



- A SPECIAL REPORT -

# FIREARMS SAFETY

USING AND  
STORING YOUR  
FIREARMS  
SAFELY

**fpa\***

**Family Protection**  
ASSOCIATION





# FIREARMS SAFETY

## Using and storing your firearms safely

***F***or anyone that uses a firearm, safety and knowing how to use a weapon is of paramount concern, and the same principle holds true for anyone contemplating a firearm purchase. Firearm safety involves both the safe use of a weapon as well as safe storage of firearms in the home.

*The following guide highlights all of the things you need to know to keep you and your loved ones safe when using and storing firearms.*

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## Point the Muzzle in a Safe Direction

This piece of advice is the most essential rule to know about firearms. Even when you are storing a weapon in your home, pointing a weapon's muzzle safely prevents unnecessary disasters. Simply put, if everyone followed this advice, firearm accidents

would be practically non-existent.

As such, never point your weapon at anything that you do not have the intention of shooting, particularly when you are loading and unloading your firearm. Should an accidental discharge occur during the reloading process, you will have no accident if your firearm is pointing in a safe direction at all times.

Safe direction means any direction

where a bullet cannot strike anyone. However, you must also consider potential ricochets and that bullets are capable of penetrating ceilings, walls and other objects. Due to this, a safe direction will vary depending on your location and surroundings, but the one constant rule is never to point a weapon at anyone or anything that would not be intended as a target.

This is the case even when you are dry firing an unloaded gun. In short, it is always best to be as cautious as possible, so get in the habit of knowing where your gun muzzle points at all times. Along these lines, maintain control of your muzzle's direction, even if you should stumble or lose your balance. When it comes to gun safety, maintaining muzzle control is always your greatest responsibility.

# Make Sure Your Firearms Are Always Unloaded When They Aren't Being Used

Another key firearm safety principle requires that you load your weapons only when they are being used at a time that you are ready to shoot. If you are at a target range, shooting area or loading your weapon for self-defense, these are the only times that your weapon should be loaded. When your firearm is not being used, ammunition and the weapon should be placed in separate locations from each other. This principle ensures that other adults and children will not have access to your firearms and ammunition, preventing unnecessary accidents in the process.

The moment you are finished with your firearm, unload it. Too many firearm owners keep a loaded weapon in their vehicles and homes, enhancing the odds that an unfortunate accident might occur. Regarding how to handle a weapon to make sure it is unloaded, always open the action immediately so that you visually inspect the chamber, receiver and magazine. This allows you to be absolutely sure that there is no ammunition in your weapon



since you should never assume that a firearm is unloaded. This is a key distinction between wise gun owners and those making key safety mistakes.

Additionally, never perform unsafe actions when you are carrying a loaded gun. Do not perform activities like crossing fences or performing other unsafe actions with a loaded weapon. This may require you to unload your weapon at certain points while you are in the field, and this advice is particularly helpful for staying safe in tricky terrain while hunting. Also, avoid pulling or pushing a loaded weapon towards you or another person. In short, if there is any doubt that a loaded gun will compromise your safety, make the smart choice and unload your firearm.

## Don't Rely Exclusively on Your Gun's "Safety"

A key principle of operating a firearm is that you must treat it as though it can go off at any time. Too many well intentioned gun owners treat the gun's safety as a foolproof safety solution. The safety, by contrast, is a mechanical device that prevents the gun from firing when it is working, but it is not foolproof. Like all mechanical things, it could become inoperable, so never think your weapon is safe simply because the safety is on.

Additionally, you might think the safety is on when it is actually off. A safety, then, is to be treated as an added help to proper gun safety protocols, but it is not meant to function as a substitute for firearm safety procedures and practices.

Avoid touching the trigger on your gun until you are going to actually shoot, as mentioned previously. Keep your fingers away from the trigger while unloading or reloading, and never pull the trigger of your weapon with the safety on the

safe position or anywhere between the safety and firing positions. These three bedrock principles of gun safety are particularly important with regards to the safety of the weapon. The gun is capable of firing at any time if you make any of these safety mistakes, even if you don't touch the trigger again.

Further, do not place the safety in between positions. Always keep the safety on until you are positive that you are ready to fire the weapon. Even with the safety on, a strong blow can actually activate the firing mechanism of a firearm, causing it to fire. This happens even if you don't touch the trigger, with a classic example of this being when you drop a firearm. Due to this, take care that you have a firm handle on your weapon at all times, and do not rest it against anything where it has the possibility of falling over and discharging.

The only times you can be positive your weapon can't fire is if the action is open and it is entirely empty. Otherwise, your weapon can fire, so don't rely exclusively on your firearm's safety mechanism. You and the safe gun principles and tips in this guide are your best weapons safety protocol.

## Use the Correct Type of Ammunition for Your Firearm



Part of being a responsible gun owner is knowing the right ammunition for your weapon. Make sure to read all warnings in the gun's instruction manual and ammunition boxes to avoid any foolish mishaps. All it takes is one improper cartridge to destroy your weapon or cause injury, so take the small amount of time to discern that you are using the correct ammunition. Using wrong ammo for your weapon has serious consequences ranging from permanently destroying a gun to causing

you or others significant personal injury. Make sure that the ammo you use is of the correct specification as outlined in your gun's instruction manual.

Firearms are created with standards that are based upon factory loaded ammunition. Due to this, ammunition that deviates from these standards can be dangerous and cause serious damage to weapons and shooters alike. Classic examples of such ammunition are hand loaded or reloaded ammo that have pressures which differ from factory loads. Make the wise choice and avoid using reloads and ammunition that are comprised of unknown components.

Moreover, ammunition that has become wet ought to be disposed of safely. Further, avoid spraying solvents on your ammunition or placing ammunition in overly lubricated guns. These conditions can cause damage to your weapon, yourself and others, while your gun's performance may suffer as well.

If you examine each and every cartridge that you put into your weapon, you will be taking the necessary steps toward preventing damage to your weapon and yourself.



# Know What Is in Front of Your Target – And Beyond

Once your weapon fires, there is no undoing the action if you made a mistake. This fact of gun handling makes it essential to know what is front of your target and behind it. Never shoot at anything unless you know what and where your shot is going to strike, and be aware of the surroundings as well in case you miss. This entails making sure that your bullets will not harm anyone or anything beyond or around your targets.

For hunters, never fire at a movement or noise without knowing with absolute certainty what you are firing at. Ignoring this advice potentially puts others in grave danger. There is no such thing as a target so essential that you can't take the extra precious seconds to determine your surrounding and what you might be shooting at. Always take this time to assess what your

target is and where your bullet will ultimately stop.

Even the weakest weapons and bullets can travel over a mile, whereas high velocity bullets can travel for several miles. Shotguns, for their part, can travel well over four football fields if you are firing pellets, and shotgun slugs can travel around half a mile. These are just a few noteworthy examples, but you will want to know how far your bullets could travel if you miss your target or the bullets ricochet in a different direction. Really, this boils down to basic situational awareness, so if there is any doubt that firing your weapon could jeopardize the safety of others, do not fire your weapon.



# Be Extremely Cautious If You Pull the Trigger and the Gun Doesn't Fire

Once you are ready to fire your weapon, if you pull the trigger and the gun doesn't fire, proceed with extreme caution. On occasion, cartridges will not fire when you have pulled the trigger. When this occurs, you must keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction as outlined in the first tip of this guide, making sure you keep your face away from the breech of the weapon. Next, carefully open the action and continue by unloading your gun and discarding the cartridge safely.

Again, any time a cartridge is in the chamber, your gun is ready to fire no matter what. So, even if you tried to shoot and the weapon did not fire, it could still go off at a later time, so watch where the muzzle is pointed.

# Ensure a Barrel Is Free from Obstructions Prior to Firing

*Before you ever even load your gun, open the action of the weapon to make certain that there is no ammo in the magazine or the chamber. Also, be sure that your gun barrel is clear of any obstructions such as mud, snow or excessive lubricating oil. Obstructions such as these can cause a gun barrel to burst when it is fired, causing injuries to the shooter and any other people in the nearby vicinity. Since obstructions are so dangerous, take care to clean the bore and also check for potential obstructions with a quality cleaning rod before firing your weapon.*

*Once you get to know your weapon, you might notice that the recoil and noise of your weapon seems just a bit off. If that is the case, immediately stop firing and check that nothing has become lodged in your weapon's barrel.*

*Tying into this advice is the previous advice to know your ammunition with regards to your weapon. If you load your weapon with a lower gauge or caliber cartridge, it can fall into the barrel and obstruct the bore when a properly sized cartridge is fired from the firearm. So, again, pay careful attention to the ammunition that you are putting into your weapon.*



## Regularly Maintain Your Weapons & Understand Them

It should be clear by this point in the guide that your firearms require regular maintenance and care in order to be used safely and effectively. Due to this, you need to periodically inspect and service your weapons, which you can do by checking with the manufacturer of your gun for their servicing recommendations.

Beyond that, it is also just common sense that no two guns are exactly alike, meaning that the way to carry, handle and maintain your firearms will vary depending on each weapon's characteristics. Due to the varying nature of firearms, become familiar and well versed with your firearms before you handle them. This way, you will know all the best tips, tricks and methods for safely handling and operating your firearm in an ideal manner.

If you do not know how to handle your weapon and have misplaced the manual, you can contact your weapon's manufacturer for a free copy. As you can see, owning and possessing a firearm requires constant monitoring and maintenance. There is no other alternative for a responsible gun owner,

given the safety risks posed by negligent gun owners. Take the time to completely understand your firearm and be responsible at all times.

## Wear Protective Eyewear & Ear Protective Gear

Another crucial aspect of firearm safety is protecting yourself since no firearm is foolproof. Wear protective shooting glasses and a quality form of hearing protection when you are shooting.

While most of the previous safety tips are primarily concerned with the safety of others, this tip is all about protecting you. Consistent exposure to gunfire has the potential to damage your hearing, and having vision protection while shooting is a necessity.

Shooting glasses will guard against firearm malfunctions, ruptured cases, clay target chips or any falling shot. Don't think that eye protection is only essential when shooting, however, since it is also important when disassembling and cleaning your firearm. Wearing protective vision during these maintenance processes prevent the possibility of solvents, chemical agents or gun springs from harming your eyes. There are a wide range of eyewear and ear protection available in every price range, meaning no gun owner, hunter or target shooter should ignore this essential safety gear.

## Keep Your Weapons Safely Stored in the Home

Unfortunately, too many firearm accidents occur in the home, and most of these are entirely avoidable. Taking simple precautions will allow you to prevent accidents with a great degree of certainty. First things first, make sure to store your weapons in a locked cabinet, gun vault, gun safe or storage case whenever you are not using them. This way, they will be locked away and out of the hands of any children.

Another overlooked aspect of this element of gun safety is that, in the event of a break-in when you are not home, criminals will not be able to obtain and use your weapons to potentially harm others in the community. To this end, use a gun locking device for your weapons. Gun locking devices ensure that your firearm is not usable when you do not want to use it, so gun locks ought to be used as an additional safety procedure to implement. While this is not a substitute for safe gun storage, it is another step

that makes gun ownership even safer for everyone.

If you have children, education is an essential responsibility of gun ownership. Instruct your children on the safety protocols required when owning a firearm, and help them understand the severity of gun safety. Further, inform your children that if they ever find a firearm that is unattended and not locked away, they must find and inform an adult immediately.

Also, never procrastinate when it comes to weapon safety. This means that even if you are tired after a hunting trip or an afternoon at the shooting range, unload, clean and lock your firearms away securely in their designated storage location immediately upon returning.

Following all of this essential advice to the letter will keep you and your loved ones safe while exercising your 2nd Amendment rights.

