

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FIREARM SAFETY

1st Commandment of Firearm Safety

Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.

This is the most important gun safety rule. A safe direction is one in which an accidental discharge will not cause injury to yourself or others. Never allow your gun to point at anything you don't intend to shoot. Be especially careful when you're loading or unloading. Treat every gun as if it were loaded. And make it a habit to know where your muzzle is pointed at all times, even when your firearm is unloaded.



No one will be injured by an accidental discharge if you keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction. It's as simple as that.

The Ten Commandments of Firearms Safety should be etched in your memory forever. Let them govern your actions wherever and whenever you're involved with firearms. In the woods. On the range. Or in your home. Please take time to review and understand these rules.

2nd Commandment of Firearm Safety

Firearms should be unloaded when not actually in use.

Load your firearm only when you're in the field or on the target range and ready to fire. Never let a loaded gun out of your sight or out of your hands. Unload it as soon as you're finished shooting - before you bring it into your car, camp, or home. Remember, unloading your firearm means unloading it completely, so there is no ammunition in the chamber or in the magazine.

Before handling a firearm or passing it to someone else, visually check the chamber, receiver and magazine to be certain they do not contain ammunition. Always keep the gun's action open when not in use. Never assume a gun is unloaded even if you were the last person to use it. Always check for yourself.

Let common sense rule when you carry a loaded gun. If you're in any situation that could risk accidental discharge - such as crossing a fence, wading through a stream, or climbing a tree - always unload your gun. Never pull or push a loaded firearm toward yourself or another person. And never carry a loaded gun in a scabbard, detached holster or gun case.



Safe storage of firearms is just as critical as safe handling. Never store guns loaded and be sure to keep your firearms in a secure place where no one can get their hands on them without your knowledge.

Take special care if there are children around. Kids are fascinated by guns. It's a natural curiosity that can have tragic consequences when not properly supervised. Store your firearms in a locked gun safe or some other location that physically bars a child from gaining access. Ammunition should be stored and locked in a location separate from your firearms. Never leave an unsecured firearm or ammunition in a closet, dresser drawer or under the bed. Remember, it is your responsibility to make sure that children and others unfamiliar with firearms cannot get access to your firearms and ammunition.

3rd Commandment of Firearm Safety

Don't rely on your gun's safety.

Treat every gun as if it can fire at any time, whether or not there's pressure on the trigger.

Your firearm has been carefully designed to maximize performance and safety. However, a gun's safety is a mechanical device and, like any mechanical device, it could fail.

Human error is a more likely reason for a gun safety to fail. By mistake, you may think the safety is on when it really isn't. Or the safety may have been disengaged without your knowledge. Or you could think your gun is unloaded when there's actually a cartridge or shell in it. A safety is not a substitute for common sense. It's merely a supplement to your proper handling of a firearm.

Don't touch the trigger on a firearm until you are ready to shoot. Keep your fingers away from the trigger when you're loading or unloading. And don't pull the trigger when the safety is engaged or positioned anywhere between safe and fire.

Read your instruction manual to understand the exact location and operation of your firearm's safety. Even when the safety is on, maintain control of your loaded firearm and control the direction of the muzzle. In other words, don't rely on your safety to justify careless handling. If your firearm's internal mechanisms are broken or have been altered, your firearm may fire even when the safety is on. Remember, you and your safe gun handling practices are your gun's best safety.

4th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Be sure of your target and what's beyond it.

You can't stop a shot in mid-air, so do not fire unless you know exactly where your shot is going and what it will strike. Never fire at a sound, a movement or a patch of color. A hunter in camouflage can easily be mistaken for a target by an impulsive shooter. Before you pull the trigger be absolutely sure of your target and what's behind it. Make sure your shot has a backstop such as a hillside or dense material like sand.



Remember, bullets can travel great distances with tremendous velocity. Know how far your shot will go if you miss your target or the bullet ricochets.

5th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Use Proper Ammunition.

Every firearm is designed to use a certain caliber or gauge of ammunition. Using the wrong ammunition, mixing ammunition or using improperly reloaded ammunition can cause serious personal injury or death. And it only takes one cartridge or shotshell of the incorrect caliber or gauge, or which has been improperly reloaded to destroy your firearm.

As a gun owner it's your responsibility to make sure the ammunition you use exactly matches the caliber or gauge of your gun. Refer to the instruction manual to find out the specific requirements of your firearm. Always read and heed the instructions on ammunition boxes.

Confusing shells or cartridges can cause serious personal injury or death and destroy your firearm. Examine your shells and cartridges closely and use only the precise caliber or gauge for your specific firearm.

For example, suppose you accidentally loaded a 20 ga. shell into a 12 ga. shotgun. Because the 20 ga. shell is too small for the chamber, the 20 ga. shell could travel down the barrel and get lodged in the bore. If you then loaded a standard 12 ga. shell behind it and fire, the 12 ga. shot will slam into the lodged 20 ga. shell and may cause the barrel to explode right in your hands. This is commonly called a 12/20 burst, and it can kill you.

Check all ammunition before you load it to make sure it matches your gun's requirements. Every cartridge and shell is head-stamped with its caliber or gauge for easy identification. Likewise, you'll find the caliber or gauge of your new firearm imprinted on the barrel.

Reloading Requires Extra Diligence.

If you're an ammunition reloader, you are responsible for personally assuring that the loads and components of your reloaded ammunition meet your gun's factory-tested standards. Never use ammunition which has been reloaded by someone else!

Many shooters handload as a hobby or to save money on commercial, factory-made ammunition. However, it requires a thorough knowledge of reloading procedures and a deep respect for the explosive potential of gunpowder.

Firearms are designed, manufactured and proof-tested to standards based on factory loaded ammunition. Handloaded or reloaded ammunition that deviates, either intentionally or inadequately, from load or component recommendations can be very dangerous. Reloaders must observe all possible safety precautions and practices related to the proper handling of explosives. Whether you're a seasoned reloader or just starting out, you should study the subject, watch reloading demonstrations and talk to experienced reloaders.

The first rule of reloading is to always follow the manufacturer's instructions for the components you're using. They'll tell you to follow certain guidelines. Namely:

1. Don't mix or substitute powders or primers.
2. Don't use unknown or substandard components.
3. Use only suitable components that have been factory tested by reputable ammunition, powder and bullet manufacturers.
4. Always be sure to use the manufacturer's recommended recipe when reloading.

Not following these guidelines could result in severe damage to your firearm or yourself. Dangerously high pressure and explosions can result from an overcharge of powder, use of the wrong powder, incorrect shot selection or other deviations from established reloading guidelines. Be very careful.

The process of reloading exposes you to environmentally hazardous materials. Lead is the most common substance in bullets and shot. It is important to handle lead bullets and shot with extreme care. Work only in a well-ventilated area and always wash your hands after exposure and before eating. Never smoke while reloading.

Primers and powders are also highly toxic and flammable. So after reloading, be sure to clean up all materials from your work area. Don't leave primer or powder spills anywhere on the floor or bench top. Dispose of all waste materials in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

Finally, when reloading or handloading concentrate on what you're doing at all times. Do not be distracted by talking to others, listening to the radio or watching TV while reloading. Never reload after or while consuming alcoholic beverages or drugs of any

kind. You are working with extremely hazardous materials and you can't risk even a few seconds of distraction. Remember, if you reload, you are the ammunition manufacturer and you are responsible for the performance and safety of your reloaded ammunition.

6th Commandment of Firearm Safety

If your gun fails to fire when the trigger is pulled, handle with care.

If for some reason the ammunition doesn't fire when you pull the trigger, stop and remember the 1st Commandment of Firearm Safety - always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. Keep your face away from the breech, then put the safety on, carefully open the action, unload the firearm and dispose of the cartridge safely. Remember anytime there's a shell in the chamber, your gun is loaded and ready to use. Even if you tried to shoot and your gun didn't fire, treat your firearm as if it could still discharge.

7th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Always wear eye and ear protection when shooting.

Your sight and hearing risk injury from shooting and should be protected at all times.

Wear protective shooting glasses to guard against falling shot, clay target chips, powder residue, ruptured cartridge cases and even twigs and branches in the field. Also be sure to wear eye protection when you're disassembling or cleaning a gun so that tensioned parts (like springs) and cleaning solvents don't come in contact with your eyes.



Continued exposure to shooting noise can permanently damage your hearing. On the range, where shooting volume is the loudest, be sure to use the maximum protection of a headset. And learn to use earplugs in the field, especially in confined locations like duck blinds.

8th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before shooting.

Before loading your gun, open the action and make sure there's no ammunition in the chamber or magazine. Check the barrel for any obstructions or debris. Even a small amount of snow, mud, excess lubricant or grease in the bore can dangerously increase pressure and cause the barrel to bulge or burst when firing. Use a cleaning rod and patch to wipe away anti-rust compounds or any other residues or obstructions in the barrel. Never try to shoot out an obstruction by loading another shell and firing!

When firing, rely on your instincts. If the noise or recoil from your firearm seems off or weak, stop everything, unload your firearm and be sure nothing is lodged in the barrel. Remember the 12/20 burst? That's what can happen when the barrel is obstructed. So always be sure you're using the correct ammunition in your firearm and that it's free of obstructions.

9th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Don't alter or modify your gun and have it serviced regularly.

Your firearm has been designed to operate according to certain factory specifications. You'll jeopardize your safety and that of others around you by attempting to alter its trigger, safety or other mechanisms. So never alter or modify your firearm in any way.

Like any mechanical device, a firearm is subject to wear. It must be maintained and periodically serviced to assure optimum safety and performance.

Don't allow anyone to service, repair or modify your firearm unless they are a qualified service facility.



Proper cleaning and lubrication are also important to firearm maintenance and are necessary to assure accuracy, safety, and reliability. Before cleaning, always make sure that your gun is completely unloaded. And always clean the barrel from the chamber end to the muzzle when possible.

Make it a practice to clean your bore every time you're going to shoot. Be sure to clean your entire gun before and after long-term storage, and no less than once a year. It's also important to clean your gun whenever it's been exposed to adverse conditions such as rain, dirt, mud, snow, sleet or saltwater.

For safe and dependable operation of your firearm, all parts of your gun must be properly cleaned and lubricated. Periodically inspect the internal workings of your firearm to be sure they're clean and free of rust, unwanted dirt and debris.

Use recommended lubricants on your gun and do not over-lubricate. Excessive use of a non-recommended lubricant could adversely affect the function and safe operation of your firearm. Remember, you are responsible for the proper care and maintenance of your firearm. Failure to properly maintain your firearm can not only damage or ruin your firearm, it can expose you and others to unnecessary risks of personal injury or death.

10th Commandment of Firearm Safety

Learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the firearm you are using.

Not all guns are alike. They have different mechanical characteristics that dictate how you should carry and handle them. Anyone who plans to use a firearm should first become totally familiar with the type of firearm it is and the safe handling procedures for loading, unloading, carrying, shooting and storing it.

Before you even unpack your new firearm, read the instruction manual from cover to cover and familiarize yourself with the different component parts of the gun. Then read, understand and follow the ten commandments of safety.

Shoot Sober

There's one other rule that must be followed when handling firearms. In fact, respect for this rule is necessary in order to effectively practice the Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety. The rule is: SHOOT SOBER!

Alcohol, drugs and guns are a deadly combination. Never consume anything that would even mildly impair your judgment or physical coordination when you're using a firearm. A staggering percentage of the shooting accidents that occur every year involve alcohol or drugs. Be smart. **Shoot sober and stay alive.**

Ten Commandments of Hunting Safety

- 1.** Treat every firearm with the same respect due a loaded firearm.
- 2.** Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle.
- 3.** Be sure of your target and what is beyond it.
- 4.** Be sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions.
- 5.** Unload firearms when not in use.
- 6.** Never point a firearm at anything you do not intend to shoot.
- 7.** Never climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch or log, with a loaded firearm.
- 8.** Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water.
- 9.** Store firearms and ammunition separately.
- 10.** Avoid alcoholic beverages or other mood-altering drugs before or while shooting.