

FIREARM SAFETY and USAGE

A BASIC GUIDE TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA FIREARM LAWS AND SAFE FIREARM PRACTICES FOR SHOOTERS.



The Western Australia Police Service Firearms Branch acknowledges the assistance of the New South Wales Firearms Safety Awareness Council Ltd in the preparation of this information brochure by allowing the reproduction of some text and illustrations contained within their handbook on Firearms Safety Awareness; and the assistance of the working party for their advice and co-operation.



Information Line
1300 171 011
www.police.wa.gov.au

WA Police Firearm Safety Booklet Western Australia

FIREARMS - SAFETY INFORMATION

Set out below are guidelines which describe responsible firearms ownership, possession and use.

The basic firearms safety rules are:

1. TREAT EVERY FIREARM AS BEING LOADED.
2. ALWAYS POINT FIREARMS IN A SAFE DIRECTION.
3. NEVER HAVE LOADED FIREARMS IN YOUR CAR, HOME OR CAMP.
4. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AND WHAT IS BEHIND IT.
5. NEVER FIRE AT HARD SURFACES OR WATER.
6. STORE FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION SEPARATELY.
7. NO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS WHEN HANDLING FIREARMS.
8. DO NOT CLIMB FENCES OR OBSTACLES WITH LOADED FIREARMS.

Learn them, practise them, teach and promote them. Firearm safety rests entirely with you. Your attitude as a firearms owner can do much to influence others.

These basic firearms safety rules are addressed below:

1. Treat every firearm as being loaded. If it has not been continually in your possession, there is a chance that it may be loaded. If you have not personally checked it, assume that it is loaded.

A firearm must be open and empty before you pass it on to someone, or before you accept it from anyone



2. Always check that the muzzle is pointing in a safe direction. *Do not point a loaded or unloaded firearm at anybody, or at anything you do not wish to shoot.*

This is one of the most important safety precautions and should be faithfully followed until it becomes an invariable habit.

3. When first picking up a firearm, keep the muzzle under control, always pointing in a *safe direction* and immediately check that it is unloaded. Whenever taking possession of a firearm also check that the barrel is not blocked and that the action is clear of obstruction. Blocked barrels will burst and an obstructed action can result in misfire.
4. Unless in storage, never leave firearms unattended. Never leave a firearm lying about the house.
5. Persons entitled to possess firearms or ammunition of any kind are to ensure they are stored in a locked steel cabinet or container that complies with the specifications described in the Firearms Regulations.
6. Make sure your firearms and ammunition are always kept out of the reach of children. Children are inquisitive and could match ammunition with a firearm and accidentally discharge it creating grave danger to themselves and others.
7. Never take a loaded firearm into a house or load a firearm indoors. Accidental discharge can cause death or injury or property damage.
8. Never carry a loaded firearm in a vehicle. Carry only empty firearms, preferably with the action open and the bolt removed or dismantled, in an appropriate carrying case. Driving over rough roads or terrain can cause a loaded firearm to discharge with possible tragic results.
9. Exercise extreme care when placing a firearm in, or removing it from, a vehicle or boat. Never have the barrel pointing towards any person. Deaths and injury have occurred because the firearm has been carelessly left loaded and the trigger or hammer has caught on some obstruction. Always handle the firearm by the butt or frame with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction.
10. Unless absolutely necessary, never shoot from a moving vehicle, bumps in roads and terrain can significantly alter the aim of the shooter. An exception to this rule relates to the need to destroy vermin, particularly on large properties, and under those conditions, only one person should do the shooting. This person should ensure that no danger is created to anyone who may alight from the vehicle to check that the vermin is dead after being shot.
11. Never lean a loaded firearm against a wall, fence, tree or vehicle, as the firearm may fall. The impact with the floor or ground may cause it to discharge. This is a common cause of firearms accidents.
12. Never "skylark" or engage in "horseplay" when you have a firearm in your hands. This is irresponsible behaviour and can result in a serious accident.
13. Never mix alcohol or drugs with firearms use. Alcohol dulls and slows mental and physical faculties. Alertness is essential to proper and safe firearms use.
14. Should you intend loading your own ammunition, seek the advice and services of an expert to assist in ensuring you use the correct powders and bullets. Such people are gunsmiths and members of recognised rifle, pistol and gun clubs.

15. In your home, it is preferable that you do not have your firearms on view. While people may be honest, they may discuss your possessions with others with the result that you may have an unwanted caller when the house is vacant. The same applies with firearms left in locked cars. This situation should be avoided. If you must leave your firearm unattended for a short time in a locked vehicle, your firearms must be unloaded and out of sight.
16. Where it is practical / appropriate safety catches should be engaged at all times when not firing. However, safety catches are mechanical devices and may become worn and not work. Do not let their value give you a false sense of firearms security. Keep your finger off the trigger unless you are about to fire.
17. Load your firearm only when you are ready to shoot. This is a practice recommended by the most experienced and safest shooters and one which should be followed by all. It is good practice to have your safety catch engaged, but remember not to rely on it for complete safety.
18. Make certain your target is positively identified before firing at it. Keep your finger out of the trigger guard until that time. If in doubt, do not shoot. Too many people and farm animals have died or been injured as a result of uncertainty of identification. Identify your target - be **absolutely certain** you have positively identified it.
19. **Do not** fire at movement.
Do not fire at colour.
Do not fire at shape.
Do not fire at sound.

Failure to observe the rule "identify the target beyond all doubt" is one of the greatest causes of death and injury from firearms.

20. When shooting, *check your danger zone*. The danger zone is the area between you and your target and the area beyond the target which is within range of your projectile. If your shot is upwards, remember in the case of some rifles the bullet may travel at least 3 kilometres. Ensure that the path of your shot from the muzzle to the target and beyond is free of obstructions likely to impede its **safe** progress.

While telescopic sights permit much clearer vision immediately ahead, vision to each side is much more limited. There is always danger of persons or farm animals moving into your danger zone without your knowledge. If you are firing at a moving target, your danger zone changes rapidly and much greater care is needed.

21. Never shoot during the hours of darkness unless it is absolutely essential. During these hours it is impossible to see what may be in your danger zone. Shooters using spotlights should remember that a spotlight illuminates only a small portion of the danger zone and only a fraction of the projectile's range. Never spotlight unless entirely familiar with the lay of the land or are guided by someone who does. Do you know where the livestock are or the local farmhouses?



22. Never shoot over the top of hills or ridges. This creates danger to people animals and property because you have no knowledge of what may be out of sight beyond the hill in the danger zone.
23. A large proportion of accidents occur while a shooter is trying to climb over or through fences with a loaded firearm which accidentally discharges when it catches in the fence or the shooter overbalances. Ensure that your firearm is unloaded and the muzzle pointing in a *safe direction*. Carefully, ease the firearm with its action open under the bottom strand of a fence and place it on the other side. If in company with another person, one should climb the fence unimpeded while the other passes both firearms, one at a time, either over the top or under the bottom. Again the muzzle must always be pointed in a safe direction.



24. Do not jump over ditches or streams when carrying a firearm. Walk through them. Loss of balance, resulting in accidental discharge of firearms has caused many deaths and severe personal injury. Carry the firearm so that you can always control the barrel direction, even if you stumble.
25. The minimum age for a person to hold a Firearms License or Permit is 18 years. Persons under the age of 18 years may use a firearm only under the direct personal supervision of the licensed owner of the firearm being used.

Licensed adult firearm owners must keep a constant check on minors to ensure that they develop safe and responsible firearms handling practices.

26. Always seek the permission of landholders before shooting on their land. Irresponsible shooters who interfere with stock, shoot at property such as windmills or tanks, and leave gates open, bring discredit on the whole shooting fraternity. They greatly reduce the availability of safe shooting areas.
27. If you are walking with a loaded firearm, make certain the muzzle always remains pointing in a *safe direction* preferably directly up in the air. Don't daydream. Concentrate on what you are doing at all times.
28. Firing at or across water, flat hard ground, or metal objects is always dangerous. A ricochet may occur and end in a tragic result.
29. Damaged firearms should always be repaired by a licensed repairer of firearms. Do not experiment and hope for the best. Proper repair will be cheaper in the long run and will certainly be much safer.
30. Use only correct ammunition as specified for your firearm. Do not use modern shotgun ammunition in very old shotguns as they may not have been constructed to withstand the breech pressures created and could blow up causing serious harm. Seek the advice of a licensed Firearms Repairer should you have any concerns about the safety or operation of any firearm.
31. If possible, when hunting in a group always keep your companions in sight. NEVER fire at anything which may flush between you and your companions.
32. Be particularly careful at the moment of closing, cocking, taking off the safety catch, uncocking or opening a loaded firearm. This is the time when accidental discharge most frequently occurs.
33. Be a responsible firearms owner-user. Practise self-control continually when shooting. Indiscriminate, unplanned shooting usually results in damage to property and may also cause death or injury to humans or livestock.
34. If you shoot at game and obviously cause injury, do your utmost to complete the destruction of the animal. Failure to do this will often subject your quarry to days or weeks of suffering before death. Use common sense, do not take shots at game that are beyond the ability of yourself or your firearm. Cruelty has no part in recreational hunting and should never be accepted by any members of a shooting group.
35. Be ethical, *always insist* that your companions comply with their safety, moral, legal and environmental obligations. If you set the example and they do not comply, they are a great danger to yourself and others. Refuse to shoot with them. Ban them from your group, and let it be known that they are not good shooting companions.
36. Repeated exposure to shotgun, centre fire rifle and handgun explosion discharge can cause permanent hearing damage. If engaged in this type of sport or competition, you should use appropriate hearing protection. The damage is usually past correcting when detected. Are you, as a firearms safety

conscious owner-user, prepared to follow these basic safety rules? It rests entirely with you. Death or injury from firearms use need not occur.

There are many thousands of firearm owners and users in Western Australia who gain much satisfaction from indoor or outdoor sports and recreational shooting, and there are numerous shooting clubs throughout this State that cater for a wide range of shooting sports activities.

You are encouraged to join a target shooting club that meets your requirements. It is in a club environment, that you can share common interests and draw upon the knowledge of other, perhaps more experienced members.

Employ common sense in your shooting activities. A day's recreation can very quickly become a tragedy that will remain with you for a lifetime.

Enjoy safe and responsible shooting.

Basic Firearms Law

1. While engaging in firearm activities and having possession or control of your firearm you **must** carry your Firearms Extract of Licence Photo Card with you at all times and produce it immediately to a Police Officer should they wish to view it.
2. Should you change your place of residence or change your name and you are the holder of a Firearms Licence or Permit then you **must** notify Police, in writing, of the change within 21 days.
3. Should you lose your firearm or any ammunition by theft or otherwise, or your firearm is destroyed, then you **must** as soon as is practicable report the loss or destruction to Police.
4. You **must** ensure that your firearms and ammunition are stored in a locked cabinet or container that meets specifications set out in the Firearms Regulations. Your local Police Officer or Licensed firearm dealer can provide information relevant to the purchase of an appropriate storage facility.
5. You **must** ensure that your ammunition is stored separately from your firearms and in a locked container of an approved type, namely one that is of a comparable standard to your main storage cabinet. Your ammunition storage container may form part of your main storage cabinet (such as an internal lockable draw securely fixed inside the cabinet in a way that prevents its removal from the cabinet)
6. When engaging in firearms activities and you have possession, custody or control of your firearms you **must** take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safe keeping of your firearms.
7. You **must not** handle or use a firearm or permit any other person to handle or use a firearm while under the influence of alcohol or any other drug.
8. You **must not** deface or alter any identification mark on any firearm or be in possession of any firearm that has had its identification markings altered or defaced.
9. You **must not** discharge your firearm from a road or across a road or onto a road.
10. You **must not** use your firearm on any land belonging to another person unless you have permission of the owner or person lawfully occupying that land and further you **must not** carry your firearm across land used for primary production without the permission of the owner or lawful occupier. The exception to this would be when you were travelling on a public road, which passed through such land.
11. You **must not** sell your firearm unless you are doing so via a licensed Firearms Dealer or if selling direct to another person, that sale is approved and noted by a Police Officer and of course you cannot buy, sell, possess or use a firearm that is not licensed.

BASIC RULES OF FIREARMS SAFETY

1. TREAT ALL FIREARMS AS IF THEY ARE **LOADED**.
2. ALWAYS POINT THE MUZZLE IN A "**SAFE DIRECTION**"
3. KEEP YOUR FINGER **OFF** THE TRIGGER AT ALL TIMES, UNTIL YOU HAVE MADE A **CONSCIOUS** DECISION TO DISCHARGE THE FIREARM.
4. **POSITIVELY** IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AND ITS SURROUNDINGS **BEFORE** YOU DISCHARGE THE FIREARM.