



The Role of Red Dot Sights and the Importance of Co-Witnessed Iron Sights

**By Brian S. Williams – Founder / Director of Training Services at
Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC
www.greywolfconsulting.us**

Optics and Red dot sights have become an extremely common and perhaps standard with many gun owners at least in part due to their intuitive ability to assist in the improvement of the shooters performance and ability. However, while electronic optics can offer advantages, they should not be viewed as a replacement for fundamental marksmanship skills or as a substitute for reliable backup aiming systems.

One of the most important considerations when equipping a firearm with a red dot sight is maintaining the ability to co-witness with iron sights. This redundant ability decreases the chances of a situation going from terrible to catastrophic by providing an additional layer of reliability should the an optic become unavailable or compromised.

Red Dot Sights Provide Many Advantages When Used Correctly

Traditional iron sights require the shooter to align a rear sight with a front sight and target simultaneously, whereas a red dot sight places the illuminated aiming point on the target while allowing the shooter to maintain focus on the target itself.

Because of this, several advantages can be observed:

- ~ Faster target acquisition.
- ~ Improved situational awareness through target-focused shooting.
- ~ Increased effectiveness during dynamic shooting.
- ~ Enhanced performance in reduced-light conditions when used appropriately.
- ~ Greater accessibility for shooters who struggle to obtain a crisp front sight focus.

These benefits have contributed to the widespread adoption of red dot optics across numerous shooting disciplines and professional organizations, however it cannot be overstated that the use of a Red Dot Site should never be used to fully replace the use of iron sights which will be demonstrated further below.

Electronic Systems Require Contingency Planning

Although many advances have been made within recent years to overall device durability and battery life, red dot sights remain at the end of the day electronic devices and as such they can and will suffer unexpected failures.

Some of these failures include:

- ~ Battery depletion.
- ~ Electronic malfunction.
- ~ Obstruction of the lens from mud, snow, rain, blood or other debris.

- ~ Damaged lenses.
- ~ Loss of zero following severe impact.
- ~ Other excessive environmental contaminates.

While most modern optics are engineered to withstand these demanding conditions, no electronic system is immune to failure and therefore, once again should never be relied upon exclusively.

Why Co-Witnessed Iron Sights

The technique of Co-witnessing sites sounds exotic, however in reality is actually very simple to learn.

The term Co-witnessing simply refers to the use of the weapons iron site through the optic's window and utilizing the red dot to verify proper placement on the target. It is however important to remember that the human eye will always track to the brightest object available to it and therefore will likely focus on the illuminated dot. For this reason it is extremely important to not "Chase the Dot" and to remain focused on the front sight and target.

The main reason for this is actually very simple: if the optic becomes unusable for any reason, the shooter can immediately transition to the iron sights without removing the optic or significantly changing their shooting position.

Some of the main advantages include:

- ~ Immediate access to a backup aiming system.
- ~ Reduced downtime if the optic fails.
- ~ The maintaining of capability

The use of red dot sights are intended to provide and function as a redundant sighting system and never as a replacement.

Train With Both Systems But Master Your Iron Sights First

Many people will incorrectly believe that a red dot sight (Not unlike a laser) will immediately ensure proficiency. This however can be no further from the truth and in fact can lead to a false sense of security which can ultimately lead to serious problems.

Shooters can and do benefit from developing competence with both red dot optics and traditional iron sights, however as stated earlier within this article, as an electronic device failures can and will happen at the most inopportune time and therefore having the ability to operate with the iron sites exclusively cannot be overstated.

Training regiments or sessions should always incorporate the following:

- ~ Confirming zero for both the optic and iron sights.
- ~ Practicing transitions between the optic and iron sights.
- ~ Verifying sight alignment after maintenance or equipment changes.
- ~ Periodically shooting with the optic turned off to reinforce iron sight fundamentals.
- ~ Understanding the specific co-witness configuration of the firearm.

By following the guideline above with regular practice within both techniques will go far to ensure that in the event of a catastrophic failure of an optic the transition and ability to remain in the fight will be maintained.

The Need to Continually Maintain Fundamentals

The simple act of adding a red dot optic to a firearm has not changed the core principles of accurate

shooting. Proper grip, stable shooting position, trigger control, follow-through, and awareness of the target and surroundings remain essential regardless of the sighting system used.

In Conclusion

The introduction of Red dot sights have caused a transformation within the modern shooting community by offering increased target acquisition and when used properly they can be exceptionally capable tools that can assist in the improvement of a shooters performance within a wide range of scenarios.

However, no electronic device is infallible and by incorporating the use of co-witnessed iron sights a simple and effective additional layer of redundancy becomes available.

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- ˆ How stress impacts critical decision-making and performance
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About the Author

Brian S. Williams is a professional firearms instructor, tactical trainer, and executive security consultant with greater than 35 years of experience in firearms instruction, use-of-force training, and protective operations. As the founder of several firearms training and security organizations, he has developed and delivered firearms, tactical, and instructor certification programs for civilians, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and licensed security professionals throughout the United States.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Williams has trained and certified more than 10,500 Connecticut pistol permit applicants, instructed more than 2,000 civilians and hundreds of law enforcement and security professionals in advanced firearms and tactical applications, and provided remedial firearms training to military and correctional personnel. He served as a Marine Police Officer and Watch Commander with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and was appointed to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council, where he contributed to firearms training and policy discussions.

Mr. Williams holds numerous professional certifications, including NRA Training Counselor, NRA Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor, General Dynamics Simunitions FX™ Instructor, The Heckler & Koch International Training Division and Sig Sauer Academy Instructor certifications, and USCCA Concealed Carry and Home Defense Instructor. He is the author of *Welcome to the Real World: A Dangerous Place to Be Caught Unprepared* and has been recognized as an expert in firearms by the Connecticut Superior Courts. His work continues to emphasize responsible firearms ownership, sound judgment, lawful use of force, and practical, reality-based training.