

## ***Safety with Firearms***

(Below is abbreviated from the GHAA Members Handbook)

Anybody interested in hunting will inevitably handle or be in the presence of persons handling firearms. It is therefore of great importance that a person understands and appreciates the **DANGER** of firearms and knows and practices the **SAFETY** rules governing their use. This knowledge may save his or another persons life.

The first thing to bear in mind with regard to hunting is that the firearms used are the most powerful and therefore do the most damage when accidents happen.

While on any course, hunt or shooting party the rules should be repeated and obeyed.

Firstly, people cause accidents, they don't just happen.

Secondly every firearm accident could have been avoided if the Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety had been observed.



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mandments are:-

1. **TREAT EVERY FIREARM WITH THE RESPECT DUE A LOADED FIREARM.** This is the GOLDEN rule of firearms safety. Failing to observe this rule would account for most accidents that happen particularly at close range when people are looking at or handling firearms in a group.
2. **WATCH THAT MUZZLE.** Don't point the firearms at anything you would not shoot. Carry the firearms safely; point it up to the sky or at the ground to the side of you. Don't point at a person in front of you. Keep the safety catch on until you are ready to shoot or better still don't 'cock' the firearms until you are ready to shoot.

In a vehicle carry the uncocked firearms with the muzzle up only if there are no passengers and there is no danger, or with the muzzle down. With the muzzle down there is a danger of blocking the barrel tip or of a

ricochet if the firearms goes off. In a firearms case the blocking danger does not arise.

Be able to control the direction of the muzzle even if you should stumble.

3. **BE SURE THAT THE BARREL AND ACTION ARE CLEAN AND CLEAR OF OBSTRUCTION.** An obstruction in the barrel can cause phenomenal pressure build-up in a barrel when a good cartridge is fired in an obstructed barrel. This pressure build-up will probably cause a barrel to burst.

Obstructions can be caused by any of the following:-

- Using ammo of the wrong type for the particular firearms, this can lodge in the barrel.
- Mud or snow can be picked up in the muzzle if this is dug into the ground while carrying.
- Water or snow can enter the muzzle if the firearm is slung, muzzle up in the normal fashion for carrying. A previous dud cartridge may have gone off but with insufficient power to drive the slug right through the barrel.
- A barrel greased for storage may not have been cleaned properly before firing.
- Avoid this danger by putting a ramrod with cleaning patch through the firearms from the rear end before using it, and then carrying it in such a way as to prevent any further blocking. Casualties from this type of accident usually happen at close quarters.

**Further Safety Tips - In Case of a "Mis-Fire"** - If the firearm fails to fire on pulling the trigger, a mechanically delayed firing may occur or the firearms may fire on opening, causing serious injury. Keep the firearms pointed in a safe direction and away from bystanders. Wait 30 seconds, carefully unload avoiding any exposure to the breech, check the cartridge, if the percussion cap indicates correct striking of the firing pin then the cartridge is at fault. If not, then the firing mechanism is faulty, a dangerous fault which should be attended to by your gunsmith before continuing.

4. **BE SURE OF THE TARGET BEFORE YOU SHOOT.** Know the identifying features of the game you hunt. Game does not wear clothing so don't shoot at a movement in the bush, it may be your buddy in camouflage. If you are not sure of your shooting partners – wear an

approved orange garment! Game animals have monochrome vision so it won't bother them.

5. **UNLOAD FIREARMS WHEN NOT IN USE.** An unloaded firearm cannot discharge and the only way it can cause an accident is if it falls off a shelf or rack and hits somebody. All firearms should be taken down when not in use and in a camp or in company, the actions then left OPEN so that everybody can see that they are not loaded. Trigger locks are an innovation that should be used by all shooters.

To unload a firearm the following procedure could be considered safe:-

- See that nobody is around you.
- Point the firearm in a downward and safe direction.
- Remove the magazine and/or every cartridge in the magazine.
- Work the action fully, including locking the bolt into the shooting position.
- Work again to remove any cartridge in the breech.
- Open the action and check the breech by sight and feel (some breeches such as lever actions are covered and it is absolutely necessary to feel with the finger).
- Remove any cartridge in the breech. (If the cartridge in the breech refuses to extract, close the action and **safely and legally discharge** the cartridge). Remove the fired shell by mechanical means.
- The firearm is now safe and may be put away.

Carry your firearm to the shooting area in cases/bags and do not load or unload them in camp. Consider the legal transportation requirements of firearms if public land is being traversed, including roadways.

6. **NEVER POINT A FIREARM AT ANYTHING YOU DON'T WISH TO SHOOT.** Avoid all frivolous play with firearms. Accidents can happen at any time anywhere through inattentive care by a handler. Don't point the firearm at people. Store firearms and ammo separately, safely, legally and beyond the reach of children. Ensure your projectile stays within the boundary of the property you have permission to shoot on.
7. **NEVER CLIMB A TREE OR FENCE OR JUMP A DITCH WITH A LOADED FIREARM.** If you have to climb a tree to see where you are leave the firearm on the ground lying down and not pointing up the tree. Jumping a ditch is dangerous as you could stumble and set off the firearm so unload and hold the firearms across your body before proceeding. When climbing a fence place the "made safe" firearm on the ground under the fence with the muzzle pointing away in line with the fence.

Negotiate the fence down side of the butt or stock end of the firearm and then when through lift up your firearms ensuring that the muzzle is pointing in a safe direction. When with a friend, before climbing the fence give him the firearm to hold while you negotiate the fence and then take it from him while he climbs over. Never pull a firearm towards you by the muzzle, a twig could snag the trigger and if loaded the firearm will go off. Accidents occurring at ditches, fences and similar obstructions are usually self inflicted but one can easily put others in danger by being careless.

8. **NEVER SHOOT A BULLET AT FLAT HARD SURFACE OR WATER.** Be sure of your backstop and know the range of your rifle. A rule of thumb for ranges:-

Shotgun Shot	(300 m)
.22 Rifle	(1.5klm)
.3006 Rifle (or .303)	(5.6klm)

Your backstop must be adequate to STOP the bullet. Accidents have been recorded where a hunter has fatally shot a deer but the bullet continued to inflict injury on someone else.

***More information on this subject and many other subjects, can be found in the GHAA Members Handbook which all members receive upon joining.***