

I. The Fundamentals of Firearm Safety

The three basic general rules of safe gun handling.

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

II. Additional specific rules of safe gun handling

Safety Rules Related to the Shooter and His Behavior.

1. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
2. 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.
3. Before handling any firearm, understand its operation.
4. Never rely on any mechanical device for safety.
5. Think before shooting: once you pull the trigger you can't take back the shot you've just fired!
6. Never joke around or engage in horseplay while handling or using firearms.
7. 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.
8. Don't sleep with a loaded firearm in your bedroom if you sleepwalk, have nightmares, sleep restlessly or have other sleep problems.
9. 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).
10. If you see unsafe behavior any time when firearms are being handled or used, speak up and take action to correct the unsafe behavior at once.
11. 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.

1. Positively identify your target and the threat it poses before firing at it.

2. 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.
3. Never shoot at a hard surface, or at water -- your shot may glance off, ricochet and injure someone.
4. Never shoot at glass bottles, living trees, or inappropriate targets which would create a hazard for other persons or damage the environment.
5. Never shoot a rifle or handgun directly upwards, or at a high angle of elevation. Even a rimfire .22 bullet fired at an angle into the air can have enough energy a mile and a half away to accidentally kill someone!
6. Never shoot across a highway or other roadway.
7. Never vandalize a road sign (or other public or private property) by using it as a target.
8. Never poach a game animal out of season, or shoot any game animal you don't intend to eat.

Safety Rules Related to Your Firearm.

1. 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.
2. Never try to fire a gun which may have a plugged or partially obstructed barrel.
3. Insure 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.
4. Be sure all accessories, such as holsters and grips, are compatible with the firearm and won't interfere with its safe operation.
5. Remember: a backup firearm carried about your person may be highly valuable to you in the event your primary firearm is ever rendered inoperable or is taken from you by an assailant.
6. It is your responsibility to insure 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.
7. 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.
8. Never carry a single action revolver with a round under the hammer unless that revolver is a modern transfer-bar type, equipped with an inertial firing pin.
9. Never carry a pistol with a round in the chamber unless the pistol has an automatic firing-pin block and/or an inertial firing pin.
10. Generally avoid carrying or storing an external hammer-type firearm with its hammer cocked. Exercise extreme care in decocking any external hammer firearm: it is very easy to experience an accidental discharge while doing so if your thumb slips off the hammer.
11. 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.

12. 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.
13. Avoid trying to catch a live round (while unloading a semiautomatic pistol) 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

Also remember that a cartridge which has: the wrong powder, no powder charge, or too large a powder charge; an inverted primer, mis-seated primer, the wrong type of primer or an inert primer; a mis-seated, inverted, or mis-sized bullet; a collapsed, weakened, improperly sized or mis-crimped case; incorrect overall length or any of a host of other defects may seriously jeopardize your safety, the safety of those around you, and/or the reliability of your firearm in a defensive situation.

Many shooters prepare and safely use reloaded ammunition each day, and it can be an economical way to stretch your ammunition budget, but the safety of that reloaded ammunition directly depends on the care, components, equipment, and practices used in preparing it.

5. Carry only one caliber of ammunition when shooting. Accidentally grabbing the wrong ammunition while shooting can result in a shooter or third party being injured, or damage or destruction of a firearm.
6. Insure you carry sufficient spare ammunition for your defensive firearm, and make sure you carry it in a readily employable fashion (such as in spare magazines or in speedloaders).
7. Store ammunition that isn't being used under lock and key, inaccessible to unauthorized parties and children.
8. Dispose of unwanted ammunition safely.

Safety Rules Related to Your Firearm's Holster and Ammo Carrier.

1. Always use a holster which is designed for, and which fits, your handgun.
2. Make sure your holster covers the trigger guard of your handgun.
3. Purchase a holster which allows you to obtain a secure grip on your handgun while it is still holstered.
4. Be sure the thumb break, safety strap, or other firearm retention device on your holster is functional and consistently employed. A good holster should retain your firearm during normal carry and routine physical activity, but no holster can insure that a firearm will be secure against determined attempts at disarmament, or keep a firearm secure during all possible physical activities.
5. Avoid clip-on holsters and magazine pouches. These carriers may fail to stay clipped to the belt and end up being drawn along with the firearm or the magazine they still hold, thereby interfering with use of the firearm or with timely reloading.
6. Avoid paddle-style holsters, cross draw holsters, and similar holsters which provide poor weapon retention.
7. Avoid ankle holsters, shoulder holsters and other types of holsters which can introduce unnecessary delays in accessing a defensive firearm.
8. Avoid carrying a defensive firearm in a purse, pocketbook, daypack or briefcase. A firearm carried in that fashion is:
 - Typically hard to rapidly access due to the presence of slow-to-open zippers, multiple latches, etc.,
 - Often hard to find and draw amidst all the other items routinely carried, since few purses or briefcases include a dedicated handgun-carrying compartment,
 - Prone to being unavailable when needed, since briefcases, purses and other carriers are routinely set down or put away in a desk drawer where they may or may not be readily accessible and under your physical control,
 - Unusually vulnerable to being stolen, since purses, pocketbooks, daypacks and briefcases are prime targets for purse snatchers, pick pockets, muggers and thieves,
 - Prone to malfunction in an emergency since materials carried along with your handgun in a purse or brief case may gum up the firearm's mechanism and potentially interfere with its proper operation, and
 - Likely to allow your handgun to accidentally become visible to shop clerks, bank tellers or other parties while you are searching for your checkbook or locating a credit card, and that inadvertent exposure may potentially result in a tense situation or even a tragic over-reaction on the part of an individual noticing the firearm and/or summoning law enforcement officers to the scene.
9. Never carry a handgun tucked into your belt or waistband without a holster (i.e., so-called "mexican carry"). A handgun carried in this fashion may be

unintentionally dislodged, fall onto a hard surface and accidentally discharge or be damaged. Inside the waistband-type holsters will allow you to obtain the concealment of this type of carry while simultaneously providing vastly improved firearm retention.

10. Always employ a proper magazine holder or speed loader carrier to carry your spare ammunition. Select a design that secures and protects your speedloaders or magazines while still making them readily available for use. Avoid ammunition loops and ammo dump boxes.
11. Never put a partially empty magazine or speedloader back into a magazine carrier or speedloader pouch: only full magazines or full speedloaders belong in a carrier. Partially empty magazines or speed loaders should go into your pocket; empty magazines or speedloaders should be allowed to fall where they're used during an emergency.

Miscellaneous Safety Rules.

1. At a range, obey the commands of the range 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.
2. Be careful of hot gases and metal shavings ejected at the forcing cone of a revolver.
3. 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 pistol.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Never ---
 - Climb a tree with a loaded firearm,
 - Cross a fence with a loaded firearm,
 - Jump a ditch or ford a stream with a loaded firearm,
 - Scale or descend a steep incline or hill with a loaded firearm,
 - Climb a tree, or climb into a hunting stand with a loaded firearm,
 - Prop or lean a loaded firearm against a tree or other surface which may allow it to slide, or
 - Transport a cased loaded firearm.
7. Always carry your firearms in a way which will allow you to control where the muzzle is pointing, should you stumble or fall.
8. A ballistic vest may substantially improve your chances of surviving an armed encounter on the street.

9. Always wear a thousand square inches or more of blaze orange while in the field during hunting season.
10. 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.
11. Circumstances may require additional safety rules unique to a particular situation.

III. Safe Gun Storage.

When you are not using your firearm, you should insure that it is store safely. Affirmative measures designed to prevent unauthorized access to a defensive firearm by minors, or firearm theft, include:

12. Use of a simplex-type locking box for securing firearms which need to be kept loaded yet available for ready-access defensive use, and
13. Use of trigger locks or padlocks to secure firearms which don't need to be kept immediately available for defensive use.

Also note that:

14. 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.
15. "Hiding" a firearm won't secure it from discovery and possible misuse by curious children or intruders.
16. Metal gun cabinets or gun safes can be used to safeguard firearms from unauthorized access or theft in many circumstances and metal gun cabinets or gun safes are generally preferable to open racks or glass-front cabinets.
17. Firearms should be stored unloaded and separate from ammunition when the firearm isn't needed for ready-access defensive use.
18. 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.
19. Consider engraving your firearms with your social security number, driver's license number, or concealed firearms license number to deter theft and facilitate return of stolen firearms which may happen to be recovered.
20. 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.

