

## Firearms

The Fresno County Suicide Prevention Collaborate recently shared the coroner data on suicides in Fresno County for 2023—and of the 96 recorded suicides last year, 46 of these deaths involved a gun. Between 2018 and 2023, firearms and asphyxiation have been among the most used methods for suicide in this region, but guns continue to rank the highest in crisis situations that Crime Scene Cleaners respond to. Fresno County has also reported 580 gun deaths, excluding suicides, in 2023. Added together, the total number of gun-related deaths in Fresno County for 2023 is 626.

When Crime Scene Cleaners arrive to a scene involving a firearm, identifying the boundaries of all biological material (where the scene begins and ends) is a tedious but important first task. The way biological material presents itself will often reflect the power of the firearm and the type of ammunition that was used. For example, pellets leaving a shotgun barrel at a high velocity typically scatter and create spray. The farther they travel, the greater the spread of the pellets in diameter. This is not the same disbursement as a single bullet through a small caliber handgun. Nevertheless, the aftermath of any penetration depends entirely on the caliber of the weapon, ammunition, range, what was penetrated, and whether or not it happened in an open space. Being able to share any kind of detail related to the firearm, room size, or the incident, in general, will always be helpful to a Crime Scene Cleaner.

Technicians responding to adult firearm occurrences are also likely to find even more guns inside the home during the assessment or remediation process. Guns are most often found in closets, hobby rooms, underneath beds, or inside easily accessible drawers. In these instances of firearms discovery, pictures are taken to document the weapons, and the homeowner or next of kin is notified immediately. The police are only notified if there is an active investigation in which cleaners are assisting law enforcement specifically; otherwise, all weapons, regardless of legality, remain private and the responsibility of the homeowner or next of kin.

Fresno's local Biohazard Remediation Service, Reaper Clean, responds to firearm situations throughout the Central Valley year-round. The most recent gun-related incident that was not a suicide involved a situation where a seasoned gun owner had been cleaning his firearm while on the phone. The person on the other line heard a shot go off mid-conversation, and when there was no longer a response from their friend, they contacted emergency services. Due to the trajectory of the bullet, it was highly unlikely it was intentional. The family continued to state that this individual was a responsible gun owner without any history of depression or mental illness. It was determined by both family and law enforcement that this was an accident.

Regardless of political spectrum, skill, or ownership—gun safety is important for everyone, so here are some general safety tips regarding firearms:

- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- Be sure of your target and what surrounds it.
- Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you're ready to shoot.
- Safely check the barrel and action for any obstructions.
- Unload the firearm when it is not in use.
- Point a firearm only at something you intend to shoot.
- Don't run, jump, or climb with a loaded firearm

- Store firearms and ammunition separately and safely.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages or use drugs before or during shooting

Being aware of family members or friends who have access to guns, having conversations about suicide prevention, understanding suicidal warning signs, and practicing gun safety are all things that can help mitigate the risk of loss of life with firearms.

For more information about Reaper Clean, go to [www.reaperclean.com](http://www.reaperclean.com), email [onthescene@reaperclean.com](mailto:onthescene@reaperclean.com), or follow on Facebook, Instagram, or Tiktok @reaper\_clean.