



This study guide has been produced in part from the National firearms safety code from the Attorney-general's department

## Introduction

The objective of this booklet is to encourage [Safe firearm handling procedures and safe shooting practices](#).

You may be new to the sport of shooting, you may be an old hand. You may be a rifle, shotgun, air rifle or handgun shooter, it does not matter.

All of the [National firearm safety code principles and all of the safe handling procedures](#) discussed in this booklet will remain the same for whatever type of firearm you intend to use.

If you remember what you learn from this booklet and put into practice the National firearms safety code then you should safely enjoy your chosen type of shooting.

## Firearms accidents

One of the main objectives of firearms safety training is to reduce the incidence of firearm accidents. In reality, there are few incidents that can be identified as a firearms accident. In almost every case at least one principle of the National firearms safety code will have been breached.

It is essential that you, the firearms owner/user, are aware of your responsibilities to:

- Yourself
- Your family
- Fellow shooters
- And to the community

## The National firearms safety code

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
2. Your firearm is your responsibility.
3. Always ensure your firing zone is clear and identify your target beyond all doubt.
4. Never point a firearm at or near another person.
5. Never load a firearm until you are ready to shoot.
6. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
7. When you have finished shooting remove the magazine (if fitted), unload and then check that the chamber is empty.
8. Make sure that all firearms are transported securely to prevent misuse or theft.

9. Never allow unauthorised access to your firearm(s) or ammunition.
10. Do not climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms.
11. Encourage safe and responsible handling of firearms in the field, on the range, and within the community.
12. Never mix shooting with alcohol or drugs.
13. Understand the operation of your firearm, keep it in good repair, and always use the correct ammunition.
14. Never store firearms and ammunition together. Ensure they are safely locked away when not in use.
15. Be familiar with the legal requirements for safe storage, firearms ownership, possession and use in your state or territory, or in the state or territory you are visiting.
16. Dispose of unwanted firearms lawfully. Surrender them to the police or sell them to or through a licensed dealer.

## Observe the code: insist others do the same

- Learn practice
- Teach and promote
- The national firearms safety code

## National firearms safety code explained

Now that you have some knowledge of the National Firearms Safety Code, let's go over the Code Principles and explain it in a little more detail.

### 1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.

Check every firearm yourself. Do not take the word of another person that a firearm is unloaded. Pass or accept only open and unloaded firearms. Only accept or pass a firearm to another person if the breech is open and all ammunition has been removed from the firearm.

Get to know your firearm; thoroughly learn the way it works; what action to take in case of a jam or malfunction; how to tell if it is loaded or unloaded; how to remove the magazine where possible and how to care for your firearm correctly.

Always keep your finger off the trigger and keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction; be muzzle conscious. If you do not know how to open a firearm **“leave it alone”**.

When handing a firearm to another person remember the following points -

- point the muzzle in a safe direction
- open the bolt or action
- check that the breech is empty
- check that the magazine has been removed and is empty

Remember: Never leave firearms loaded

Every year people (often children) are injured or killed when firearms are left loaded. Remember to unload your firearm and remove all rounds or cartridges from the breech or magazine when you are not using it.

Treat all firearms as if they are loaded

**Special care** is required when closing, cocking, taking off the safety catch, uncocking or opening a loaded firearm. Special care is required when using the action to unload live ammunition from a firearm. These are danger times when a firearm may discharge accidentally and without warning.

2. **Your firearm is your responsibility.**

If you own/use a firearm you must comply with the requirements of the firearms legislation in your State or Territory. You are both legally and morally responsible for your firearm.

Responsible ownership and use of a firearm can:

- Prevent you being responsible for an accident with your firearm.
- Prevent the prospect of you being subject to civil and/or criminal charges.
- Prevent the possible loss of life through the misuse of your firearm.
- Prevent the illegal use of your firearm.

**Remember:** You are responsible for your firearm under all circumstances. You should not confine yourself to doing the right thing and obeying the law simply because of the risk of prosecution if you do not. You should comply with and promote the National Firearms Safety Code because **it is the right thing to do.**

3. **Always ensure your firing zone is clear and identify your target beyond all doubt.**

4. **Never point a firearm at or near another person.**

Loaded or unloaded, always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

**What is a safe direction?**

Many theories abound on this subject, all of them most likely correct, however the simply answer is that a **safe direction depends on where you are and what you are doing.** Remember bullets can kill having passed through a wall, the ceiling or a car door.

Do not develop bad habits. Concentrate on the task at hand. Do not daydream when handling firearms.

Never lean your firearms against a vehicle or put them in a place where they could slide or fall causing an unintentional discharge of the firearm.

When removing a firearm from a vehicle or boat ensure that it is unloaded and be careful to remove the firearm butt first: **Never remove a firearm muzzle first.** Remember to ensure the muzzle does not point at you or anyone else.

- Be muzzle conscious.
- Identify your target and what is behind it

Make sure of your target before firing. You should be certain that what you see is your target.

- Do not fire at movement only
- Do not fire at colour only
- Do not fire at sound only
- Do not fire at shape only
- If in doubt do not shoot.

It is not easy to see clearly early in the morning or late in the evening. Be sure the object at which you are aiming can be clearly identified and that it is in full view before you shoot.

### What is behind your target?

What will happen if you miss the target or the projectile passes through the target? What MIGHT you hit between you and your target? The firing zone is not only the area between you and your target, but also the area beyond the target which is still within the extreme range of your firearm.

The effective danger range for projectiles, may generally be:

22 rimfire	1500 metres (1.5 kilometres)
303	3600 metres (3.6 kilometres)
308	4050 metres (4.0 Kilometres)
Air rifle	150 metres
Shotgun	# 6 shot 250 metres
BB shot	450 metres

Check your firing zone with special care when shooting at birds in flight.

You should remember that when using a shotgun, pellets spread further over long distances and therefore your firing zone will increase. Also remember when shooting at moving targets the danger area will increase because your target is moving. Be particularly aware of the position of other shooters who may be nearby.

It is essential that you ensure that your sights are correctly aligned, especially when using a telescopic sight. If your sights are not correctly aligned then you may miss your target and increase the chance of hitting something that you did not intend to hit.

### Never fire at hard surfaces or water

Consider the area in which you are shooting. Could a ricochet occur? A ricochet will almost certainly result from shooting at water or smooth flat surfaces and rocks.

Remember that when a ricochet occurs you have lost control of where the projectile will finish up, resulting in possible injury to another person or damage to property.

Be especially careful when shooting with an air rifle. Air rifles are very prone to ricochet and should be treated with the utmost caution because of the slow velocity of the projectile fired. Rimfire and centrefire rifle projectiles are prone to ricochet as they lose velocity at the end of their travel, which as we have already seen can be some considerable distance.

When shooting with a shotgun your chances of a ricochet are multiplied by the number of pellets in the cartridge that you are using. It takes only one pellet to cause serious injury or death. Be particularly aware of this if you are shooting over water or over hard flat surfaces.

## 5. Never load a firearm until you are ready to shoot.

### Never take loaded firearms into the car, the home or the camp.

Many people have been injured or killed having broken this rule. Before entering a car, home or camp unload your firearm. Ensure that the action is open and there is no ammunition in the breech or the magazine. Pay particular attention to tubular or rotary magazines to ensure that all rounds are removed.

### In the field

This is a very important area for novice shooters. It is essential that you understand the basic principles that apply to using firearms in the field.

In the field firearms should be carried unloaded with the action open, until you are in your shooting area and you are expecting game to be flushed.

Always point your firearm in a safe direction, be aware of your surroundings, and if hunting with companions be especially careful of where you are pointing your muzzle; be aware of where your companions are, especially in thick scrub where you may lose sight of them.

If hunting in a party where shooters are walking line abreast be extremely conscious of the person either side of you. Take a shot only if the target is in front of you or if you are the last shooter on either end of the line and you can turn away from your companions and take a shot in safety. For this type of shooting it is best to accompany people who are experienced shooters.

If stalking game with companions and you are walking one behind the other, then the **only person who should have his firearm loaded is the person in the lead.**

If shooting from a boat or punt, keep both hands on your firearm and control the direction of the muzzle at all times. Do not carry **loaded** firearms in a boat or punt unless you are ready to shoot.

Barrel obstructions are very common in the field due to objects such as mud, twigs, etc., becoming lodged in the barrel. It pays to check your barrel frequently to ensure that you do not have an obstruction. If you drop your firearm you should immediately check the barrel for obstructions. If a cartridge produces an unusual or soft sound when fired, you should check the barrel for an obstruction before firing again.

**Always** unload the firearm before checking for obstructions.

When shooting in the field do not use set triggers or hair triggers. These are designed for target shooting and really have no place in the field. A simple knock is all it may take to cause an unintentional discharge.

When leaving or returning to a vehicle or camp make sure that your firearm is unloaded. Where possible, the magazine and bolt should be removed.

## 6. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.

It is not safe practice to have your finger on the trigger or inside the trigger guard until the moment before you are ready to fire at your target.

Firearms in good order have trigger pressures set at safe levels. Normally the manufacturer sets this before they leave the factory. This does not mean that it is safe to leave your finger on the trigger while carrying your firearm, as other factors or distractions may cause the trigger to be set off accidentally.

Trigger adjustments should only be carried out by a competent person, preferably a qualified gunsmith.

Most firearms have a safety catch fitted by the manufacturer. Safety catches have two positions:

### On or Safe

In this position the firearm is restricted from firing in the event of the trigger being accidentally pulled or snagged on a branch when moving through dense vegetation.

### Off or Fire

When in this position the firearm can be discharged by pulling the trigger. Most firearms have markings stamped into the metal work or coloured dots to indicate the current status of the safety catch.

Note: **Do not rely solely on safety catches** - they are a mechanical device and may fail to engage properly or be knocked off.

## 7. When you have finished shooting remove the magazine (if fitted), unload and then check that the chamber is empty.

On completion of shooting or handling a firearm, you should open the action and remove any live rounds from the chamber. You should make it a habit to check that the chamber is empty. At this stage you should also remove (if possible) or empty the magazine. Not all firearm magazines are removable or easily checked. Magazines may be removable, or fixed (box/hinged floor plate, tubular or some box magazines).

**Remember:** Your firearm is loaded if the action is open and if a live round is in the chamber or, if the magazine still contains a live round, even if the magazine is not attached to the firearm.

## 8. Make sure that all firearms are transported securely to prevent misuse or theft.

All firearms should be transported in a carry case or carry bag. All firearms should be unloaded and where applicable, the bolt should be removed.

If possible, firearm carry cases/boxes should be kept out of sight in the vehicle. Vehicles should not be considered to be a secure option in which to store your firearms.

Ammunition should be transported in its box and secured. Ammunition must not be transported in a magazine that can be fitted to a firearm.

When travelling with firearms you should take precautions to minimise the likelihood of unauthorised access or theft. Depending on the circumstances it may be more secure to lock your firearms up within your temporary accommodation (motel room, guestroom) rather than leaving them locked in your car. Give careful thought to how you will secure your firearm before leaving on your trip and take appropriate trigger locks, chains or padlocks with you.

If travelling interstate it is important to remember that each State and Territory has its own firearms legislation. It may be that the regulations pertaining to transporting firearms and ammunition in your State or Territory differ slightly to those in the State or Territory to which you are travelling. It is important to contact the relevant Firearms Registry before travelling interstate.

If travelling by air it is advisable to contact the airline with which you are travelling well before your departure date and find out how they require you to submit your firearms for transport.





## 9. Never allow unauthorised access to your firearm(s) or ammunition.

### Firearm safety begins at home.

The storage of firearms and ammunition is your responsibility. You must never allow unauthorised persons access to your firearm(s) or ammunition. Your firearm(s) should only be accessed when you are present to ensure safe handling. You must ensure that your firearm(s) cannot be easily stolen.

Safes or other storage containment facilities must be constructed and secured in accordance with your State or Territory regulations.

As a firearm owner/user you are responsible for making absolutely sure that all the safety requirements within the home are carried out.

**Think** when putting your firearm away. Do not put **your family at risk**.

Before storing your firearms:

- Make sure both the magazine and chamber are empty.
- Clean the firearm before putting it away.
- If possible remove the bolt and magazine and lock it away separately from the firearm.
- Do not try to remove the action from lever, pump action or self-loading firearms.
- Store firearms and ammunition separately in locked containers or other approved repositories.

### Remember you have a responsibility to your family and to others.

Make sure that all members of your family are aware of what a firearm is, its capacity to kill or injure and **why it should not be touched**.



## 10. Do not climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms.

Every year shooters are shot (usually with their own firearm) as they attempt to negotiate fences and/or obstacles with loaded firearms.

Before attempting to negotiate a fence or obstacle, unload your firearm. **Do not rely on safety catches**. Safety catches at best supplement the safe handling of firearms.

If attempting to cross a fence alone:

- unload your firearm;
- place it through the fence and lay it on the ground with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction. Cross the fence away from your firearm.

If crossing a fence with a friend:

- ensure all firearms are unloaded;
- use the same method as for crossing alone, or hand your unloaded firearm to your companion and then cross the fence, then have your companion hand the firearms to you.

If carried out correctly these two methods of crossing will prevent injury by a firearm. **Think before you cross. Unload that firearm.**

Correct methods of crossing a fence



Alone



In company

**11. Encourage safe and responsible shooting practices in the field, on the range, and within the community.**

Those involved with firearms should be ambassadors in the community for current and prospective firearms owners/users.

By exercising and encouraging training in the safe use of firearms by members of the community, clubs and collectors, it is possible to provide a safe environment for all.

Shooting and hunting ethics should be encouraged.

The use of both body and mind is necessary if one is to become proficient in the use of a firearm. It is therefore critical that those involved in the handling and use of firearms gain proficiency in as many aspects relating to them as possible.

Firearms have the potential to fire projectiles for distances far past the target. You should be aware of the capabilities and potential of your firearm. Ensure you are aware of what is around and beyond your target and do not shoot if it is not safe to do so. Refuse to shoot with a person who does not have safe firearm practices.

**12. Never mix shooting with alcohol or drugs.**

- Good judgement is the key to safe firearms use
- Avoid alcoholic drinks or drugs/medicines when using firearms

Alcohol and drugs including some legal medicines dull and slow your mental and physical reactions. You may be unaware of this reaction and feel you are in better control than usual, which is extremely dangerous when using firearms. The ability to recognise and react to dangerous situations swiftly and accurately is essential.



Do not shoot if you are on medication that is identified as affecting your ability to drive or operate machinery. If in doubt ask your doctor.

**Never take** alcohol or drugs before you go shooting, whilst you are shooting or until your firearm has been put away safely.

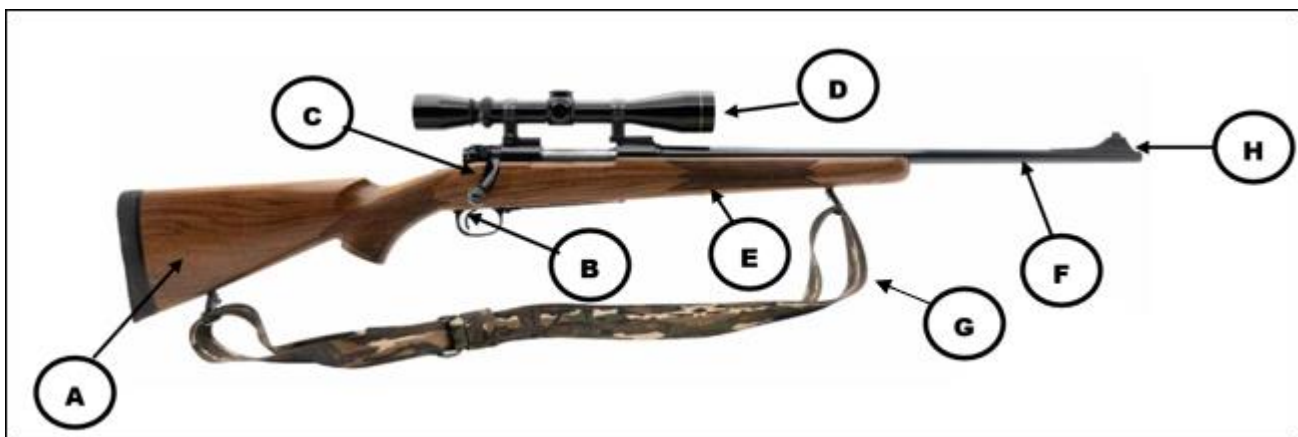
Refuse to shoot with others who are, or have been, drinking alcohol or taking drugs/ medicines.

## Ammunition

Do not mix up your ammunition. You should only carry the ammunition for the firearm you are using. For example, it is very easy to confuse centrefire rounds of different calibres and shotgun cartridges of different gauges. The wrong ammunition in a firearm could result in the explosion of the firearm and injury to the user.

Ensure that you can identify and recognise the different types of ammunition so that you avoid mixing your ammunition.

## Basic parts of a firearm



Butt	A	Bolt	C
Muzzle	H	Barrel	F
Scope	D	Sling	G
Fore end	E	Trigger	B