

Safety - The Fundamentals of Firearm Safety



The three basic general rules of safe gun handling.

- Always point the muzzle in a safe direction; never point a firearm at anyone or anything you don't want to shoot.
- Keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.
- Keep the action open and the gun unloaded until you are ready to use it.

Additional specific rules of safe firearm handling.

- Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
- Never pass a firearm to another person, or accept a firearm from another person, until the cylinder or action is open and you've personally checked that the weapon is completely unloaded.
- Before handling any firearm, understand its operation.
- Never rely on any mechanical device for safety.
- Think before shooting: once you pull the trigger you can't take back the shot you've just fired!
- Never joke around while handling or using firearms.
- Be alert at all times; never shoot if you're tired, cold or impaired in any way. Don't mix alcohol or drugs with shooting.
- Safeguard your sight, hearing and health. Always wear eye and ear protection. Endeavor to limit your exposure to heavy metal particulates and gases and minimize your contact with aromatic organic solvents (such as those commonly used in gun cleaning products).
- If you see unsafe behaviour any time when firearms are being handled or used, speak up and take action to correct the unsafe behaviour at once.

- Receive competent instruction from a qualified person before beginning to shoot. If questions arise later, after you've been shooting for a period of time, get answers to those questions from a competent authority.

Safety Rules Related to Your Target.

- Positively identify your target.
- What's behind your target? Always make sure that a stray shot, or a bullet which penetrates its intended target through and through, will be safely stopped.
- Never shoot a rifle or handgun directly upwards, or at a high angle of elevation.

Safety Rules Related to Your Firearm.

- Make sure your firearm is in good mechanical condition before firing it. Periodically have your firearm checked for signs of erosion, cracking, or wear by the factory, by a qualified armorer, or by a factory certified gunsmith.
- Never try to fire a gun which may have a plugged or partially obstructed barrel.
- Ensure that any modifications made to a firearm are made by a qualified individual, and that those modifications don't interfere with your firearm's safety features.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that your firearm is always either about your person and under your personal control, or positively secured from access by children or other unauthorized parties. Prevent tragedy: lock down your firearms when they aren't in use.
- When storing a firearm for a long period of time, consider storing the slide, bolt, or other critical components of the firearm separately under separate lock and key.
- Generally, avoid unloading a firearm by working the cartridges through the action one-at-a-time; drop the magazine and then eject the round which may be left in the chamber, instead, if possible.
- Never use a scope mounted on a firearm as a general purpose spotting scope: while observing an area you may end up accidentally aiming your firearm at fellow hunters, or other non-targets.
- Avoid trying to catch a live round (while unloading a semiautomatic rifle) by cupping your hand around the ejection port while retracting the slide; doing so may result in an accidental discharge.

Safety Rules Related to Ammunition.

- Be sure your gun and ammunition are compatible. Shooting incorrect ammunition in a firearm may cause it to be damaged or even make it blow up.
- Relying on ammunition which doesn't feed reliably in your particular firearm may make your firearm malfunction at a critical juncture: get experience with a particular lot of ammunition in your firearm before relying on it for defensive purposes.
- Use only ammunition recommended for your firearm by its manufacturer. Never fire ammunition which exceeds industry standard pressure specifications. Over-pressure ammunition will reduce the

service life of your handgun and puts you and those around you at risk of a catastrophic firearm failure.

- Use reloaded ammunition judiciously. Be aware that many firearms manufacturers specifically forbid the use of reloaded ammunition in their products and will void their product's warranty if you elect to use reloaded ammunition in contravention of their instructions.

Miscellaneous Safety Rules.

- At a range, obey the commands of the range conducting officers, or any individual calling 'cease fire,' at once. Read, know and follow any rules peculiar to a particular range which you may be using.
- Keep your fingers and other parts of your body away from the muzzle, the rear of the slide, and the ejection area of a semiautomatic rifle.
- In the event of a misfire, keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction, remove your finger from the trigger, wait ten seconds, then eject the cartridge and dispose of it properly.
- If you hear an unusual sound upon squeezing the trigger or feel an unusual recoil, stop shooting and investigate. You may have experienced a "squib" load (or under-powered cartridge), and it may have caused a bore obstruction. Keep the firearm pointed in a safe direction, remove your finger from the trigger, wait ten seconds, then unload the firearm and safely examine the barrel, checking carefully for any possible obstructions before reloading and resuming shooting.
- Blackpowder (and replica blackpowder) firearms require additional safety precautions not discussed here. Obtain qualified instruction in the safe operation of blackpowder firearms before attempting to load or fire any such firearm.
- Circumstances may require additional safety rules unique to a particular situation.

Safe Gun Storage.

- When you are not using your firearm, you should ensure that it is stored safely. Affirmative measures designed to prevent unauthorized access to a defensive firearm by minors, or firearm theft, include:
 - Use of trigger locks or padlocks to secure firearms.

Also note that:

- Gun security devices which rely solely on physical strength to secure firearms from unauthorized use are generally undesirable since ingenious children can potentially employ leverage or tools to overcome those devices.
- "Hiding" a firearm won't secure it from discovery and possible misuse by curious children or intruders.

- Metal gun cabinets or gun safes must be used to safeguard firearms from unauthorized access or theft in all home circumstances and metal gun cabinets or gun safes are generally preferable to open racks or glass-front cabinets.
- Firearms should be stored unloaded and separate from ammunition.
- You may want to store critical components of a firearm (such as the gun's bolt or slide) separately from the rest of the firearm when the gun won't be used in the immediate future.
- Explore "gun-proofing" your child by proper training, and by controlled and closely supervised access to firearms to reduce your child's natural unsatisfied curiosity about firearms.