



Understanding the Differences Between Handheld and Weapon Mounted Lights

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The statement which reads *"White light is an identification tool first and a fighting tool second."* cleanly embodies one of the most important principles of operating within a low-light environment. Without regard for your capacity including an armed citizen, law enforcement, military, or security practitioner, the ability to identify what you're looking at and especially your target is significantly more important than simply having a flashlight.

The debate over a handheld or weapon mounted light continues to rage and is not likely to be resolved within this article and therefore the information contained herein is simply to provide information and guidance to anyone who is considering this question.

Although over the years equipment and training have evolved the solution has become clearer. Rather than a this or that decision, the decision should be based upon the specific role which needs to be filled and the selection of equipment based upon that information.

Light Equals Information

Withing darkness details hides. Within light details are revealed.

Light is used not only to illuminate an area, it is also used to gather specific information about that area and the environment.

Whenever a flashlight or other device used for illumination is used within a defensive situation, the following critical questions should if at all possible be answered::

- ~ Who is there, what actions are they engaged in, are are they holding anything in their hands, do the represent or present an immediate or imminent threat, are there any hazards, barriers or obstructions between you and them.

Because one of the core principles of shooting is to always know your target and to never shoot at a shadow, ensuring positive identification is critical especially within a low or reduced light environment which in the absence of can lead to catastrophic outcomes. This is where the use of a flashlight or weapon mounted light (WML) can help lead to better decision making through the effective gathering of Information.

Handheld Flashlights

Generally considered an important part of any EDC kit (Everyday Carry Equipment), even if no firearm is being carried. This is because the uses for the ability to light up dark areas can truly never be overstated.

The reality is that the use of a flashlight will likely be something that is found to be extremely frequent even though most situations which will require its us will have nothing to do with shooting and the use of a handheld light allows you to illuminate the area without the need to manipulate or handle a firearm when not appropriate or necessary.

It is important to remember that one of the most important principles of firearms handling is that a weapon mounted light (WML) should never become a substitute for an everyday flashlight because of convenience.

The Weapon Mounted Light (WML)

A weapon mounted light (WML) exists for one specific purpose, the supporting the use of a firearm. When used correctly, a weapon mounted light ((WML) provides multiple important benefits to the shooter including: Allowing for the shooter to maintain a proper two handed grip and increasing the likelihood of accurate target identification under stress.

Additionally, with a quality weapon mounted light (WML) more than just the target will be illuminated which will aid in better visibility of the overall environment and other potential hazards.

While weapon mounted lights (WML's) serve a valuable purpose, it cannot be overstated that they are not typically intended to be used in the following ways: As general light source or a as a search light.

Carrying Both

Most experienced instructors, law enforcement officers, and military professionals will carry both a handheld flashlight and a weapon-mounted light as part of their EDC (Everyday Carry Equipment) because neither typically takes up much room or adds excessive weight and it is understood that each device serves a different purpose and therefore carrying both will provide the greatest level of preparation and flexibility.

Choosing The Correct Equipment

In this age of amazon.com, the selection of handheld flashlights and weapon mounted lights (WML's) can seem overwhelming and in reality not all lights are worth it.

Within many cases the marketing of any type of light will focus on the number of lumen output which is to say the brightness of the light. However, the brightness alone should not be the only determining factor of effectiveness. Any handheld or weapon mounted light which is to be used must met the following criteria: Proven reliability, durable construction preferably aircraft aluminum which can handle abuse, controls which can be operated under extreme stress, a light beam which provides both direct and peripheral illumination, long battery or charge life and in the case of a weapon mounted light a secure system for mounting.

Remember that it is far more important that a light that operates every time it is activated than flashy marketing slogans and cool looking tactical advertisements.

Some brands and manufacturers and this is by no means an exhaustive list which are commonly used by both the author of this article and his staff include the following: SureFire and Streamlight as both of these pieces of equipment have proven that they meet the criteria listed above.

The Critical Need For Training

Although hopefully the need will never arise, the need for proper and effective training can and likely will make the difference between life and death. The reality is that while nothing is guaranteed, the likelihood of being attacked at night or within a reduced light environment is higher than during the day and this is where a flashlight or weapon mounted light will be a benefit. However with that said, even the best equipment cannot replace skill and ability or compensate for poor decision-making or lack of practice.

Because reduced light environments present challenges which will affect perception, communication, movement and general overall situational awareness training and regular intervals of practice with your your equipment will emphasize consistency. It is critical to never rely solely on your equipment but

rather your skills and abilities where are developed and maintained through regular training and practice.

In Conclusion

As an instructor I often field different questions from my students and if asked me to recommend a lighting setup for a an EDC (Everyday Carry Equipment) I would answer them by recommending that they carry both a handheld light and a weapon mounted light (WML), because as stated earlier within this article each piece of equipment has its place and use.

The issue is not which platform is better but rather what tasks am I more likely to need a light for on a more regular basis. The handheld flashlight can be used safely and effectively as a general utility tool while the weapon mounted light (WML) is intended for use within a defensive confrontation.

By carrying both, there will be a significant increase in flexibility and capability within both types of circumstances, however as with any equipment it is critical to remember that it is a mechanical device and as such is prone to failure and should never be relied upon exclusively or to replace effective skills and abilities.

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Our training philosophy is built around developing well-rounded individuals who understand that personal safety and professional performance require more than simply equipment alone. Awareness, critical thinking, communication, and disciplined decision making skills remain the foundation of effective preparation.

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- ˘ The role equipment plays within a broader preparedness plan
- ˘ How stress impacts critical decision-making and performance
- ˘ The high value of consistent professional training and continued education
- ˘ How the correct mindset will impact informed decisions within high stress environments

Whether you are beginning your training journey, expanding your knowledge, or seeking to refine your existing skill set, Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC (www.greywolfconsulting.us) is committed to providing high quality professional firearms and tactics education focused on professionalism, responsibility, and continuous improvement.

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.