

GUN SAFETY

The first and most fundamental rule of shooting is to be able to handle a gun safely. Firearms are not inherently dangerous – they only become so when they are incorrectly or carelessly handled. Always observe safe procedures when using firearms, and in doing so you will be respected as a safe shooter with whom others are happy to shoot.

Checking the state of your firearm

- Whenever you pick a gun up or have one passed to you by someone else, check whether it is loaded by opening the breech or, if it is a rifle, drawing back the bolt. Do this without fail, even if you believe the gun to be empty.
- When passing a gun to someone else, make sure it is unloaded before passing it in such a manner that the other person can see the empty breech or chamber.
- With a magazine shotgun or rifle, remember that there may still be ammunition in the magazine, even if the chamber is empty.
- Check that your gun is unloaded before putting it into its slip or case, before bringing it into a house and before putting it away in its storage cabinet.
- Never load a gun in a house.

In the field

- When carrying a shotgun or rifle in the field, never point it at anyone, or at anything you do not intend to shoot. Keep the barrel(s) pointing either at the ground or at the sky. Cultivate ‘muzzle awareness’ so that you know instinctively at all times where your gun is pointing.
- Load your gun with the barrel pointing in a safe direction. Close a shotgun by bringing the stock up to meet the barrel. Always keep your fingers clear of the trigger when loading and closing a firearm.
- Keep the safety catch on until the moment you raise your gun to fire it. Remember that the safety catch on many shotguns only locks the triggers and does not necessarily prevent the gun from firing. Only you can do that by unloading it.
- Ensure you are using ammunition of the correct bore and never mix cartridges of different bores. A small bore cartridge may drop into the chamber of a gun allowing a larger one to be loaded behind it. If the gun is fired, the pressure in the breech will be so high that the barrel may burst. Loading the wrong calibre cartridge in a rifle can also have disastrous consequences.
- Never allow the barrel to be obstructed by mud, snow, twigs or other debris. If you think that you may have an obstruction, use a cleaning

rod or pull-through to clear the barrel before continuing to shoot. Regularly check for obstructions before loading.

- When taking a shot, always ensure that there is a safe area behind your target. If you are using a shotgun, only take a shot when there is a backdrop of solid ground or clear sky. If you are using a rifle, only shoot when there is a solid backstop of earth. Trees or bushes are not a safe backstop.
- Remember that a shot from a rifle or shotgun may ricochet from stony or frozen ground, or from water.
- Always be aware of where your companions, or other members of the public, may be. Never shoot if, in doing so, you may endanger another person.
- Take special care when animals are present. Horses may be alarmed at the sound of your shot, thus endangering riders or other people.

Crossing obstacles

- Many shooting accidents occur when crossing obstacles. When crossing a fence or other obstacle alone, unload your gun, place it on the far side of the obstacle where it will not fall over, negotiate the obstacle, pick up your gun and continue.
- When crossing an obstacle with another shooter, both shooters unload and the first shooter passes his gun, open and empty, to the other before crossing the obstacle. The second shooter then passes both guns, open and empty, to the first shooter, before crossing the obstacle. The first shooter returns the second shooter's gun, and both then continue.

Guns and vehicles

- Always check that a gun is unloaded before placing it in a vehicle.
- A gun should not normally be loaded and fired from a vehicle. However, there are occasions when a vehicle may properly be used as a platform for pest control. Ensure that the shooter has a proper seat, cradle or rest to shoot from, and that he does not shoot over or across the driver or another passenger. Shooting from a vehicle is a skilled operation, not suited to the beginner.

Firearms security

- You are responsible for ensuring that your shotgun or firearm and ammunition do not fall into the hands of an unauthorised person.
- Never leave a gun or ammunition unattended. Store it in its locked gun cabinet or other approved storage facility when it is not in use. Rifle ammunition must be stored separately under lock and key.
- Take special care when travelling with your gun. Avoid leaving it in an unattended vehicle. If you have to do so, then ensure that it is out of sight in a locked luggage compartment and remove a key component such as the fore-end of a shotgun or the bolt of a rifle and carry it with you. Park the car in a well-lit place where it may be observed.

Damaged or defective guns

- If your gun develops a fault, or if it is damaged in any way, do not use it. Take it to a competent gunsmith and have the fault rectified.
- Ensure that your gun is properly maintained. Clean it after shooting and before returning it to its store. Have it checked over annually by a competent gunsmith. Badly maintained guns present a safety hazard.
- Always use ammunition which corresponds with the proof marks on your gun. Using ammunition which generates higher pressures than your gun was designed for is very dangerous.

Noise

Shotguns and rifles generate sufficiently high levels of noise to cause damage to your hearing and that of people in close proximity. Wear hearing protection when using a gun and consider fitting your rifle with a sound moderator.

Enjoy your shooting – safely!

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