



Large Capacity Ammunition Magazines: Frequently Asked Questions

Large capacity ammunition magazines are designed to shoot mass numbers of people quickly and efficiently. They are useful for criminals, but not for hunting or self-defense. New magazines containing more than 10 rounds were banned under the Federal Assault Weapons Act, but Congress failed to renew the law in 2004, despite support from over 70% of Americans.¹ Now only 6 states and D.C. limit the capacity of magazines. The Brady Campaign strongly supports proposed legislation to again ban large capacity magazines.

Q. What is a large capacity ammunition magazine?

A. A magazine is a device for feeding bullets into a handgun or rifle. Standard hunting rifles are usually equipped with no more than 5-shot magazines, standard revolvers are 6-shot, and standard pistol magazines hold 6-10 rounds. But large capacity ammunition magazines can hold 30, 50 or even 100 rounds, enabling shooters to injure or kill many people in seconds before needing to reload. Semi-automatic pistols with large capacity magazines can fire at a rate of more than 6 shots per second for well trained shooters, according to the FBI², or about 30 shots every 5 seconds.

Q. Did large capacity ammunition magazines facilitate the Tucson shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords and 18 others?

A. Yes. According to law enforcement, “There’s absolutely no doubt the magazines increased the lethality and the body count of this attack.”³ The shooter was able to fire at least 31 shots in rapid succession from one magazine, hitting 19 people, including Representative Giffords, and killing 6, including a 9-year-old girl and a federal judge. The damage was limited to the firepower of his magazine; when it was empty, he was stopped while attempting to reload. Unfortunately, a large-capacity magazine enabled him to fire more than three times the rounds of a standard magazine. The increased firepower of large capacity magazines also emboldens shooters to engage in mass attacks.

Q. Have large capacity ammunition magazines been used in other mass shootings?

A. Yes. Large-capacity magazines have been used in many mass shootings, including at Virginia Tech (32 killed, 17 wounded); Fort Hood (13 killed, 34 wounded); and Columbine High School (13 killed, 23 wounded). Typical of mass killers, the Fort Hood shooter wanted a large magazine capacity, so purchased a gun that could use 30 round magazines.⁴ Police chiefs across the country report increases in the use of weapons with large capacity ammunition magazines in crime and against police officers and civilians since the federal ban expired.

Q. Is there any legislation in Congress seeking to ban large capacity ammunition magazines?

A. Yes. Representative Carolyn McCarthy is introducing legislation in the 112th Congress to prohibit the transfer of large capacity ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition and the possession of new large capacity magazines. Standard-sized magazines for law-abiding firearms owners are unaffected.

¹ Over 70% favor continuing the ban on large-capacity magazines and assault weapons, The Harris Poll, Sept. 9-13, 2004.

² <http://www.slate.com/id/2235051/>

³ <http://openchannel.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/01/09/5801374-tucson-shooting-with-high-capacity-magazines-reignites-gun-debate>

⁴ See <http://www.statesman.com/news/local/witnesses-hasan-spent-weeks-before-fort-hood-shooting-985470.html>