



THINK

FIREARM SAFETY!



PART OF THE
AHEIA "O.W.L. SERIES"

OUTDOOR WILDLIFE LEARNING

MODULE #4



A firearm is merely a tool.
It is no more responsible for accidents or deaths than a
pencil is responsible for spelling errors!
Every time you pick up a firearm you become responsible for
the actions of that firearm.

You have control and you determine if the gun is
safe — or unsafe.

The Alberta Hunter Education Instructors'
Association says:

Think!

Your Trigger Can't
Firearm Safety is for Everyone



**Firearms just don't mix with
alcohol, drugs or fatigue.**



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A firearm is a device that has no ability to think for itself. When you pick up a firearm, you take on a responsibility that requires you to 'Think because your trigger can't'.

A responsible shooter lessens the chance of an accident by following some basic rules of firearms safety. These rules must be followed whenever and wherever firearms are being handled.

This booklet is intended to make firearms experiences even safer by emphasizing the basics of safe gun handling and storage and by helping you to remember to think when you are around firearms.

A.H.E.I.A. encourages you to enroll in one of our Conservation and Hunter Education Courses or Firearms Education Courses. We offer courses in every community of the Province and our qualified instructors can assist you with safety guidelines that you may not be acquainted with. Our qualified instructors and range officers can assist you in your pursuit of firearms safety.

Please read this booklet carefully and remember the safety procedures that are outlined. Please also remember that this booklet is a synopsis of safety guidelines and much more information is available to you through our programs. Look us up as we are happy to assist you. In the meantime...

Think!
Your Trigger Can't



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1 Always Keep the Muzzle Pointed in a Safe Direction



Of all ten rules, this is the most basic and the most important. Firearms use and the act of hunting are safe when this basic rule is observed.

According to the National Safety Council Injury Facts (2003 edition), since record keeping began in 1903, the rate of accidents has declined by 91 percent. In California alone, where there are an estimated 300,000 hunters, on average 10 - 15 hunting related accidents, including both fatal and non-fatal, occur each year.

So just how safe is hunting compared to other sports? The National Safety Council shows out of every 100,000 football players, 2,369 were injured or killed in 2001 compared to only 6 per 100,000 hunters in all of North America, according to the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA).

If everyone handled a firearm so carefully that they never pointed the muzzle in a direction that they didn't intend to shoot, there would be virtually no firearms accidents.



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Be particularly careful of where your muzzle is pointing at all times when handling your firearm. Be especially careful when loading or unloading. Make it a habit to be Muzzle Aware and know where your muzzle is directed even if you were to fall, slip or stumble.



Firearm is safely unloaded and the firearm is set down with the action open. Note the hunter crosses the obstacle away from the muzzle of the firearm. Once on the other side the hunter can safely retrieve the firearm, check for obstructions and then safely reload again. See the note on the summary page at the end regarding ACTS and PROVE. ACTS and PROVE are essential for firearms safety.

The muzzle of your firearm is your responsibility and it is up to you to control its direction.

It does not have a mind of its own!



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2

Firearms Should Be Unloaded When Not Actually in Use

Load your firearm only when you are ready to shoot. Your firearm should only be loaded in the field when hunting, or at the firing line of the shooting range. When your firearm is not in use, it should be unloaded and the ammunition stored securely and separately from the firearm.

Whenever you handle a firearm always assume it is loaded until you have checked and verified that it is indeed unloaded. Always open the action and visually inspect the chamber, receiver and magazine to verify that the firearm contains no ammunition.

An experienced and safe gun handler is one who never makes the assumption that a gun is unloaded. When a gun is handed to you or when you pick it up, verify it for yourself! An unloaded firearm cannot discharge!

Never cross an obstacle with a loaded gun. Keep the muzzle pointed away from yourself and others. Never pull a firearm towards yourself by the muzzle; use the safety but never rely solely on this mechanical safety device. There may be times when common sense dictates that the safest way to move in the field is with an unloaded gun.



If ever in doubt ... unload your firearm!

3

Don't Rely on Your Gun's Safety Mechanism

The Safety on your firearm is a mechanical device and, like most things mechanical, it can fail. It may fail at the worst possible time and, therefore, you should never completely rely on it. The Safety device on your firearm is part of a complete package of handling that renders your firearm inoperable. On its own it is not a substitute for common sense.

Keep your fingers away from the trigger and out of the trigger guard until you are prepared to discharge the firearm. Regardless of the position of the safety, it is possible for a strong enough blow or jar to activate the firing mechanism.

The only time you can be absolutely certain the firearm will not discharge a round of ammunition is when the action is both open and completely empty.



The most important safety on your firearm is you!

4

Be Sure of Your Target and What Lies Beyond It

Once the trigger is pulled or a projectile is released from your firearm, there is no calling it back. Don't ever shoot unless you are aware of your target and beyond.

Be aware that even a .22 short bullet can travel over 1.6km (1 mile) in distance and higher velocity cartridges can travel more than 4.8km (3 miles). Even a shotgun pellet can travel 450m (500 yards) and shotgun slugs can travel over 750m (500 yards).

Be sure of your target and what lies beyond it. Positively identify the target, then look past it to be sure it is safe to shoot. Do not shoot where your bullet will ricochet. Bullets can ricochet off trees, metal, rocks, water and other surfaces.



You are ultimately responsible for the projectile and where it comes to rest!

5

Use Proper Ammunition

The ammunition used in rifles, shotguns and handguns varies in size, appearance and parts. Ammunition is designed specifically for the firearm. Using incorrect ammunition can result in serious damage to the firearm, the user and those around you. Read all warnings including those that appear in the firearms manual from the manufacturer as well as information on ammunition boxes.

Never load incorrect ammunition into a firearm. Always check the data stamp on the firearm and compare it to the ammunition you are going to use. Compare the data stamp on the firearm to the manufacturer's data and information on the ammunition itself, as well as on the original containers for the ammunition.

Firearms are designed around specific proof-tested requirements by the manufacturer. Using hand loaded or reloaded ammunition that exceeds the manufacturer's specifications can be dangerous and can cause severe damage to guns and serious injury to the shooter. Never use improper reloads or ammunition that is made up of unknown components.

Get yourself into the habit of carefully examining every shotshell or cartridge you load into your firearm. Never use substandard or damaged ammunition!



You own the responsibility of only using the correct ammunition for your firearm!

6

If Your Gun Fails to Fire When the Trigger is Pulled, Handle With Care

From time to time, a cartridge or shotshell may fail to fire when the trigger is pulled. This is known as a “misfire”. If a misfire should occur, keep your muzzle pointed in a safe direction. Wait an appropriate length of time, approximately 60 seconds, then carefully open the action of the firearm, unload it and dispose of the cartridge in a safe manner.

Remember ... any time there is a cartridge or shotshell in the chamber of your firearm, your gun is loaded and capable of firing even if you have tried to fire and the gun failed to shoot.



The round of ammunition could still go off at any time so always remember the rule of controlling the muzzle direction of the firearm.

7

Always Wear Eye and Ear Protection When Shooting

Shooting exposes the ear to some of the loudest sounds anywhere in our environment. Protection is necessary if you are to save yourself from severe hearing losses over time. If you are a casual shooter, recommendations vary, but minimum 33 NRR plugs provide maximum protection. You only get one chance to save your hearing. Once it is damaged it will never recover, so, in general, safer is better.



It is highly recommended that you wear ear plugs with ear muffs over them. If you are a regular shooter, tactical electronic muffs, passive noise activated muffs or indoor/outdoor range plugs may be for you. These devices let sound through so that you can hear voices in spite of the protective device, but when a very loud sound wave hits the device, it protects you from that dangerous loud sound. Passive muffs and plugs have a noise activated mechanical valve that slams shut and tactical muffs have an electronic circuit that does the same thing only more quickly. Tactical muffs also offer the added advantage that they will amplify low sounds, making your hearing even better with them on than with them off.



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Shooting glasses guard against twigs, debris, falling shot, clay target chips and the rare, but possible, rupture of a firearm or ammunition. Wearing eye protection to guard against potential hazards makes absolute sense. No target shooter, plinker or hunter should ever be without eye protection.



You only get one set of eyes and one set of ears. Protect them as though they are to last you a lifetime.



The key to eye and ear protection is to remember to WEAR THEM!



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8

Be Sure the Barrel is Clear of Obstructions Before Shooting

Before you load your firearm, open the action and ensure there is no ammunition in the chamber or magazine. Then verify that the barrel is not obstructed in any way. Even a partial blockage can prove to be dangerous. This can include mud, snow, debris, rust, excess oil or other lubricant. When an obstruction is present, it can cause the barrel to bulge or even burst, which can cause serious injury to you, the user, or those around you.

Become conditioned to checking the bore of your firearm immediately before you shoot. Use a rod with a patch to wipe away antirust compounds or to clean the bore of other debris.

Don't be in a hurry — remember to check the bore and avoid the pitfalls of shooting through obstructions.



***Haste Makes Waste:
Take the time to ensure the barrel is clear first!***

9

Don't Alter or Modify Your Gun And Have Guns Serviced Regularly

Your gun is a complicated mechanical device that is designed by experts to function under a variety of conditions. Any change or alteration can make the gun operate in an entirely different way than it was designed to. These types of changes can exceed manufacturer specifications and place you in danger. Never take chances with your safety or the safety of bystanders by modifying the trigger, the safety or any other mechanism. Leave changes to your gun to qualified professionals.

Your firearm, although a complex and precisely engineered device, will not last forever. It is subject to wear and as such requires periodic inspection and service. Check with the manufacturer of your firearm with regards to recommended servicing.

Regular cleaning will keep your gun in good working order and will prevent it from rusting. Any firearm that has been stored uncovered for a long time or has been exposed to moisture or dirt, must be cleaned thoroughly before use.



Before cleaning any firearm, check to be sure it is unloaded!

10

Learn the Mechanical/Handling Characteristics of Your Firearm

There is no such thing as a foolproof gun! You cannot guess what the operation of a particular firearm may be. You need to know how to use, handle and store your firearm safely. You should always read and refer to the operational instructions you receive from the manufacturer of the firearm. If you have misplaced the manual, simply contact the manufacturer for a copy.

There are numerous types of firearms and they are not all designed the same. They do not operate the same way and their characteristics are not all the same. Since they are so different, you own the responsibility of familiarizing yourself with the particular type of firearm you are using before you handle it. You need to be aware of the safety features and the safe handling rules for loading, shooting, unloading and carrying your firearm, as well as the general rules of firearms safety!

Don't be timid when it comes to firearms safety. Rules are safe only when they are obeyed. If a companion doesn't follow the rules for safe handling of firearms, you should refuse to hunt or shoot with him or her unless they correct their behavior.



Firearms safety is NOT negotiable.

AHEIA's General Rules of Firearms Safety:

- 1) Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- 2) Firearms should be unloaded when not actually in use.
- 3) Don't rely on your gun's Mechanism.
- 4) Be sure of your target and what lies beyond it.
- 5) Use proper ammunition.
- 6) If your gun fails to fire when the trigger is pulled, handle with care!
- 7) Always wear eye and ear protection when shooting.
- 8) Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before shooting.
- 9) Don't alter or modify your gun and have your guns serviced regularly.
- 10) Learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the firearm you are using.

The Vital Four Acts of Firearms Safety

- A** – Assume every firearm is loaded
- C** – Control the muzzle direction at all times
- T** – Trigger finger must be kept off the trigger and out of the trigger guard
- S** – See that the firearm is unloaded – PROVE it safe



Prove it Safe

- P** – Point the firearm in the safest available direction
- R** – Remove all ammunition
- O** – Observe the chamber
- V** – Verify the feeding path
- E** – Examine the bore for obstruction



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the first rule in firearms safety?
 - a. Make sure the gun is loaded at all times
 - b. Checking the safety by pulling the trigger
 - c. Always keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction
 - d. Buy the shiny gun because it looks cool
2. What should you do with your firearm before crossing a fence?
 - a. Toss it to a friend
 - b. Unload the firearm and place it on the ground
 - c. Strap your loaded gun onto your back and jump over
 - d. Lean it against the nearest fence post
3. What do we assume our firearm is?
 - a. Assume a firearm is always loaded
 - b. Assume that everyone knows proper firearms handling
 - c. Assume that our firearms will never need cleaning or maintenance
 - d. Assume that our firearms can use any ammunition we find
4. What can a bullet ricochet off of?
 - a. Water
 - b. Rocks
 - c. Trees
 - d. All of the above
5. What personal protective equipment should you be wearing while shooting?
 - a. A thick leather jacket
 - b. Eye Protection and Ear Protection
 - c. A fur hat
 - d. A suit of armor
6. When checking ammunition to your firearm what should we compare?
 - a. The data stamp on the firearm and the head stamp on the cartridge
 - b. If it looks like it will fit in the end of the barrel
 - c. The colour of the bullet
 - d. The animal on the side of the box



7. How far can a .22 rimfire cartridge travel?
 - a. 1.6 km
 - b. 250 meters
 - c. 500 meters
 - d. It won't go any further than I tell it to
8. True or False, If you pull the trigger on your firearm and it does not fire, you should immediately open it to see what the problem is?
9. True or False, You should always make sure of what is in front of and behind your target before shooting?
10. True or False, You are the biggest factor in firearm safety.

Remember that proper storage of firearms is an important way to prevent accidents, theft and misuse. Follow the safety protocols that are outlined in this workbook! Keep those in the forefront of your mind at the range, in the field or wherever you come across a firearm. Remember to "THINK FIREARM SAFETY" and enjoy your shooting experience.

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Your Trigger Can't



**AHEIA offers numerous resources and training to ensure
the safe and responsible use of the great outdoors.**

Our mission is to

Make wildlife and fish part of the value system of every Albertan.

Courses, manuals, seminars and workbooks, such as this, proactively educate the user to be safe and to enjoy their wilderness experience while perpetuating Alberta's vast natural heritage.

This workbook is one in a series of informational, entertaining and proactive materials produced for Conservation Education.

For more information, or to review additional resources, please visit our website or contact us directly.

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