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Career Survival
with Sgt. Betsy Brantner Smith

No excuses to not carry

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As of September 1, 2008, five American police officers have been shot and killed while off duty. This is an issue that both my husband and I write and teach about extensively, and in the [Street Survival Seminar](#) all of the instructors encourage attendees to be prepared off duty as well as on duty, and that includes being armed when you're not at work. During the seminar, our unofficial poll reveals that about one third to one half of the officers attending carry an off duty firearm (this varies regionally). As someone who carries a gun just about everywhere but in the shower, I began to study why someone, anyone, who is legally allowed to carry a firearm would choose not to do so.

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Fellow cops gave me many reasons, including the close proximity of kids, the [objection of a spouse](#), the desire to be "totally off-the-clock" when not at work, and the "I don't want to have to get involved" mentality, to name just a few. But one of the most consistent issues I hear from the officers I talk to is this: it's just too difficult to carry a gun in my off duty attire. This was especially true for women, but many men expressed difficulty concealing a weapon as well, especially in warmer climates. Let's face it, there are times in all of our lives where the standard ankle, belt, or shoulder holster just isn't practical.

Well, give me a mission and I'm on it! I looked into numerous off-duty products designed to carry a gun and conceal it well, all while looking good doing it. I even got involved in a project that will help you better train yourself and your family to respond in an off duty incident.

Conceal Carry Clothing for Men and Women

[Smith and Wesson Apparel](#) got together with Wilson Leather and designed a beautiful black leather motorcycle jacket for men and women with ambidextrous conceal carry pockets. The pockets have a magnetic lock for a quiet draw and the left chest is embroidered with the S&W so subtly that someone would have to be within 4 inches of you to notice it. I own the ladies version and I took it to the range and practiced drawing and firing both a small revolver and a small automatic out of each side with no problems on either side. It's the perfect conceal carry jacket and can be dressed up or dressed down and it's extremely reasonably priced.

[Coronado Leather](#) makes a great line of conceal carry products including handbags, outerwear, even carry cases that look like a day planner or a wallet. They have leather jackets, leather vests, and my favorite, a beautiful leather backpack. Take a hint guys: for our wedding anniversary, Dave presented me with a special

edition Bison leather conceal carry handbag that can be worn as a shoulder bag or on your belt. Again, I took it to the range and it's an easy and stable draw from the bag, and it looks beautiful! Coronado has great customer service and they tailor each item to your specific handgun.

For the women out there, as we talk about in the "Street Survival" seminar, if you're going to carry your gun in your purse, make it a purse designed specifically for that purpose.

[LP Defender](#) is a relatively new company that features purses not only for the general public, but they have developed a line specially for the female crime fighter. I own both the "hobo" and the "slim line," and I love them. Both of these bags are high quality leather and the design is extremely fashionable (and yes, I bought shoes to match). Their purses come in four different finishes (black leather tooted leather, brown leather, and faux croc, and the "LP Defender" for cops has pockets for spare mags, cuffs and a pistol, plus room for all the "regular" things you might carry in a plainclothes assignment, such as a notebook, day planner, etc. The LP Defender is especially great for carrying a secondary gun, something we advocate that all police officers do. The cross strap allows for a stable platform for your draw, and all their purses allow you to make the transition from on duty to off and still be armed and ready to take action.

What About Your Spouse or Partner?

All of these products are also great gifts for your spouse who might be hesitant in getting that conceal carry permit because they aren't used to being armed or don't know how they will manage to carry a weapon, keep it concealed and still look "normal." And if you're hesitant about your spouse or partner carrying a gun, remember off-duty Ogden, Utah police officer Ken Hammond's response to an active shooter at the [Trolley Square mall in Salt Lake City](#). Very few people know that Ken's pregnant wife, 911 Operator Sarita Hammond, is also an avid shooter, and she was also armed that day.

Her husband credits her with saving his life. If you're caught in an unavoidable off-duty confrontation, wouldn't two armed and trained people be better than one?

Training, Training, Training

In the "Off Duty" section of Street Survival we advocate that officers try hard to avoid getting involved in off duty confrontations. However, it's not always possible to just "be a good witness," so make sure you train your friends and family how to react and how to help you react when an off duty threat comes your way. Ti Training Corp, a Colorado-based simulator and video training company, developed "[Safe at Home – Off Duty Encounters](#)." This video uses many of "Street Survival's" principles and training points to help prepare both you and your family for a potential off duty incident. Also make sure that you practice, practice, practice with your off-duty weapon and your preferred method of concealed carry to help keep yourself and everyone around you safe.

If you have additional ideas for off duty concealed carry, please post them or email them to me at betsy.smith@calibrepress.com. We learn best from each other. Stay safe!

Sergeant Betsy Smith has nearly 30 years of law enforcement experience, and she currently serves as a patrol supervisor in a Chicago suburb. A graduate of the Northwestern University Center for Public Safety's School of Staff and Command, Betsy is a police trainer, author and instructor for the Calibre Press [Street Survival Seminar](#). Visit Betsy's website at www.femaleforces.com.

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