



## Green Me Up, JJ

"Advice for Greenies in a Complicated World"

By **Jenny Price** | February 25, 2010

Dear JJ:

I've been trying in vain to locate guns and ammunition with less toxic materials, to use at work. Can you help me? I can't tell you what I do exactly (or I might have to kill you), but I can say that I work alone, that I use guns in a lethal manner on a regular basis, and that despite my commitment to "reduce, reuse, and recycle," I often have to discard a gun after I've used it.

J.N.

No home address

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Dear J.N.:

Wow. Seriously, wow. A hit man?

OK, what a dilemma. On one hand, what you do for a living is reprehensible. OK, beyond reprehensible— It makes what's reprehensible seem mildly objectionable.

And yet, guns don't kill people, right? People do—as the NRA always says—and in the U.S. alone, people are using guns to kill at least [12,000 people a year](#). That number isn't budging. The bullets can end up in the soils, and not a few of the guns get thrown into sewers, and they end up eventually in our rivers. So don't we need to act responsibly to green up these massive quantities of guns and bullets?

For the planet. And, you know, for the people who *aren't* killed by the people who use guns that don't kill people to kill people.

Bullets, after all, don't poison the environment. People do.

And yes, J.N., the gun industry does seem to be quite far behind on the green curve. Which is pretty baffling, since the gun manufacturers introduce innovative new features every year, in their continuous quest to make their products both safer for people who shoot them and more lethal for anyone who gets shot. Why not greener, safer, and more lethal?

Glock did introduce green versions of seven of its popular handgun models in 2004—which seemed really exciting, until it turned out that the guns were actually just green instead of black.

And while there's been a big push to develop lead-free hunting ammo—and likewise to make the bullets at firing ranges more eco-friendly—the vast quantities of bullets we use in homicides continue to pump lead into the soil.

The good news is that the U.S. Military, which uses guns to shoot a lot of people (and legitimately so), is showing a real and growing commitment to all kinds of sustainable practices, with the launch of major recycling programs as well as water and energy conservation initiatives—which include solar-powered tents and the development of biofuels for fighter jets.

The bad news is that the military is moving much more slowly on technologies to green up firearms.

And the worse news is that we seem to be inexplicably losing the green arms race to the British. Yes, that's right. The British. Since 2006, the Ministry of Defence has contracted with the arms-manufacture titan BAE to develop green ammunition—having become convinced that the lead in bullets "can harm the environment and pose a risk to people." They're moving, too, to develop greener, reduced-smoke grenades. Also greener, quieter bombs to reduce noise pollution. And also greener, compostable explosives that can break down into manure—apparently in a cutting-edge effort to enrich enemy soil.

Seriously, *the British*—whom the American army first defeated 235 years ago, in the very war that inspired the 2nd Amendment right to own guns because "a well regulated Militia [is] necessary."

Which is exactly what now guarantees the right to conceal a 9mm semiautomatic handgun with a 10-shot clip in your pocket so you can kill someone when they nab your parking space.

(On the cool side, the U.S. Army did just deploy the Quantum Aggressor diesel-electric hybrid off-road reconnaissance vehicle, which has an all-battery silent mode—which can be very useful in hostile territory.)

Of course, what will absolutely, ultimately, really make the difference is if each and every individual gun consumer can green up his or her own gun cabinet, at home and at work—which is why we really need to see Glock and other manufacturers produce low-toxic guns and ammo for the retail markets. And we need to see this happen especially in the United States—since people just don't kill such huge numbers of people in Britain, Australia, and other countries with gun-control laws that do more than require people without criminal records to wait up to three days before they can shoot someone.

Imagine if every single one of the 68 million gun owners in the U.S. could choose to purchase lead-free bullets. Americans own 283 million guns! 50 million more new guns since President Obama was elected! Imagine the difference we could make.

And yes, J.N., imagine if every single professional assassin—worldwide!—could buy Glocks made from plastics that are recyclable, and could buy AK47s made from metals that are sustainably mined.

Of course, I do have to encourage you at the same time—and seriously, please don't be angry now—to put as much consideration into reducing your impact not just on the environment but on people. Since the gun consumers in your profession also do, as you clearly must know, have a significant footprint in this regard.

Have you considered, for example, that for every person you shoot, you might make a substantial donation to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence? Or to the Violence Policy Center, which hasn't tried so hard to assure would-be homicidal maniacs that it's not trying to prevent them from buying a gun as long as they've committed no previous crimes, have never truly scared a psychiatrist, and have the patience to wait, you know, up to three days.

Or to the Gun Control Network in Britain—since they did have 51 gun homicides in the U.K. last year in England, Scotland, and Wales combined. Or to Amer-I-Can, Homeboy Industries, or one of the other excellent groups in Los Angeles, my hometown, that's working to reduce gang violence.

In other words, when one family grieves anywhere, it's enormously important that another family be spared anywhere else. Your personal actions in one place should in no way increase the total number of homicides across the globe. And more, if you donate enough to prevent more than one homicide for each one you commit, then you can actually even save lives every time you carry out a contract.

In the meantime, you'll want to focus on all the things you *can* do to reduce your personal environmental footprint. You'll need to dispose of your guns properly—which means to avoid dumping them in rivers or lakes (as opposed to dumping the bodies, which will in fact biodegrade far more effectively than in a formal burial)—or in dumpsters either, where they'll end up in landfills. You might find someone you trust who can melt the sniper rifles down for you and recycle them as scrap metal. Which also ensures they won't end up in an evidence room (since TV detectives, at least, always find the guns in the dumpsters).

If you travel often internationally, then purchase carbon offsets when you fly. Rent the fastest hybrids when you drive. Take public transportation, when speed really isn't of the essence. Shred and recycle your files after you're done with them. Just all the obvious stuff. You know what it is. Wow.

*Green Me Up, JJ is an occasional advice column. You can [e-mail JJ](#) with your burning questions about how to act and think environmentally smart in our complicated 21st-century world.*