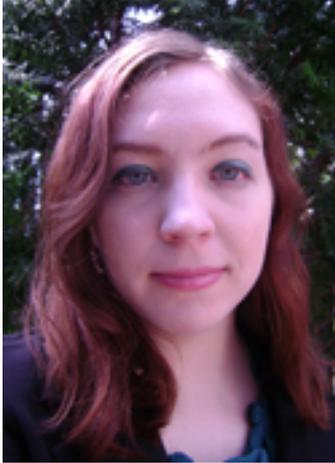


Guns are only as 'smart' as we are

Stephanie Carmichael, Contributor



I'm uncomfortable with the phrase "smart gun." Maybe that's because the words make me think of Skynet in *Terminator*, or the great lesson to man about the dangers of artificial intelligence gussied up in a blockbuster action-movie franchise.

While it's probably not going to rebel and nearly exterminate all of mankind, in the wrong hands, real-world technology can become a tool for evil.

That's why today's manufacturers are seeking better methods of gun control. [Smart guns](#) [1] may be their answer. Since only the real owner can fire them, they could drastically reduce firearm-related violence.

This works through different types of recognition: a watch or ring that a person wears that the gun will "remember." Even an individual's unique grip could act as a sort of passcode.

The New Jersey Institute of Technology is one body that has been researching this development, where touch-sensors measure the size, shape, and amount of a pressure exerted by someone's hands. The method is cheaper and [more commercially viable](#) [2] than biometrics (such as fingerprints), and it could effectively prevent children from causing a serious accident by grabbing a gun.

Those safeguards would also stop criminals from firing the 232,000 or so guns stolen every year.

Arms expert [Armatix](#) [3] — which specializes in wireless locking and access control systems — sells personalized weapons that activate with a special radio-controlled wristwatch and pin. These Smart System guns only shoot within the range of the watch, and it's possible to release the safety mechanism via pincode.



Another company, [Triggersmart](#) [4], is doing the same with chips that can be implanted in jewelry or even someone's hand. It has developed and patented a Childproof RFID smart gun. RFID stands for Radio Frequency Identification, or the same inexpensive and fast technology E-ZPass uses to track vehicles on toll roads in the northeastern United States.

Still, couldn't smart guns create a new wave of problems? If a criminal wanted to use someone's gun, all they would need is the "key," which could encourage direct contact and put that person's life at risk.

You could argue that the prospective gunman would just assume the weapon was faulty, but what if he were educated? A criminal isn't necessarily going to give up and walk away. He might settle for a more extreme approach.

While the restrictions that come with smart guns may discourage some people from committing a crime altogether, they could breed more dangerous behavior in others. The technology could have unforeseen repercussions.

Manufacturers claim smart guns could prevent tragedies like the Newtown shooting of last year. And while this tech could've prevented Adam Lanza from brandishing his mother's weapons, smart guns merely inhibit unintended users. What happens when the shooter is the rightful owner?

And if a criminal took a smart gun into a hostage situation, and one of the captives managed to get ahold of it, wouldn't that be bad?

Smart guns might even make us lazier about proven gun safety measures. And there's always the possibility that the technology could fail to disastrous results.

Critics might be overlooking one advantage, however: tighter regulation. Armatix's vision statement includes a note about the future of guns: "Once equipped with chip-

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based intelligence, weapons and weapon systems can be networked with computers. In this way, it will be possible to log the use of arms and ammunition in detail, flexibly control this use, and evaluate it in multiple dimensions.”

And Triggersmart’s RFID system “can create safe zones in certain areas such as schools, where smart guns coming into the area will be disabled remotely” through Wide Area Control (WAC), according to the company’s website. Take a look at the video below.

Out of all the technology at our disposal, I find guns the least beneficial. They protect people, yes; they stop bad guys from causing more damage. But much more often, guns ruin lives. And we’re still figuring out how to make them safe.

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Links:

[1] <http://money.cnn.com/2013/04/23/technology/smart-guns/index.html>

[2] <http://www.njit.edu/v2/News/Releases/199.html>

[3] <http://www.armatix.us/Smart-System.778.0.html?&L=7>

[4] <http://www.triggersmart.com/Pages/TriggerSmart.aspx>