

Technical Note No 6

Safety and Maintenance of Firearms

Summary

All firearms are potentially lethal. It is essential that the safety and operating procedures recommended by the manufacturer are precisely followed, and that all operators of firearms are properly trained in their safe operation and maintenance.

Do not under any circumstances attempt to handle or operate firearms, before reading and fully understanding the manufacturer's instruction sheet for the particular weapon being used.

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Safe operation

- When receiving or handing over a firearm, always open the breech and make sure it is not loaded
- During and on completion of the loading procedure, the muzzle of the weapon must at all times be kept pointing away, and a distance, from the operator's or any other person's body
- Once the weapon has been loaded, ensure that the safety catch is on until ready to shoot
- When handling any firearm, never allow it to point at any part of your body or at any other person
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you are actually aiming at the target and ready to shoot
- If possible, when shooting smaller animals, ensure that the subject is standing on soft ground and that no part of your body is underneath the animal (eg your feet)
- Rifles, shotguns and general-purpose handguns should never be discharged with the muzzle in contact with the target area. Such action could result in severe injury to, or death of, the operator
- In the unlikely event of a misfire, do not open the breech of the weapon for at least 30 seconds. Sometimes, slow primer ignition will cause a 'hang fire' and the cartridge will explode after a short pause
- If there is any reason to suspect that a projectile is obstructing the barrel, immediately unload the firearm and look through the bore. It is not sufficient to merely look into the breech; a round may be lodged some distance along the barrel where it cannot be seen
- Immediately report any faults in the operation of the equipment to the person responsible for maintenance (if applicable) and take the weapon out of service until the fault has been rectified
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IMPORTANT:

Do not attempt to carry out any cleaning and maintenance until you have made sure that the firearm is not loaded. Always lock firearms away immediately after use. Do not forget to secure the ammunition in a different location.

Routine Maintenance

Any weapon used for the humane destruction of animals should be correctly maintained, cleaned and oiled after use, even if has discharged only one shot. The inside of the barrel should be thoroughly cleaned out and be free of any condensation. The outside of the gun should be cleaned and then a thin film of oil applied all over, using an oily rag. A drop of oil should be applied regularly to all moving parts, but avoid getting oil into the breech of any weapon.

Every 6 months, regardless of whether or not the weapon has been used, it should be taken out, inspected and thoroughly cleaned and lubricated. A logbook should be kept in the gun cabinet and, every time a weapon is used and/or cleaned, the details should be recorded and dated. Similarly, a logbook should be kept in the ammunition cabinet and entries made for each type of ammunition, to record when it is bought and when it is used.

Cleaning and storage

- After each use, thoroughly clean the weapon before locking it away
- Make sure that the weapon is unloaded before cleaning
- When not in use, firearms and ammunition should be stored separately and locked away in approved storage cabinets

General points on safety

- Always treat firearms and shotguns as if they are loaded
- Do not climb trees or step over fences with the loaded firearm
- Never carry any firearm in your pocket, purse or waistband
- Never pull a firearm towards you by the muzzle
- Never point any firearm, loaded or unloaded, at anything you do not intend to shoot
- Never leave a loaded firearm unattended

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

In no circumstances can the HSA accept liability for the way in which the equipment in this leaflet is used: or for any loss, damage, death or injury caused thereby, since this depends on circumstance wholly outside the HSA's control

For enquires about practical training in the correct use and maintenance of firearms, please contact the HSA at the address overleaf.

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Further reading

Guidance Notes No 3: Humane Killing of Livestock Using Firearms (2nd Edition)
Humane Slaughter Association 2005