

Fundamentals Highlight: Weapon Maintenance

By Matt Alexander

Over the past several years, I have observed a strange practice start to take hold of the law enforcement precision rifle community: the intentional decision to stop cleaning or maintaining the weapon system.

Rifles are a precision mechanical tool with moving parts. Like any other, it will require maintenance to operate as designed. I've heard those who endorse this practice say things to the effect of "the rifle will tell you when it needs to be cleaned". That is certainly true, just as a car will eventually tell you when it needs an oil change, but it's probably going to cost you a lot more than a quick trip to a lube shop at that point. I have also seen more than one student's rifle come through a class and "tell us" it needed to be cleaned. It did so by locking up to the point where a mallet was necessary to get the bolt open. The student advised us that it had not been cleaned in years. Only after several hours of extensive cleaning was it able to function somewhat normally again. What happens when it "tells you" it needs to be cleaned during an operation and not in training?

I have spoken to numerous professional shooters on this issue, and while the round count often varies (very possibly specific to the rifle), none of them have said they do not ever clean their rifles. And should a competition shooter decide to wait until the rifle starts to show decreased consistency, the most they have to lose is a few points in a competition. In a sniper deployment, there is far more on the line.

Develop a system to clean your rifle and stick to it.

*Note: If you run a suppressor on your rifle, it needs to be removed regularly. Use anti-seize paste in the threads to prevent it from locking up the rifle. I have seen rifles in class with suppressors that may as well have been welded on due to be left on the gun for thousands of rounds.