

General notes on how to host a Safe Storage Give-away:

Lessons learned from the Longmont Gun Violence Reduction Team

December 1, 2024

Our overarching goal is to find the common ground among gun owners and folks working to reduce gun violence. We feel the more we can find this common ground (can't we all agree we don't want children to accidentally use a weapon, for a teen to use a weapon in suicide or homicide, etc.), we can create space where more productive dialog can take place. We make a point to not have any "anti-gun" literature or presence (e.g., no orange shirts).

And, we can feel great about providing the safes. Most people tell us they were either not securing the weapons or had insecure methods of keeping them. A large portion of them report children, grandchildren and other visitors living or spending time in their homes.

1) HOW TO ADVERTISE? WHERE?

Our very first safe giveaway was tied to the July 1, 2021 kickoff of the Safe Storage Law.

Our team called and emailed reporters, sending them a press release.

We reached out to local news photographer and the few (remaining) local reporters. We looked for bylines on local stories and contacted them. We also asked around for contacts for reporters' names.

We sent press releases to Daily Camera, Boulder Reporting Lab, and Colorado Sun and the Boulder Weekly. Tried to hit all the local publications. UCC Longmont paid for a 1/4 page ad in the Times Call for the first event but we haven't done that since. We do submit the information to the local social events calendars, and it gets printed about half the time. The newspapers seem to only want to report the first time event; once it became annually recurring, we got less press.

We contact veterans groups, gun ranges, sporting goods stores, and put flyers in windows on Main Street in Longmont. We have gotten good response from the local gun ranges; people tell us they came because of seeing the flyer there. We also have sign-wavers on the cross streets near us and get people pulling over to stop at the event.

At the Veterans Giveaway we literally march in the parade with signs telling folks that the giveaway is happening after the parade. Each year we have gotten more positive responses from the crowd while marching, from the podium as the entries walk by, and this year's giveaway was our best yet, with more that 150 home and 150 car safes given out.

2) HOW/WHERE TO PURCHASE SAFES? WHAT TYPE TO PURCHASE?

We initially purchased gun safes through Amazon, however, we have now formed a relationship with a local sporting goods store in Longmont, which orders in bulk and gives us the manufacturer's price. The type that requires just a fingerprint or 3-digit key code to access has been the safe that we have the most traction with; people who want a gun for protection in their home want 'quick access' and don't like the key opening versions. Fortunately, these quick action safes are now being manufactured more, and by more companies. We had a session to compare several of the types initially but now go with the product that is recommended to us by the store. They have a retail connection with the manufacturer and this product seems to have all the features we were looking for.

We supply individuals with a safe and the batteries needed. We show them how to set the code at the event and make sure they are operational. Every event we have at least one that doesn't work, so that has been our standard practice.

We used to order about 100 safes. Now we order more if we can because we usually run out, and there is no problem storing any that don't go out. The summer event that we advertise for all usually gives out 150/ 200 safes. That is just the quick release ones for homes. The cost to us with the discount is about \$80 each.

We initially had only 20-30 car safes, but we now give out almost as many of those as the home safes. Most guns are stolen from vehicles, and with there being more restricted zones, people are more likely to need to leave a weapon in the car. New Colorado law also requires that guns be secured in empty vehicles, so there is an added legal incentive to not just throw them in the glove box. The car safes are simpler, only key operated, and cable-locked to the pedestal of the seat or some other secure location. These are much less expensive – about \$20 apiece.

We have sometimes had law enforcement there to hand out the simple cable-locks.

3) FUNDING:

We have a relationship with the Longmont Community Foundation. We have an account that people can donate to. We think we might get more funding donated there because some people in the general public might be reluctant to donate directly to a faith community, despite identifying the funds for a specific purpose. With them, people can also access tax- benefits as a non-profit. We use this status also when we are buying the safes and other supplies from that fund. We have QR code on our flyers that takes them directly to the donation site. We display the QR code at the giveaway, but passively; we don't ask for any donations, but some people ask how they can support the efforts and we point to the code.

4) HOW DO WE CONDUCT THE GIVEAWAY?

We have done the safe giveaways in two different locations, one at the park where the Veterans Day parade begins and ends, and the other at the Longmont Public Safety headquarters (the DA's event used the Sheriff's HQ in Boulder). We are able to use the Public Safety parking lot since it is on a Saturday. This is also a good collaboration with law enforcement. While we don't have anyone in uniform at the event, we have had officers participate as volunteers, and the location is indicative of the support from them. Their location is also easily accessed and near the intersection of 3rd and Main Street, where we place sign-wavers.

We have stations, 3 or 4 popup tents.

People walk through the stations, not a drive- through event.

At Station One, we explain the process and we have sometimes asked for their zip code.

We tell people they could have one car and one home safe per family, then ask if they want one, the other, or both.

At Station Two, we open the box for the home safe and pull the safe out of its plastic wrapping. This makes the instruction and battery insertion process go faster and a bit more smoothly.

At Station Three, which becomes a bottleneck, volunteers put batteries in the safe and show them how to set up their own code. This station has volunteers who demonstrate how the safe works.

Before the event, a large place to store the safes ordered is needed.

The day of the event, we have several SUVs to move the safes from the storage area to event. The boxes for the safes are heavy and bulky. We usually get about 30 in an SUV, or about fifty in a truck bed.

5) MISCELLANEOUS

We have a place for storage of any leftover safes. They are bulky; hopefully there won't be many of them but think ahead.

The event also creates a lot of trash, not all of which will be recyclable.

We recruit about 20 – 25 volunteers. The initial setup of the tents and moving the safes is very labor intensive. We sometimes have volunteers who only do the safe moving, and not the next phase since having more hands in the transfer time is really helpful.

The passing out of the safes is fast and furious and requires at least 12 people. We place two or three each at the first two tables and 4 – 6 at the assembly table. You also need runners behind the tables to fetch the safes from the stacks behind.

The volunteers who set up the safes need to be familiarized with the product ahead of time, and to get used to getting the set up done quickly. If the line gets too backed up, people may leave without having the safe set up. Our goal is to have them 'storage ready' when they walk away, so that once home, the box doesn't sit unopened for any length of time. Hopefully, most of the safes are distributed, so that the breakdown is much easier than the set up.

Membership of the GVR team is made up of members of UCC Longmont, Heart of Longmont, We partner with the Longmont Community Foundation and the Boulder County DA's office. We have volunteers from other organizations: the Boulder area Colorado Faith Communities United to End Gun Violence (CFCU) , Good Sam Hospital, Moms Demand Action and Longmont community members.

Please feel free to contact us for more information or questions. Ann Noonan (Gvredution@ucclongmont.org).