

The Four Rules of Safe Gunhandling

When practicing, always follow The Four Rules of Safe Gunhandling. Gunhandling is just as important as marksmanship, but many people are careless about the way they handle firearms, which can result in death or serious injury.

While the following is NOT all inclusive of the implications of the Four Rules, it is a starting point to allow shooters to think about the proper way to handle guns safely.

The Four Rules of Safe Gunhandling

1) **Treat all guns as if they are ALWAYS loaded.**

- a. If you treat all guns you see and handle as if they are loaded, you will never have occasion to say: "I didn't know it was loaded" after the gun goes **BANG!** when you didn't want it to.
- b. Among knowledgeable gunhandlers, anytime a firearm discharges at anything other than an intended target, the incident is called a NEGLIGENT DISCHARGE (ND). This is because 99.9% of unintentional discharges are caused by NEGLIGENT gunhandling on the part of the shooter.
- c. The term "accidental discharge" (AD) is only used for incidents that occur when an internal part of the gun breaks and allows the gun to discharge without the shooter causing the discharge. Accidental discharges are exceedingly rare; remember,
- d. 99.9% of unintentional discharges are caused by NEGLIGENT gunhandling on the part of the shooter.
- e. The good news in this is that almost all unintentional discharges are preventable by proper gunhandling.
- f. The first thing you should do when picking up a gun that you THINK is unloaded is to CHECK to see if it is indeed unloaded. Doing this immediately displays to those around you that you understand the fundamentals of safe gun handling and are not ignorant of proper safety procedures. If you do not know how to properly check the status of a gun, DON'T TOUCH IT until someone knowledgeable demonstrates for you the way to check it. No properly trained person will be offended by your double check of the status of the gun. Anyone who would object is an ignoramus and dangerous, leave the area IMMEDIATELY; eventually that person will experience an ND and you don't want to be there when it happens.

2) **Never point a gun at something or someone you don't want to be shot.**

- a. While this rule seems elementary, it is easily violated. This is the reason that the vast majority of gunshot wounds are self-inflicted.
- b. Remember that when handling a gun, YOU, and only you, are TOTALLY responsible for where it is pointed. Be conscious of where the muzzle is pointed at all times when you are handling a gun. Think about how you are going to move a gun before moving it.

- c. In many cases, you will have to choose between pointing the gun at an inanimate object, such as the floor, or pointing the gun at a person; always choose the inanimate object, never point the gun at a person.
- d. Don't point a gun at any part of yourself, either. Your extremities, particularly feet and hands, are easy to unintentionally point guns at. Handguns can point at the non-firing hand; rifles and shotguns are easily pointed at the feet.
- e. Do not walk around any firing range with your gun in your hand. This is an obvious indication of someone who is unskilled in gunhandling and most likely an unsafe gunhandler. It is almost impossible to casually walk around with your gun in hand and not point it at your own feet or the feet of others. Own a holster for your pistol and use it on the range.
- f. Skeet and trap shooters sometimes have small accessories that are made specifically for resting the muzzle of a shotgun on the toe of the shoe ("it's not loaded" – see Rule #1). These devices are an abomination to gun safety and should be avoided at all costs.
- g. When drawing a handgun from a holster or opening interior doors in the home while holding a handgun, it is very easy to sweep the muzzle over the non-firing hand. Watch the police reality shows on TV to see how often this happens even to trained police officers. A close range discharge to the hand will frequently result in the hand being permanently crippled, don't let it happen to you.

3) Keep your finger above the trigger guard until you are ready for the gun to fire.

- a. Due to mass media influences, most people will immediately place their finger on the trigger of a gun when picking it up. This is a terrible habit and immediately marks the person doing it as someone who is ignorant of how to properly handle firearms.
- b. The proper place to put the trigger finger is on the frame or slide of the gun above the trigger guard as far up as you can move your finger. This place on the frame or slide is referred to as the "register position." Placing your finger there is known as "being in register." Handling a gun in this manner will display to those around you that you know how to safely handle a gun.
- c. When the decision to fire a shot is made and the gun is indexed at the intended target, you may then place the finger in the trigger guard and on the trigger. This takes no more time than having the finger inside the trigger guard. Fire the shot and, unless you are going to immediately fire again, take the finger out of the trigger guard and consciously place it back in register.

4) Be sure of what you are shooting at and what is behind it.

- a. If you own a gun for home defense, you should keep a flashlight right next to it. If you require corrective lenses to see, put your glasses on before getting your gun and flashlight. You must ALWAYS identify a target before shooting it. NEVER shoot through doors or at shadows or at anything that you have not POSITIVELY identified.
- b. Keeping your gun in the nightstand next to you is frequently not a good idea. You need to be awake before handling a gun. Keeping a gun under your pillow, tucked between the mattress

and box spring, or ON the nightstand is almost certainly a BAD idea, for a number of reasons, both safety and tactically related. The best plan is to have the gun a few steps away from the bed so that you will be reasonably awake by the time you pick it up.

- c. Bullets will frequently go through multiple layers of building materials. Do not consider any interior wall of your home as bulletproof; almost certainly, it is NOT. Many exterior walls are not either. Be aware of the location of all your family members in your home when handling a gun. Floors and ceilings are seldom even bullet resistant, much less bulletproof.
- d. Do not shoot faster than you can get the sights on target, even at a formal shooting range. You are responsible for the impact of every single round you fire, no matter where you are. Missing the target and hitting target stands, target holders, lights, etc. will most likely cost you extra money to repair the damage, build bad habits, and mark you as a doofus who can't even hit a target.

In addition to the Four Rules, always store firearms so that they are not accessible to unauthorized persons.

DISCLAIMER: Firearms Safety Training LLC does NOT give legal advice. You should seek competent legal advice if you own a firearm for self-defense. Discuss the legal ramifications of firearms and self-defense with a knowledgeable attorney who specializes in CRIMINAL LAW in your local jurisdiction. Law, both statutory and common, regarding self-defense varies widely from one area to the next, and is constantly changing. Only accept legal advice on firearms and/or self-defense from the POLICE or OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES OR OFFICIALS if it is in writing on official letterhead signed by a sworn senior supervisory official of that department in his or her official capacity or a current official document of that department bearing the department's insignia and signed by the current head of the department (Chief of Police, Sheriff, or Special Agent In Charge). Verbal (not in writing) advice from law enforcement personnel may be in error and will have NO standing in a court of law.