Transcript for CCW Safe Podcast: Traveling With Firearms

Kent Brown (00:00) Hello, and welcome to the CCW Safe Podcast. It's May 2026, and I want to welcome our CCW Safe members, our newsletter subscribers and everyone else watching today. We have a special guest: Luke McCoy from USACarry.com. We're going to talk about a topic I think will interest a lot of you, which is traveling with firearms. But first, Luke, tell people a little about yourself, your background and what you're doing at USACarry.com.

Luke McCoy (00:40) Thanks for having me on. I'm Luke McCoy from USACarry.com, and USA Carry on all the social channels. I started USA Carry in 2007 as a resource site for concealed carriers. I've always built websites around my hobbies, and this one took off. I wanted to provide the laws and how to get your permit in every state, because back then it was hard to figure out. Some police websites were out of date or didn't explain the process, so I wanted one central place with all that information.

I was the first to come out with interactive concealed carry maps, which make it easy to see which states you can carry in and which you can't. We also had community forums, which were a lot more popular before Facebook and social media killed forums. I've been running it ever since.

Luke McCoy (01:32) I still do all that, but now I'm also covering a lot of defensive gun use incidents and firearm news, and doing a lot of video content. A little bit of everything.

Kent Brown (01:42) That's really cool. 2007 is a long time ago, especially in today's world. We started our company in 2011, and our 15th anniversary is coming up in August. Luke, what led you to create that first website? How did you get interested in concealed carry and firearms education, and in wanting to help people?

Luke McCoy (01:47) I've been a web developer since I was about 18 or 19, building websites around my hobbies. I was living in Las Vegas at the time, around 2005 or 2006. A childhood friend of mine and another friend were in the French Quarter when they got robbed. The robber shot my childhood friend in the chest with a shotgun, and he died in my other friend's arms.

I had just gotten my first firearm. I grew up with guns; my dad was in the military and had Berettas and Tauruses. After that happened, I decided to get my concealed carry permit so I could protect myself and my family. That led me to my first concealed carry gun, and then I started taking defensive classes. I've been doing it ever since.

Training beyond the firearm

Kent Brown (03:01) That's a tragic story, and we see that pattern a lot. Even CCW Safe began with an incident involving our founder, Mike Darter, when he was an on-duty police officer, and all the legal ramifications that came with it. It seems to be an unfortunate pattern: people learn not just about self-defense, but about the need to be educated on the ramifications of defending yourself with a firearm, and that their perception of how things will go is usually not how it goes.

Sites like yours, our educational materials and our whole mission come from the same place. We have the right to defend ourselves, and we have all these tools and resources now. But you can't go out there without being armed physically, mentally and even emotionally.

So I'd encourage everyone watching: your perception of what the law is, or how the police will react, is probably not in line with reality. That doesn't mean you're crazy. It means what you think is perfect probably isn't. Very few of our members have had an incident where, looking back, we thought they did everything well. Nobody does everything well every time, because you're under a significant amount of stress and in fear of severe bodily injury or death. Something is going to go wrong. Resources like yours and ours are a good place to find the gaps in your knowledge.

We'll get to the topic in a minute, but I want your opinion. You talk with a lot of people taking defensive pistol classes. It seems to me there's so much focus on operating the firearm that the other parts don't get attention. Do you see that?

Luke McCoy (05:38) Yeah. People just want to get their gun and go shoot, but there's a lot more to it. One of our neighbors in Las Vegas, who leans more to the left, has heard me talk about guns over the past couple of years. He said, "I want to go shooting with you. You don't sound like one of those gun people. You're responsible." And my girlfriend's brother and his wife recently started getting guns and got their CCW permits. It's been interesting to watch them go through it and help them, and to talk with them about CCW Safe, why you want coverage and why you should always carry.

Kent Brown (06:02) I do a fair number of podcasts and get asked a lot about what our members go through. We don't talk about incidents in detail while they're ongoing, but sometimes we do afterward, as an object lesson. One thing I find myself saying all the time is that most people are doing a good job training with the firearm. They're shooting 5, 6 or 20 times a year. There's a lot of information out there and great instructors all over the country.

Somebody asked me, if there's one other thing people should train, what is it? At the very least, train your brain for what you're going to say to the police and how you'll interact with them. If you defend yourself with a firearm, even if you only draw it and don't fire, you're most likely going to end up talking to the police. So learn what you should and shouldn't say.

Kent Brown (07:31) Some people say, "I have an attorney," or "You guys are getting my attorney." Well, the attorney doesn't show up in two minutes. You don't have to say anything, but you need to learn how to say nothing the right way, make it clear you'll cooperate, and put yourself in a position for that interaction to go well. I'm always wondering how we get people to focus on these other things so they can navigate them more effectively.

Luke McCoy (08:01) Even talking to the media. I cover a lot of defensive gun use incidents, and I watch the news coverage and think, "I wouldn't have gone on the news and said that." You've got to know what you're saying.

Kent Brown (08:12) For sure. We advise our members on that, and if it gets into a very high-profile incident, and we've had some that a lot of people would recognize, we hire a third-party media specialist to help the member and the attorney team manage that side. We don't want the member talking publicly about their incident.

Not long ago, we had a member whose incident wasn't publicly known. We were in the middle of helping him; we had just gotten the attorney, all within about five days. He was so happy with what we were doing, which is great, that he made some social media posts about us. We told him, "That's cool, but we're taking these down. You don't know where this case is going. This could actually be damaging. We appreciate the kudos, but let's save that for when it's over."

Luke has a lot of content, and we have a lot on our site that's useful, including at least two or three pieces on the top things to say or do with the police after an incident. Please go watch those.

But the reason we're here today is a topic where Luke has a lot of experience and expertise: traveling with firearms. Most people don't do it, and you're traveling with a firearm virtually every week. There are federal, state and local laws and regulations, and it can be overwhelming.

Flying every week, TSA basics and locks

Kent Brown (10:16) So Luke is here to share his experience, and we'll walk step by step through his best practices for doing it within the law. Tell everybody how often you travel with firearms, and across which airlines. Give them a flavor that this isn't something you do once a year.

Luke McCoy (10:44) I spend half my time in Nevada and half in Louisiana, so I'm flying with firearms literally every week. I've been doing that since 2020 or 2021. One day I decided to put my Insta360 on, film the check-in process and upload it. That video did very well, so I started filming all of them. We're 55 episodes in now.

I started filming because I was doing it anyway. But after a while, people started commenting, "I've been watching your videos, and it's making me comfortable enough to do it myself." Only one or two of my videos have had issues. Usually checking firearms is quick and painless, and the videos show how smoothly it can go. So I think it's helping people. I screenshot those comments, and when someone says I'm just showing off, I reply with all the comments from people thanking me.

Kent Brown (11:41) It's an intimidating topic, especially if it's your first time or you do it infrequently, because there are TSA regulations and the airlines have their own regulations. Give us an overview of the TSA rules, and then how the airlines handle it.

Luke McCoy (12:03) The TSA guidelines are pretty straightforward. The airline guidelines can differ depending on the airline, and on the agent you get and whether they know all the policies.

Generally, firearms need to be in a locked, hard-sided case. That case can go inside another piece of luggage or not. Every locking point on the case needs a lock. If you have one lock and an empty locking point, they'll usually have a problem with that.

Under TSA regulations, the locks can be any type. They can be TSA-recognized locks, which means TSA has a master key and can open them, or non-TSA-recognized locks. The problem is that sometimes agents ask, "Is that a TSA-approved lock?" They mean TSA-recognized, they're using the wrong term, and they think you need one. So now I just say yes. It's TSA-approved, but it's not TSA-recognized. That's where the TSA's policy and the agent you're talking to can differ.

Kent Brown (13:21) So TSA doesn't require a lock they have a master key for.

Luke McCoy (13:30) No, it can be any lock. TSA's policy says you're the only one who can have the key, unless TSA asks you for it to inspect the case. And that's a whole other issue I sometimes see come up.

When TSA asks for your keys, and the 15-minute wait

Kent Brown (13:49) So when would TSA want the key to inspect? You're at the counter, you check the bag, and you get through that part. Where does the bag go, and what happens next?

Luke McCoy (14:03) That depends on the airport. I fly out of New Orleans (MSY) and Las Vegas. At both, once you declare the firearm and check the bag, they put it on the conveyor belt, it goes to TSA and goes through an X-ray. Because of something that happened in New Orleans with a very large rifle case, I now wait 15 minutes before going through security, whether the airline asks me to or not.

Kent Brown (14:40) So in some cases the airline puts the bag on the belt and tells you not to go through security for 15 minutes, in case TSA needs to open it.

Luke McCoy (14:50) Right. I never get asked that in New Orleans. In Las Vegas, it's always "go stand by the flagpole." Anyone who has flown through Las Vegas with firearms knows what I'm talking about. There's a flagpole right outside, so if TSA needs you, you're right there. I set my timer for 15 minutes whether I'm asked or not.

That first time, my large rifle case didn't fit in their X-ray, and I had already gone through security. Of course, my gate was all the way at the end of the airport. I had just sat down when Spirit called me up. That was before Spirit went bankrupt and shut down. TSA wanted the keys to my case.

I went all the way back through security to the Spirit desk and said I wanted to be there when they opened my case. They said I couldn't, and I pushed the issue, so they brought me down to TSA. A TSA agent came out and treated me like a criminal: "Why won't you give us the key?" He was standing so close I had to take a step back. I told him I had a lot of expensive guns in there and wanted to see who was going through them.

In the end, you have to decide: are you going to push the issue and miss your flight, or let them have the keys? I let them have the keys. Thankfully, nothing was missing when I got to where I was going.

If you don't want to deal with any of that, you can use TSA-recognized locks. I like keeping the keys to my locks. I've heard that sometimes they'll take you to a special room and inspect the case in front of you, and sometimes they won't. It depends on the airport and the agent.

I try to go with the flow. That time I was getting frustrated, and you won't get anywhere arguing. It's their policy. So I try to be as nice as possible. That's the only time they've ever asked for my keys, and I don't think I was even filming yet.

Kent Brown (16:39) So it's pretty rare. But if you use a TSA-recognized lock, they have a master key and can open it anytime. They don't have to tell you they've inspected it. People should be prepared for that.

Luke McCoy (17:13) Right. I was just watching a video last night from Nick Young of Vlocks Training Group about flying with guns. He had a recent incident and says basically the same thing I do: be nice. If they ask for your keys, you can ask them to open it in front of you, but that probably won't happen. He gave them his keys. They gave them back and said one of his guns was loaded, which it wasn't. When he got to his destination, a knife was missing. They had asked for his keys, gone through everything, and somebody took the knife, locked the case back up and returned his keys.

I get that question a lot: what if your bag goes missing, or someone steals a gun? I've never had a bag go missing, and I'll deal with it if it happens. I have insurance on my firearms, and I have a few other firearms I can use in the meantime.

Keep firearms and range bags away from the checkpoint

Kent Brown (18:14) Just for clarity: today we're talking about checking firearms in your bags at the counter. We're not talking about the TSA security checkpoint. Hopefully everyone watching knows you never bring a firearm anywhere near the checkpoint.

Kent Brown (18:44) A lot of our members are avid shooters, and we have coverage in our plans for this. Say you have a backpack with a few rounds of ammo or an empty magazine in the bottom. That will be a problem at the TSA checkpoint, 100%. If they see it on the scanner, you'll get pulled aside and could face civil, federal or local charges.

Kent Brown (19:09) We've seen a wide range of how airports handle those. Members on certain plans can call us for help if it's accidental and it happens at the checkpoint. But please: don't carry empty magazines, don't carry loaded magazines. If you use the same backpack you take to the range, or that's held your firearm, you're just increasing the risk that you'll forget something. Even the swabs they do can pick up residue they won't like. My advice is to get yourself another bag. I know you love that bag, but use something else.

Kent Brown (19:56) One of our employees here in Oklahoma City had a loaded magazine in their bag and forgot about it. Oklahoma City was great about it. They said, "We can throw it away, or you can take it back to your car." Now imagine that in Las Vegas, LAX or LaGuardia.

Luke McCoy (20:07) Or New Jersey.

Kent Brown (20:17) We've had members with literally one round of ammo in some of those major metros, and it's very problematic. So please, either search that bag meticulously, every pocket, zipper, crease and fold, and get it cleaned, or use another bag. You won't regret it.

Luke McCoy I broke my own rule once, within the last year or two. It was my camera bag. They pulled it aside, and there was one spent casing at the bottom, underneath something. The agent said, "I'll throw it away, it's all good." So don't use your travel bag as a range bag. Get something separate.

Kent Brown (21:03) We had a member traveling with a firearm in their bag, and I won't name the airports, but they were big ones. It went through the scanner at the departure airport and wasn't even seen.

Kent Brown (21:30) It got caught on the return trip. You can imagine how stunned they were that it didn't get caught the first time. Finding out that way at the airport, I promise you, ruins your day and many days after. To be fair, the departure airport would have been a much better place to get caught. The return was from a very liberal city where it's likely much tougher. Instead of "empty casing, just throw it away," it was going to be a problem.

Kent Brown (21:53) So please, please use different bags.

One last thing. People ask, "You don't want members getting into these problems because you have to spend money helping them, right?" The answer is no, we don't mind that at all. That's what we're here for. We just don't want you to go through it. The money doesn't make up for the mental anguish, the inconvenience and the potential loss of freedom.

Kent Brown (22:33) That's the hard part, and we don't want anybody going through it. We're here to help if you have an accident or get involved in an incident. But anything you can do to avoid a self-defense incident, if possible, or a TSA violation, or anything else we cover, please stop and think about it.

Airlines, declaration forms and staying calm at the counter

Kent Brown (22:57) Luke, have you seen airline-specific policies or processes where you do things differently? Or are they consistent enough that it's basically the same?

Luke McCoy (23:19) Lately it's been good. When you ask that, Spirit comes to mind, but they're not an airline anymore. For about two years, they wanted the make and model of every firearm in the case, which made no sense. A lot of times they wanted me to open the case just to look at the guns, and there's no reason for that. Spirit often wasn't aware of its own policies, including its

supervisors. In episodes 30 and 31, I think, one day went completely wrong, my flight got canceled and I went home. The next day, it went completely right.

Kent Brown (24:03) Same bag, same everything, same airport.

Luke McCoy (24:04) Same exact everything, and it was smooth. I put both episodes together to show what happened. On the first day, a supervisor came out, and I had their contract of carriage on my phone. It had just been updated that day. I was pointing things out, and they didn't want to hear it. So that was really my problem with them.

Lately I've been on a lot of Southwest flights, and I just flew Delta and Frontier. Smooth, and everybody knew what they were doing. Delta likes to put a zip tie on your bag to secure it, and then you pick it up from that airline's baggage office and you're free to go. I used my trauma shears to cut the zip tie and was on my way.

Kent Brown (24:56) Have any other airlines asked to see the guns, or was that just Spirit?

Luke McCoy (25:02) That was only Spirit, and that's what I had a problem with. One day I pushed back and asked why they wanted to look at them. They said, "To see if they're unloaded." I said, "You can't tell if they're unloaded by looking." My pistols were in sleeves in the case. I asked, "Are you going to touch the guns?" No. "Then you won't know if they're unloaded." It's not the airline's job to figure that out. The form you sign declares they're unloaded, and TSA scans the case and will contact you if there's a problem.

Kent Brown (25:48) Interesting. I'd think the last thing they want to do is touch those firearms, for a lot of reasons.

Luke McCoy (25:54) Right. I got to the point where I'd open the case to show them, and that's as far as I'd go. Here's why. If the hard-sided case is checked by itself, the declaration form goes inside the case. You fill it out, unlock the case, slip it in and close it. So technically, you're opening the case sometimes anyway.

If the case is inside another piece of luggage, the form goes on the outside of the case. I usually fly with the case inside another bag. Agents will tape the form to the outside with packing tape or a baggage sticker. Or, and everybody likes this tip, I get free transparent FedEx shipping sleeves and stick one on the case.

Luke McCoy (26:48) I put the form in the sleeve and close it, and the agents all say, "That's so smart. You're doing our work for us." So that's why I'd sometimes open the case: it makes things move more smoothly, and they're not going to touch anything. Beyond that, I'd request a supervisor, which I've done before, and the supervisor didn't know what they were doing either. At that point I'd ask for a TSA agent to come over and explain the actual policy.

Kent Brown (27:18) Has it ever come to that, where a TSA agent had to come over during check-in?

Luke McCoy (27:24) No. I think it was in episode 30 that I finally gave up and said, "Fine, here, it's open." And they said, "Okay, you can close it." They didn't even look at anything. They were just fighting to be right when they were wrong.

Kent Brown (27:43) I think the takeaway for people watching is that you need to know the process and the airline's policy.

Kent Brown (27:59) If you're following the TSA guidelines, you just need to get through the people at the counter. Get the form on the case or in it, whichever it needs to be, and carry on. Standing there trying to win an argument isn't going to help.

Luke McCoy (28:15) It's not going to happen. You'll miss your flight.

Kent Brown (28:19) It won't make anything better or worse with TSA. They won't even know about it. The bag goes down, and they make their own decision on whether to look inside.

Even in the self-defense world, so many people feel the need to be right. It complicates situations and, in some cases, escalates them. We don't want that when we're checking firearms at the airport, much less in a situation that could lead to self-defense.

Kent Brown (28:48) I've been here almost five years, and I've figured out that in some situations, who cares who's right? I want to be safe. I want to go home to my family. I don't want to deal with the police, insurance, all the horrible things that can happen. I'm happy to let someone else think they were right while I leave. Same mindset.

Luke McCoy (29:12) Exactly. I fly once a week. I just want to get where I'm going. You want me to open the case? Okay, here, look at it. Close it, lock it and let it go.

Kent Brown For sure. I think it's a very intimidating topic for people because they're so worried about getting it wrong. Can I do it, can I not? Obviously, the answer is you can. It sounds like there are just basic things you have to do. It's not a highly complex situation. You need the right case. You need the right locks. You need to know whether the case goes in a bag or not. There's one declaration, and the paperwork may be at the check-in counter.

Luke McCoy (30:02) That can be different by airline. This one is a Southwest form. Sometimes they fill it out for you, and sometimes they hand it to you to fill out. This one asks for your name, address, city, state, flight number and PNR number. If you're at Southwest wondering what the PNR number is, it's just your confirmation number.

Luke McCoy (30:30) Delta, which I flew last week or so, only needed a signature. No other information. These are each airline's own forms.

Kent Brown (30:48) But there's always one, even if they're different. No airline doesn't make you sign something.

Luke McCoy (30:50) Yes. At one point, Spirit made me sign one for every single gun in the case, and I found that in their contract of carriage. It made no sense, because the models weren't listed on the form. I had to fill out eight because I was flying with eight guns that day, all in the same case. Dumb policy, but go with it and be on your way. Spirit's not around anymore anyway.

Kent Brown (31:01) For a lot of people watching, the goal is to comply with the law, reduce friction at the counter and get to your destination.

Picking up your firearm at baggage claim

Kent Brown Now let's talk about when you get to your destination. You go to get your baggage. Does it just come through normal baggage claim, and away you go?

Luke McCoy (31:46) Maybe. It depends on the airline, the airport, the baggage handlers and what phase the moon is in. Generally, if it's a hard-sided case with locks on it, I'd say 70% of the time it gets hand-carried to the airline's baggage office, where you show your ID to pick it up.

Luke McCoy (32:13) If the case is inside another piece of luggage, it depends. Delta zip-ties the bag and attaches a slip that says to bring it to the airline office. But most of the time, if my case is in a bag that looks like regular luggage, it comes out on the carousel. And sometimes a locked hard-sided case that isn't supposed to come out on the carousel does. I've stood watching the office, waiting for my big rifle case, and then seen it dump out onto the carousel.

So I try to stand somewhere between the carousel and the office so I can watch both. I also always use AirTags, so I can track on my phone where the bag is.

Kent Brown (32:42) Nice. So for members watching: when you get to baggage claim, don't be alarmed if your firearm doesn't come out on the carousel. In fact, it most likely won't. Go to the baggage office. That's why I wanted to cover the whole journey. You get through check-in, it makes it onto the plane, and then there's one more step to watch for.

Kent Brown (33:21) If it's in the baggage office, I assume you just show proof that the bag belongs to you, and away you go. There's no second check?

Luke McCoy (33:30) Yep. You show your claim slip or your ID. At Delta last week, they asked for my tags. I gave them my tags and my ID, they went into the back of the office and rolled it out to me.

When I flew to the NRA Annual Meetings in Houston, we were waiting for our bags and they never came out on the carousel. We were told carousel six, then five. Apparently they came out on three. A few of us were looking for our bags at the office, and somebody was just standing with them over by carousel three. Good to know my bag of firearms was just hanging out. It was all fine, but you never know. You have to go with the flow.

Kent Brown (34:09) Other than proving the bag is yours, which you'd do for any luggage you pick up at the airline office, like a delayed bag, there's no additional paperwork, signatures or checks. Once you have it, you have it.

Laws where you land, ammunition, cases and locks

Kent Brown (34:09, continued) Luke, talk about preparation. Say you live in Louisiana and you're flying to Ohio.

Kent Brown (34:37) Should people be thinking, "Okay, I got it there, but is it legal for me to have it here?"

Luke McCoy (34:52) Yep. If you have a concealed carry permit, the first thing I'd check is whether you have reciprocity there. If it's a constitutional carry state, is constitutional carry allowed for non-residents? Start there. Then you need to know that state's carry laws if you plan to carry or transport the firearm.

If you don't have a permit, or your permit isn't recognized, you can still travel with the gun. It just needs to follow that state's rules. The hard case might need to be locked in the trunk and inaccessible, and the ammo might need to be stored separately. I generally don't go to those kinds of states, so I don't have to deal with that. I was just booking flights for a convention in a few weeks. There were two states I could fly into, both about the same distance away, and I picked the one, South Carolina or North Carolina, I think, that had better laws and where I had reciprocity.

Kent Brown (35:49) That's important. It's fine to get through the transportation part, but you need to know the law where you land. I think most constitutional carry states, if not all but one, allow non-residents to carry. Maybe North Dakota is the one that doesn't. Not a lot of people are going there, but you do need to know. Here in Oklahoma, anybody can carry concealed or open. You don't have to be a resident; you just have to be lawfully allowed to possess the firearm. So it varies.

Kent Brown (36:28) The checklist isn't just "Now I understand how to check the bag and what equipment I need." It's also "When I get there, will I comply with the laws?" You might land in one state and drive to another, so check both. Don't assume you can just throw it in the trunk and nothing will happen. What if you get in an accident? Anything can happen, so be familiar with those laws. You have a section on your site with that information, and so do we. It's relatively easy to find. So please, prepare yourself for the trip there and the trip back.

Luke McCoy (37:12) One of the most common questions I get is whether you need a permit to declare firearms when traveling. The answer is no. You just need to be able to legally own a firearm. They're not checking serial numbers to see if the gun is registered to you or anything like that.

Kent Brown (37:34) You also have some general tips, like documenting things and taking photos of what you have. Go through a few of those.

Luke McCoy (37:46) I make a list of what guns are in the case. I started doing that more when Spirit was asking. If I was carrying a Smith & Wesson, which has the longest names ever, like a Performance Center M&P9 Carry Comp, I'd shorten it. A Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro was just "Hellcat." They don't ask anymore, but I still keep track of what guns I'm flying with, and I take a picture.

Then there's ammo. If you're flying with ammo, it can be in the hard case with the firearms or just in your checked luggage. It generally needs to be in the original manufacturer's box or a box designed to hold ammo. Technically, you can't have more than 11 pounds. I've had my ammo checked twice. A long time ago, flying out of Vegas, I had too much .300 Blackout and had to give them a couple of boxes to get under the 11-pound limit.

Another time, recently, they had me take out a box and recheck it, and obviously it wasn't anywhere near 11 pounds. There are ways around that. Ammo in checked luggage doesn't need to be declared, so you can check a bag with ammo in it like a normal bag. Since there are no firearms in it, they won't ask anything.

Generally, if I'm flying with my carry gun, I just bring a small box of ammo. And since I live in both places, I have ammo in both. I just bring enough to load my carry gun.

Some airlines allow loaded magazines, obviously not in the gun. Southwest does. The back of this form says loaded magazines or clips must be packaged to prevent accidental activation of the primer, so they allow loaded magazines. I generally don't, just to keep things running smoothly with TSA.

Kent Brown Like I said earlier, the whole idea is to reduce friction. Don't give them a reason to dig in there any more than necessary, not because we have anything to hide, but because individual agents' opinions on the policies vary a lot. At the airport, you're on a schedule. Follow the law and be cooperative. Off the top of my head, I don't know what 11 pounds of ammo looks like, and it depends on the kind of ammo, but it sounds like a fair amount. If you need more than 11 pounds, you should probably just buy some on the other end.

Luke McCoy Yep, or order it online and ship it to where you're going. That's another way to do it.

Kent Brown (41:04) We talked about ammo and being able to put it in a separate bag. Any advice on the hard case itself? Are there brands or types that are better, or places to buy them? Or is it pretty straightforward?

Luke McCoy (41:27) As long as it's a hard-sided case that locks and can't be pried open enough to stick a finger in. That's on my list of common problems: say you only have one lock, and the other side has no lock. I've heard of agents unlocking the case and prying it open: "See how I can pry it open this much? That's not allowed."

Personally, I use Pelican and Condition One cases. If I'm flying with just one gun, I have smaller cases like a StopBox or a Vaultek. Those have locks built in, so there's no physical padlock, and

that's fine too. Some of the better hard cases that come with your firearm can work, though sometimes those are flimsy plastic. Harbor Freight has cases that will do just fine. Just get whatever fits the guns you're bringing, and make sure there's a lock in each locking point. That's the problem I see most. A week or two ago, while I was waiting to check in, I saw them discussing a rifle case that only had one lock on it. I thought, that's probably getting kicked back.

Kent Brown (42:43) It probably had locking points at both ends and only one lock. I know Condition One cases have multiple points. Do you put a lock on every one to eliminate all doubt?

Luke McCoy (42:49) Yeah. It might be in the airlines' policies, I'd have to check, but you need a lock in every locking point. My pistol cases have two. My rifle cases might have four or six. You need locks for all of them. At the NRA meetings, Tom Gresham from Gun Talk told me about a lock, I forget the name, that's really hard to break or cut off if TSA tried. I thought, let me look into those. But they're about $120 a lock, so I'll probably stick with my regular locks for now.

Kent Brown There's a lot out there. You can get a reasonably priced case and reasonably priced locks that meet the requirements. Traveling with your firearm doesn't have to be financially overwhelming.

Final tips, and carrying once you arrive

Kent Brown I want to wrap up in a minute. Luke, what are the top couple of things people should think about, maybe for their first time flying with a firearm?

Luke McCoy (44:11) Knowing the policies and how it's going to go is important. When I get called up, the first thing I always say is, "I'm declaring firearms." I don't walk up and say, "I've got guns." Saying "I'm declaring firearms" tells them I know what I'm talking about and I'm following the policies, and hopefully it makes things go a little smoother. When they see the FedEx sleeve, they know I've done this before, and it puts them at ease. Then go with the flow without being argumentative. Out of 55 videos, I think only one or two have had issues. Most of the time it goes smoothly, they know their policies and you're on your way.

Kent Brown (45:04) This is a smaller detail. I fly a lot, but not with firearms. When you bring your suitcase with the firearm case inside, do you go straight to the full-service counter? Or do you use the self-service kiosk, print your own luggage tag and then go to bag drop?

Luke McCoy (45:29) It depends. Lately at Southwest, I've been going straight to the help desk before tagging. Sometimes I've tagged the bag at the kiosk and then waited. In New Orleans, I've tagged it and waited at bag drop, and that was totally fine. I did that in Houston coming back, and the agent said, "No, you need to go to the help desk," but then checked me in anyway. Next time I'm in Houston, I'll go to the help desk. So if they tell you to go to the other line, just say okay and go.

That's why I get there two hours before boarding. I also have TSA PreCheck and CLEAR, which speeds up security, but two hours is my window. It's plenty of time to check the bags, and if there's an issue, I can still get through and make my flight.

Kent Brown (46:25) That's great advice. I'm sure some people watching cringe at the thought of getting there two hours early. But traveling with a firearm is different. You can't swing in at the last minute like you might for a vacation or a meeting, even in Oklahoma City, where security is very simple. You need that extra time built in. To your point, they may ask you to wait 15 minutes before going through security.

Luke McCoy (46:50) Right. Or they might ask for your keys, and you have to go all the way back, give them the keys, wait for them to go through your guns, get your keys back and go through security again. Give yourself enough time so you're not stressing yourself out.

Kent Brown (47:07) Hopefully the advice and your experience today reduce some of that anxiety. The last thing I wanted to ask is why you take your firearms. Are some of them for self-defense where you're going? I'm sure some members are thinking, "I'm going to Missouri for a week for business. I'm not going to buy a firearm when I get there, but maybe it's a constitutional carry state and I want one with me." That's a totally valid reason. Are you carrying for self-defense at your destinations?

Luke McCoy (47:33) Yes. I'm usually carrying my carry gun at the time. I just switched to an Echelon, and I don't have one in both locations, so I bring it. I started shooting USPSA last year, so I'm usually bringing my competition gun too, because I dry fire with it a lot. And for USA Carry, I'm reviewing guns and optics, so I fly with those to keep the review process going.

I get that question a lot: "Why are you flying with guns? What's your job?" Well, it's none of your business, but this is my job.

When I flew Delta to Salt Lake City, I snipped my zip ties, went into the bathroom and loaded up. You need to make sure that's legal, too. For example, at the Las Vegas airport you can open carry, but you can't carry concealed anywhere in the airport, even with a permit. So if you fly into Las Vegas, get your gun and go to the bathroom to load up, you'd be breaking the law. In New Orleans, you can carry concealed up to the TSA security checkpoints, so doing the same thing there is fine.

So you have to know the laws in each state. If you want to carry as soon as you land, find out whether that's legal at the airport, or whether you have to wait until you're out of the airport or at your hotel. Know the laws and know the policies.

Coverage while you travel, and wrap-up

Kent Brown (49:23) That's really important. One reason for this podcast is that we have members who travel with their firearm for all kinds of reasons. Every CCW Safe plan covers you in 47 states. We don't cover New York, New Jersey or Washington State, but we cover all the other 47. So if you're traveling and want your firearm with you for self-defense, hopefully today's video helps you get comfortable getting it there. Then research the laws where you are, so you know whether you can carry and what the rules are in each situation, like the airport or other public places. We're with you there.

If you live in Louisiana like Luke, and Luke is a CCW Safe member, and he gets into an incident in Salt Lake City, he calls the same hotline and the same team helps him. Some companies in the industry charge extra for multi-state coverage. We don't. We want everyone watching to know we have your back wherever you go in those 47 states.

Make sure you're following local laws and using good principles in defending yourself, and keep learning about carrying, de-escalation and other tactics that can make you safer. But we know as well as anybody that a lot of these situations are thrust upon you. You don't choose them, and you don't always have the option to withdraw or de-escalate, even though we want you to try. They happen fast, and when you're in unfamiliar surroundings...

Luke McCoy (51:14) Things happen quick.

Kent Brown (51:24) ...it increases the anxiety about what your options are and what to do. Just know you don't have to carry the anxiety of whether you'll have the same team of experts at CCW Safe. We are going to help. We hope you never have an incident. We hope you navigate the airport beautifully with no extra friction, maybe because this video inspired you to check your airline's rules before you go, whether you're flying United or another airline. Give yourself plenty of time and have the right equipment. Don't use a soft case. Don't show up with four locking points and one lock and try to talk them into it; that's probably not going to work. Follow the rules, and I think you'll have a very successful trip. We hope everyone stays safe, but if you need us, we're here for you. Luke, anything you want to add?

Luke McCoy (52:27) If anybody is anxious about flying with guns, or you're about to do it soon, go watch the series and see how often it's a painless process. It's very easy to do. I've got 55 episodes, and I upload a new one every Tuesday on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Kent Brown (52:49) I'd encourage people to watch them. There's even some entertainment value in watching somebody navigate it.

Luke McCoy (52:55) Hopefully it helps some people.

Kent Brown (53:10) It will reduce the anxiety people have. Some people watching are thinking, "I know how to do this. It doesn't worry me." But for others, there will be a first time, just like their first time shooting or carrying a firearm. All those first times can be a little stressful.

Luke McCoy (53:30) I had my first time carrying on a college campus last week in Salt Lake City. I thought I'd have to take my gun home first because we were going straight to the college. Then I thought, wait, let me look it up. It turned out I could carry on campus. I was a little anxious walking around campus carrying, since it was my first time, but it was legal.

Kent Brown (53:47) It does require research when you're not in your home environment. Here in Oklahoma City, not to oversimplify, you can do pretty much any reasonable thing around town without worrying about it. I wouldn't recommend walking into the police department or a courthouse, of course. But in your day-to-day life of shopping, working and socializing, you can carry here, and it's not particularly stressful. We have very favorable laws in Oklahoma.

California, not so much. The first thing to check is whether your permit has reciprocity there. If you don't have a permit, don't even take it.

Luke McCoy (54:31) Not so much. Honestly, I don't think they recognize anyone's permit. When I flew there on vacation, I didn't bring my gun. I just had palm pepper spray shipped with one-day delivery from Amazon so I'd have some kind of defensive tool, and that worked.

Kent Brown (54:54) You can get a California permit without being a resident, but you have to go through the process. If you live in Utah, for example, you can get a California permit. Some of the training is available online now, and approved curriculums can be taught in other states. Make sure you're taking a California-approved curriculum. CRPA has a new approved California curriculum that's taking off. We're turning this into a California advertisement now, but CRPA's website has a lot of resources if you're going to California.

So please, keep up with where you're going, be informed and be safe. That's all we want for our folks. I appreciate Luke's time today, and I encourage people to watch his videos. He has a lot of great content on the site, and I'd also suggest following him on social media. I follow his Instagram, and he's always posting real-life self-defense incidents from around the country. If you're interested in carrying, self-defense and the tools of self-defense, whether firearms or accessories, USACarry.com is a great place to go. Luke, thanks for your time. Good to see you as always. We'll have you back soon. Thanks, everybody, and we'll see you on the next podcast.

Luke McCoy (56:19) Good to see you. Thanks for having me on.