

body. The muzzle may be pointing in a safe direction, thus preventing the bullet from striking them if the gun goes off, but they forget about the burning gases emitted with the projectile. And those gases don't leave the barrel in a straight line like the bullet does.

The gases travel down the barrel at approximately 900 feet per second. Once they exit it, they fan out at about 60 degrees to form a cone that can be lethal for several inches. Consequently, if you're holding the muzzle near your chest, abdomen or biceps, the gases can blow away a chunk of your body. How effective will your gun disarm be if that happens?

To study this effect, I went to a shooting range, placed the muzzle of a handgun close to a piece of cardboard and pulled the trigger. The tremendous force of the shot tore away a large section of the cardboard. I repeated the experiment at night to see just how far the burning gases spread out from the end of the barrel. It was enlightening.

If you execute a gun disarm on a real assailant and fail to consider the expulsion of gas, you'll probably panic when part of your body is ripped away. Then you'll most likely lose your focus and ultimately fail to take the weapon away from the attacker. Game over.

Things aren't as bleak as they would seem, however, because now that you've been forewarned, you can adjust your techniques to allow for more space around the muzzle so that the expanding gases won't injure you.

The preferred way to disarm a gunman is to keep it simple:

1. Move your body off the line of fire.
2. Grab the gun with both hands and don't let go.
3. Keep the muzzle away from all parts of your body.
4. Shove the weapon into the gunman's face.
5. Rip the weapon from his hands.
6. If he doesn't release it immediately, strike him until he does.
7. Move at least 21 feet away and fire

the weapon at him if he tries to attack.

8. If it fails to discharge, use it as an impact weapon.

To practice these skills, you can use an Airsoft gun, which shoots 6mm plastic pellets at the relatively low velocity of 230 feet per second. (Note that an Airsoft gun is not the same as a BB gun or a pellet gun, both of which are too dangerous to use in training. Even with an Airsoft gun, eye protection must be worn.) If you're too slow in the execution of the disarm or if you make it too complicated, you might feel the sting of the plastic pellet. In the world of reality-based training, pain can be a great teacher. ✕

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*About the author: Jim Wagner is a police and military defensive-tactics instructor and a civilian reality-based personal-protection trainer. For more information, visit <http://www.blackbeltmag.com> and click on Community, then Black Belt Authors.*



Jim Wagner (left) with a Glock 17 (9 mm pistol) during a live-fire training exercise inside the shoot house at the GSG9 base in Sankt Augustin, Germany