



Z.P.G.A. Firearm Safety a Study Guide

Every firearm owner should understand and follow firearm safety practices, have a basic familiarity with the operation and handling of their firearm, and be fully aware of the responsibility of firearm ownership.

This study guide provides basic firearm safety information which if followed will help reduce the potential for accidental deaths and injuries.

Simply reading this study guide will not make you a safe firearm owner. To be a safe firearm owner you must practice the firearm safety procedures described throughout this Study Guide.

INTRODUCTION

Firearm safety is important to all Z.P.G.A. Members. No one wants firearm accidents to happen yet they do every day. Firearm accidents involving guests or colleagues are especially disturbing.

Studies show that easy access to loaded firearms in Camps is often a contributing factor in accidental shootings. While there may be no way to guarantee safety, firearm owners can take steps to help prevent many accidental shootings. This study guide will give you valuable information to help you become a safe and responsible firearm owner.

As a Member of the Z.P.G.A. all Members must have a basic familiarity with their firearms, including but not limited to, the safe handling and storage of those firearms.

Firearms must be handled responsibly and securely stored to prevent access by unauthorized users.

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CAUSES OF FIREARM ACCIDENTS

Ignorance and carelessness are major causes of firearm accidents

To help reduce the number of firearm accidents, it is critical that gun safety rules are understood and practiced at all times by every Z.P.G.A. Member.

Following are some examples of firearm accidents that could have been avoided if the basic gun safety rules had been practiced:

- 1) Two young children playing in their home found a loaded handgun with the magazine removed on a bedside table. One child was injured when the handgun was fired
- 2) A handgun owner assumed a firearm was unloaded. While cleaning it, he accidentally fired the handgun, causing injury to himself
- 3) A hunting client was walking with his finger loosely on the trigger of his rifle. Distracted by a sudden noise behind him, he turned and accidentally fired, injuring his Hunting Guide walking nearby

Knowing the safety rules and applying them most of the time is not enough. Firearm accidents can happen even to a person who knows the safety rules, but is careless in following them.

For example, you may think you can leave your loaded firearm on the Camp dining room table just for a moment while you go outside to help move a cooler box. Although you know you should never leave a firearm where a Camp staff member may find it, you carelessly think it will be alright “just this once.” REMEMBER: Ignorance and carelessness can result in firearm accidents. Basic gun safety rules must be applied **ALL OF THE TIME**.

PREVENTING MISUSE TRAGEDIES

It's a fact that many depressed, intoxicated, substance abusive, or enraged individuals commit suicide every year with firearms, usually handguns. The developmental issues associated with adolescence make teenagers particularly susceptible to this unfortunate outcome. Safe and responsible firearm storage, particularly when a member of the household is experiencing one of the aforementioned conditions, can help prevent tragedies.

BECOMING A SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE FIREARM OWNER

Becoming a safe firearm owner is similar to becoming a safe driver—you combine a good working knowledge of your equipment, the basic skills of operation, and a mind-set dedicated to safe and responsible usage and storage. This means you must have:

- 1) Respect for the danger of firearms;
- 2) An awareness and concern about the possible safety hazards related to firearms; and
- 3) A desire to learn and practice safe conduct with firearms. Developing a mind set for safe and responsible firearm usage and storage is the first step in actually becoming a responsible firearm owner. The next step is building your knowledge of firearms and gun safety

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GUN SAFETY RULES

Specific gun safety rules will give you a better understanding of firearm safety:

THE SIX BASIC GUN SAFETY RULES

- 1) Treat all guns as if they are loaded
- 2) Keep the gun pointed in the safest possible direction
- 3) Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot
- 4) Know your target, its surroundings, and beyond
- 5) Know how to properly operate your gun
- 6) Store your gun safely and securely to prevent unauthorized use. Guns and ammunition should be stored separately

EXPANDED AND ADDITIONAL SAFETY POINTS

ALWAYS KEEP THE MUZZLE POINTED IN A SAFE DIRECTION

This is the most basic safety rule. If everyone handled a firearm so carefully that the muzzle never pointed at something they didn't intend to shoot, there would be virtually no firearms accidents. It's as simple as that, and it's up to you.

Never point your gun at anything you do not intend to shoot. This is particularly important when loading or unloading a firearm. In the event of an accidental discharge, no injury can occur as long as the muzzle is pointing in a safe direction.

A safe direction means a direction in which a bullet cannot possibly strike anyone, taking into account possible ricochets and the fact that bullets can penetrate walls and ceilings. The safe direction may be "up" on some occasions or "down" on others, but never at anyone or anything not intended as a target. Even when "dry firing" with an unloaded gun, you should never point the gun at an unsafe target.

Make it a habit to know exactly where the muzzle of your gun is pointing at all times, and be sure that you are in control of the direction in which the muzzle is pointing, even if you fall or stumble. This is your responsibility, and only you can control it.

FIREARMS SHOULD BE UNLOADED WHEN NOT ACTUALLY IN USE

Firearms should be loaded only when you are in the field or on the target range or shooting area, ready to shoot. When not in use, firearms and ammunition should be secured in a safe place, separate from each other. It is your responsibility to prevent children and unauthorized adults from gaining access to firearms or ammunition.

Unload your gun as soon as you are finished. A loaded gun has no place in or near a car, truck or building. Unload your gun immediately when you have finished shooting, well before you bring it into a car, camp or home.

Whenever you handle a firearm or hand it to someone, always open the action immediately, and visually check the chamber, receiver and magazine to be certain they do not contain any ammunition. Always keep actions open when not in use. Never assume a gun is unloaded — check for yourself! This is considered a mark of an experienced gun handler!

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Never cross a fence, climb a tree or perform any awkward action with a loaded gun. While in the field, there will be times when common sense and the basic rules of firearms safety will require you to unload your gun for maximum safety. Never pull or push a loaded firearm toward yourself or another person. There is never any excuse to carry a loaded gun in a gun bag. When in doubt, unload your gun!

DON'T RELY ON YOUR GUN'S "SAFETY"

Treat every gun as though it can fire at any time. The "safety" on any gun is a mechanical device which, like any such device, can become inoperable at the worst possible time. Besides, by mistake, the safety may be "off" when you think it is "on." The safety serves as a supplement to proper gun handling but cannot possibly serve as a substitute for common sense. You should never handle a gun carelessly and assume that the gun won't fire just because the "safety is on."

Never touch the trigger on a firearm until you actually intend to shoot. Keep your fingers away from the trigger while loading or unloading. Never pull the trigger on any firearm with the safety on the "safe" position or anywhere in between "safe" and "fire." It is possible that the gun can fire at any time, or even later when you release the safety, without you ever touching the trigger again.

Never place the safety in between positions, since half-safe is unsafe. Keep the safety "on" until you are absolutely ready to fire.

Regardless of the position of the safety, any blow or jar strong enough to actuate the firing mechanism of a gun can cause it to fire. This can happen even if the trigger is not touched, such as when a gun is dropped. Never rest a loaded gun against any object because there is always the possibility that it will be jarred or slide from its position and fall with sufficient force to discharge.

The only time you can be absolutely certain that a gun cannot fire is when the action is open and it is completely empty. Again, never rely on your gun's safety. You and the safe gun handling procedures you have learned are your gun's primary safeties.

BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT'S BEYOND IT

No one can call a shot back. Once a gun fires, you have given up all control over where the shot will go or what it will strike. Don't shoot unless you know exactly what your shot is going to strike. Be sure that your bullet will not injure anyone or anything beyond your target. Firing at a movement or a noise without being absolutely certain of what you are shooting at constitutes disregard for the safety of others. No target is so important that you cannot take the time before you pull the trigger to be absolutely certain of your target and where your shot will stop.

Be aware that even a .22 short bullet can travel over 1 1/4 kilometres and a high velocity cartridge, such as a 30-06, can send its bullet more than 5 kilometres. Shotgun pellets can travel 500 yards, and shotgun slugs have a range of over half a kilometre.

You should keep in mind how far a bullet will travel if it misses your intended target or ricochets in another direction.

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USE CORRECT AMMUNITION

You must assume the serious responsibility of using only the correct ammunition for your firearm. Read and heed all warnings, including those that appear in the gun's instruction manual and on the ammunition boxes.

Using improper or incorrect ammunition can destroy a gun and cause serious personal injury. It only takes one cartridge of improper caliber or gauge to wreck your gun, and only a second to check each one as you load it. Be absolutely certain that the ammunition you are using matches the specifications that are contained within the gun's instruction manual and the manufacturer's markings on the firearm.

Firearms are designed, manufactured and proof tested to standards based upon those of factory loaded ammunition. Handloaded or reloaded ammunition deviating from pressures generated by factory loads or from component recommendations specified in reputable handloading manuals can be dangerous, and can cause severe damage to guns and serious injury to the shooter. Do not use improper reloads or ammunition made of unknown components.

Ammunition that has become very wet or has been submerged in water should be discarded in a safe manner. Do not spray oil or solvents on ammunition or place ammunition in excessively lubricated firearms. Poor ignition, unsatisfactory performance or damage to your firearm and harm to yourself or others could result from using such ammunition.

Form the habit of examining every cartridge you put into your gun. Never use damaged or substandard ammunition — the money you save is not worth the risk of possible injury or a ruined gun.

IF YOUR GUN FAILS TO FIRE WHEN THE TRIGGER IS PULLED, HANDLE WITH CARE!

If this occurs, keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction for at least 30 seconds. Keep your face away from the breech. Then, carefully open the action, unload the firearm and dispose of the cartridge in a safe way.

Any time there is a cartridge in the chamber, your gun is loaded and ready to fire even if you've tried to shoot and it did not go off. It could go off at any time, so you must always remember Rule #1 and watch that muzzle!

Discharging firearms in poorly ventilated areas, cleaning firearms or handling ammunition may result in exposure to lead and other substances known to cause birth defects, reproductive harm and other serious physical injury. Have adequate ventilation at all times. Wash hands thoroughly after exposure.

ALWAYS WEAR EYE AND EAR PROTECTION WHEN SHOOTING

All shooters should wear protective shooting glasses and some form of hearing protectors while shooting. Exposure to shooting noise can damage hearing, and adequate vision protection is essential. Shooting glasses guard against twigs, falling shot, clay target chips and the rare ruptured case or firearm malfunction. Wearing eye protection when disassembling and cleaning any gun will also help prevent the possibility of springs, spring tension parts, solvents or other agents from contacting your eyes. There is a wide variety of eye and ear protectors available. No target shooter, or hunter should ever be without them.

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Most rules of shooting safety are intended to protect you and others around you, but this rule is for your protection alone. Furthermore, having your hearing and eyes protected will make your shooting easier and will help improve your enjoyment of the shooting sports.

BE SURE THE BARREL IS CLEAR OF OBSTRUCTIONS BEFORE SHOOTING

Before you load your firearm, open the action and be certain that no ammunition is in the chamber or magazine. Be sure the barrel is clear of any obstruction. Even a small bit of sand or mud, excess lubricating oil or grease in the bore can cause dangerously increased pressures, causing the barrel to bulge or even burst on firing, which can cause injury to the shooter and bystanders. Make it a habit to clean the bore and check for obstructions with a cleaning rod immediately before you shoot it. If the noise or recoil on firing seems weak or doesn't seem quite "right," cease firing immediately and be sure to check that no obstruction or projectile has become lodged in the barrel.

NOTE: a primer (with no powder in the case) has enough energy to force a .458 bullet just over half way up the barrel...it is difficult to remove, and a round fired behind it would be disastrous.

Placing a smaller gauge or caliber cartridge into a gun (such as a 20-gauge shell in a 12-gauge shotgun) can result in the smaller cartridge falling into the barrel and acting as a bore obstruction when a cartridge of proper size is fired. This can cause a burst barrel or worse. This is really a case where "haste makes waste." You can easily avoid this type of accident by paying close attention to each cartridge you insert into your firearm.

DON'T ALTER OR MODIFY YOUR GUN, AND HAVE GUNS SERVICED REGULARLY

Firearms are complicated mechanisms that are designed by experts to function properly in their original condition. Any alteration or change made to a firearm after manufacture can make the gun dangerous and will usually void any factory warranties. Do not jeopardize your safety or the safety of others by altering the trigger, safety or other mechanism of any firearm or allowing unqualified persons to repair or modify a gun. You'll usually ruin an expensive gun. Don't do it!

Your gun is a mechanical device that will not last forever and is subject to wear. As such, it requires periodic inspection, adjustment and service. Check with the manufacturer of your firearm for recommended servicing.

LEARN THE MECHANICAL AND HANDLING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIREARM YOU ARE USING

Not all firearms are the same. The method of carrying and handling firearms varies in accordance with the mechanical characteristics of each gun. Since guns can be so different, never handle any firearm without first having thoroughly familiarized yourself with the particular type of firearm you are using, the safe gun handling rules for loading, unloading, carrying and handling that firearm, and the rules of safe gun handling in general.

For example, many handgun manufacturers recommend that their handguns always be carried with the hammer down on an empty chamber. This is particularly true for older single-action revolvers, but applies equally to some double-action revolvers or semiautomatic pistols. You should always read and refer to the instruction manual you received with your gun, or if you have misplaced the manual, simply contact the manufacturer for a free copy.

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Having a gun in your possession is a full-time job. You cannot guess; you cannot forget. You must know how to use, handle and store your firearm safely. Do not use any firearm without having a complete understanding of its particular characteristics and safe use. There is no such thing as a fool proof gun.

The Basic Rules of Firearms Safety for our Zimbabwean Walking Guides and Hunting Guides, as well as target shooting are meant to set a standard that ensures we all stay safe. This list is intended to help you keep safe or safer by emphasizing the basics of safe gun handling and storage and by reminding you that you are the key to firearms safety.

You must constantly stress safety when handling firearms, especially to children and non-shooters. Beginners, in particular, must be closely supervised when handling firearms with which they may not be acquainted.

Don't be timid when it comes to gun safety. If you observe anyone violating any safety precautions, you have an obligation to insist on safer handling practices, such as those described here.

The Z.P.G.A. encourages all of its Members to Follow the safety procedures outlined here, develop safe shooting habits, and remember, firearms safety is up to you.

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT!



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