

BENEFITS OF USING SUPPRESSORS FOR HUNTING AND SHOOTING SPORTS

INTRODUCTION

Firearm sound suppressors, or “silencers” as they are sometimes called, are devices which help reduce the noise of gunfire to hearing safe levels when attached to the end of a firearm’s barrel. Suppressors are generally nothing more than containment systems with a series of baffles which help contain and re-direct the expanding gasses that exit the end of the firearm’s barrel when it is discharged. They are very similar to car mufflers which were, in fact, developed in parallel by the same inventor in the early 1900s.ⁱ Suppressors help to lessen the sound of the muzzle-blast only. Using suppressors can make shooting firearms safer, more enjoyable and help make shooting ranges more neighborly.

SAFETY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Firearm suppressors have many practical benefits for civilians. One of the “ten commandments” of firearm safety is for shooters to wear eye and ear protection.ⁱⁱ A suppressor solves the need for ear protection for shooters who would normally be affected by the noise of the gun shot. This makes for more effective firearms training. Without ear plugs, all shooters will be able to communicate without shouting at each other and hear and comply with instructions and range safety commands easier.

One of the most common problems for shooters is poor accuracy due to the shooter’s anticipation of the gun’s loud report and recoil. This anticipation causes shooters to “flinch” before the gun even goes off, to experience slight tremors in the hand from nervousness, and even to close their



eyes or blink right before they pull the trigger. All of these issues cause the gun to move from the intended target area. The use of suppressors will dramatically increase accuracy because of the reduced muzzle report, reduced recoil, and decreased muzzle flip.

HEARING LOSS

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), any exposure over 140db causes immediate and irreparable hearing loss.ⁱⁱⁱ Men and women in law enforcement and the military are all too familiar with the threats posed by noise-induced hearing loss. In fiscal year 2023, tinnitus and hearing loss were the top disabilities claimed by veterans.^{iv}

Unsuppressed handguns and rifles generally create a muzzle report well above the 140 db threshold.

While the dangers of exposure to the sound of gunfire is indisputable, a suppressor can protect against hearing loss. In one study, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that, “The only potentially effective

noise control method to reduce students’ or instructors’ noise exposure from gunfire is through the use of noise suppressors that can be attached to the end of the gun barrel.”^v Adding to the importance of suppressors, the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck surgery “endorsed the use of firearm suppressor as an effective method of reducing the risk of hearing loss, especially when used in conjunction with conventional hearing protective measures”.^{vi}

HELPING MAKE RANGES BETTER NEIGHBORS

Suppressors in America became highly regulated in 1934 with the passing of the National Firearms Act of 1934 (NFA).^{vii} Prior to this, suppressors were available by catalog mail order directly to a customer’s home. Now, in order to own one you must complete an extensive application, pay an ownership transfer tax and undergo a background check. In England

and many other European countries, generally known for having much more restrictive firearms laws, they do not have restrictions on suppressor ownership and, in fact, actually encourage their use.^{viii} They recognize that suppressors are a great tool to help reduce noise pollution. Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the modern firearm suppressor, would likely agree. He invented the suppressor in 1902 to solve the noise pollution complaints of his neighbors. In Maxim's book, *Experiences with the Maxim Silencer*, he explains that he developed the suppressor to, "meet my personal desire to enjoy target practice without creating a disturbance. I have always loved to shoot, but I never thoroughly enjoyed it when I knew the noise was annoying other people." Sound familiar? Over 100 years after his invention, noise pollution is still a problem. Shooting ranges throughout America are increasingly being sued by neighbors or are being shut down due to noise complaints.

HUNTING

Suppressors are also useful for hunting where it is not practical to wear ear plugs all day in anticipation of shooting. Suppressors are currently legal to use and possess in 42 states and 40 states have approved suppressor use for hunting. A recent study by NSSF highlighted the growing popularity

of suppressor in hunting. It was found that hunting was the second most primary reason for purchasing a silencer, surpassed only by recreational shooting^{ix}. There are several benefits to hunting with suppressed firearms. Because listening to your surroundings is an important strategy in tracking prey, hunters very rarely if ever use hearing protection. Again, unsuppressed gunfire is loud enough to cause permanent hearing loss. Using a silencer will suppress the gunfire enough to protect your hearing without the use of hearing protection, thus allowing you to effectively track your prey and quickly take your shot without having to first apply hearing protection.

If you have a silencer attached to your muzzle while hunting, there are benefits other than hearing protection. Because the silencer reduces recoil and muzzle rise, you are able to get into position for a follow-up shot more quickly because there is a lot less movement and your cross hairs stay closer to the target. Sometimes, it is possible to get your cross hairs back on target before the first bullet strikes. This quick strategy also allows you to "call" your hits or misses and make quick corrections in the field.

LAWFUL USE OF SUPPRESSORS DOES NOT INCREASE CRIME

There are concerns by some that suppressors will be used in crimes.

These concerns are unfounded, however, as suppressors, which have been legal to own by law-abiding citizens since their inception in 1902, are very rarely used in crimes. In a study looking at the criminal use of suppressors^x in California and nationwide between 1995 and 2005, the researcher found 153 federal criminal cases involving suppressors, only 15 of which involved the actual use of the suppressor in the commission of a crime. Less than 0.1% of homicides in federal court, an infinitesimally low 0.00006% of felonies in California and a mere 0.1% of armed robberies involve a suppressor. Suppressed firearms are clearly not the choice for criminals. This is likely due to the fact that they do not silence firearms like in the movies, they are ineffective on revolvers, they prevent the proper function of most semi-automatic handguns without the addition of a special piston system and they make firearms longer and heavier, which makes them more difficult to conceal.

Suppressor use, especially in Europe, has a long history with many benefits. The fears and concerns about suppressor ownership and use are unfounded and have not been seen in the over 100-year history of suppressors. NSSF supports efforts to remove restrictions on the use of suppressors for hunting and to permit their use at shooting ranges.

ⁱ Maxim, Hiram Percy. Firearm Silencer. U.S. Patent 1482805 A filed Feb 21, 1921 and issued Feb 5, 1924.

ⁱⁱ See: Firearms Safety - 10 Rules of Safe Gun Handling, <http://www.nssf.org/safety/basics/>

ⁱⁱⁱ NIOSH. 1998. Criteria for a Recommended Standard. Occupational Noise Exposure: Revised Criteria 1998. DHHS (NIOSH) Pub. No. 98-126. Cincinnati, OH: NIOSH.

^{iv} <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2023-compensation.pdf>

^v Chen, Lilia and Scott E. Brueck, "Noise and Lead Exposures at an Outdoor Firing Range - California," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 2011. p. 5 <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2011-0069-3140.pdf>

^{vi} <https://www.entnet.org/resource/suppressors-for-hearing-preservation/>

^{vii} <https://www.atf.gov/file/58141/download>

^{viii} Halbrook, Stephen, "Firearm Sound Moderators: Issues of Criminalization and the Second Amendment," published in the *Cumberland Law Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2015-2016. http://stephenhalbrook.com/law_review_articles/firearm_sound_mod.pdf

^{ix} NSSF Suppressor Consumer Study 2025

^x Criminal Use of Firearm Silencers, Paul A. Clark, *Western Criminology Review* 8(2), 44-57 (2007)