in Vietnam in the sixties I know the value of shooting at targets compared to shooting at someone who will shoot back is zero.

We can fight back against armed robbers by supporting the Criminal Code and Law Enforcement in Canada.