Firearm Safety In Your Home

Every time you pick up a firearm, you pick up a responsibility. Safe storage of your firearms is also **YOUR** responsibility.

The rules of home firearms safety are few in number and easy to follow. It is extremely important that these rules be strictly obeyed. Equally important is the development of the proper attitude toward firearms. An attitude of respect and seriousness should always be encouraged and maintained when dealing with guns. In the beginning, this may require a conscious effort, but as time passes it becomes automatic and safety becomes instinctive.

- **Unload all firearms before taking them into the home.** Simple reason dictates that firearms should be loaded only when in the field or on the range. At all other times, during travel and especially in the home, they should be kept unloaded.
- **Never handle or show guns without first carefully checking to be sure they are unloaded. Open the action and keep it open until the gun is again ready for storage.** Never assume that a firearm is unloaded, even if it was checked only a few minutes earlier. And don't trust the safety to compensate for unsafe gun handling -- like all mechanical devices, safeties can malfunction, and in any case, they are only intended to supplement human care and intelligence.

  Among experienced gun handlers there is a kind of ritual that is repeated whenever a firearm is shown or examined. The person picking up the gun opens the action and checks to make sure it is not loaded. When the gun is handed over to the second person, he goes through the entire procedure again. This is not an insult to the original handler. In fact, most shooting veterans take it as a sign of gun-savvy and competence, because there is just no way to be overcautious about firearms safety.

- **Long arms, such as rifles and shotguns, should be stowed securely in racks or cabinets, preferably locked. Handguns should be stored in a locked cabinet or drawer.** Locked storage is particularly important if there are children in the home. Standing a shotgun in the closet corner or keeping a pistol in the desk does not do the job. If the proper storage facilities are not available, trigger locks should be purchased. Different types are available for use on all kinds of guns, including revolvers and pistols, and they prevent even a fully loaded gun from being fired.

  On the practical side, guns should be stored in a reasonably dry environment but away from exposure to heat. Dampness causes rust and heat can bake the wood of stocks and grips to the point of cracking or splitting.

- **All ammunition should be kept under lock and in a location separate from firearms for complete safety.** Again, this is especially important if there are children in the home. An extra measure of safety can be had by storing ammunition in another room or on a different floor level. The objective is to create a situation in which conscious effort is

required to bring firearms and ammunition together. Obviously the keys to all storage areas must be kept away from children.

- **When handling firearms, always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction. Avoid horseplay at all times -- guns are not toys and they must be handled with respect.** Common sense must be used in choosing the safest direction to point the muzzle. "Down" is not always the safest direction and neither is "up."

Firearm Education

Safety in general is largely a matter of education and home firearms safety is certainly no exception. The head of the house must teach safe gun handling to all family members. Without proper education, preventive measures are nearly useless.

Children are never too young to begin the lessons of safety. Teaching can begin long before the child is old enough to understand detailed instruction. Start by setting a proper and consistent example. If parents treat guns with care and respect, children will likely follow their lead.

The second stage is more difficult, but well worth the effort. It involves convincing the child that firearms are not toys. Having noticed adult interest in guns, children will naturally develop a healthy curiosity about their use and operation. In addition, children tend to have an entirely unrealistic idea of what guns are all about because of exposure to modern realistic toys and to the fantasies of television. The quickest and surest way to show youngsters the power of firearms is by demonstration. Take them to the local range, fire a few rounds of high velocity ammunition at closed gallon cans of water, and show them the results.

It is a serious mistake to assume that keeping children ignorant will prevent accidents. Nothing could be further from the truth. Where firearms are concerned, there is no such thing as blissful ignorance. Keeping youngsters in the dark only insures that they will not understand the potential danger and increases the likelihood that they will seek to satisfy their curiosity without proper supervision. Also, the hazards that the parent wishes to eliminate are greatly increased if the child does not know how firearms function.

A good rule for children is: "Hands Off" until they are old enough to be taught safe gun handling, and then only in the presence of an adult -- NEVER while playing with other children.

As soon as a child is old enough, he or she should be enrolled in one of the many firearms safety classes sponsored by sportsmen's groups across the country. These courses provide excellent training and serve to reinforce the lessons learned at home.

Essential to any responsible hunting trip is an ironclad adherence to the four basic rules of firearm safety that can be easily remembered using the TAB-K formula.

T = Treat every firearm as if it is loaded. Never assume a firearm is unloaded and never treat it that way, even if you watch as it is unloaded. Make it a habit to treat guns like they are loaded all the time.

A = Always point the muzzle in a safe direction. About one third of all hunting incidents are self inflicted injuries. That means the muzzle was pointed at some part of the hunter's body. A safe direction is a direction where the bullet will travel and harm no one in the event of an unwanted discharge. There are no accidental discharges with firearms, only unwanted discharges.

B = Be certain of your target and what's beyond it. Positive target identification is a must. To shoot at something you only think is a legal target is gambling. In the case of human injury, that means gambling with human life. You must be absolutely certain and correct in judgment before deciding to shoot. Otherwise, it's reckless behavior. In addition to identifying the target, a hunter must know that a safe backstop for their bullet is present in every shooting situation. We don't always hit our target, and, in some cases, the bullet passes through the target. A safe backstop guarantees that no one will get hurt.

K = Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot. If a hunter stumbles with a firearm in one hand and nothing in the other, whatever that person does with their free hand will automatically happen with the hand holding the gun. If a finger is inside the trigger guard, that hand is likely going to close around the pistol grip of the gun and on the trigger causing an unwanted discharge.

Planning your fall hunting trip also means having your gear in proper working order. Firearms should be cleaned and closely inspected for any signs of mechanical wear that could result in a problem in the field.

Firearms aren't the only items that need to be checked well in advance of a hunting trip. Clothing and other equipment should also be inspected for signs of wear and tear. Anything that might cause you to compromise safety should be repaired, discarded or replaced. Blaze orange clothing that has faded over time, a jacket that doesn't fit right or a scope that isn't adjusted correctly can compromise your safety and the safety of others.

4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety
TAB-K ; Series (T)
Every graduate of hunter education has been taught and tested on the 4 basic rules of firearms safety since it began in the summer of 1967 in Wisconsin. In the very early days we actually trained our students on the 10 commandments of firearms safety but statistics and research has shown that every firearms related incident is a violation of one or more of the 4 basic rules of firearms safety, which are included in the 10 commandments. This is the first in a series of articles explaining each of those 4 basic rules, why they are important and how to put them into practice.
The first rule is to treat every firearm as if is loaded. Put simply never assume a firearm is unloaded and even if you know it is do not treat it with any different respect than if it was loaded. Too many

times a firearm has been handled and the person said, “ah, it’s not loaded” and then it discharged when the trigger was pulled. That is what is known as an unwanted discharge. It’s not an accidental discharge because it was not an accident that caused the firearm to go off; the trigger was pulled intentionally. Unwanted discharges shock everyone nearby. In the worst cases a person is injured or even killed.

Every time you handle a firearm do two things. First check to see if it is loaded by opening the action. If a person is handing you the firearm it’s even better if you have them open the action before you agree to accept it. The second thing is to check the safety and make sure that it is always on safe. This is a practice that should be conducted numerous times when handling a firearm. Safe hunters and shooters do this all the time and frequently when they are handling firearms. You cannot check the safety too many times to verify if it is on safe or not. I don’t mean play with it. I mean routinely check the safety once you first touch the firearm, then frequently while handling it and when you are just about to put it away or hand it off to someone else.

Respect is what this rule is all about. Respect for the firearm and what it can do. Respect for other people around you. Every one likes to know that you acknowledge their presence and are aware that safety is foremost on your mind. Respect for property. Firearms can and will do damage to property when discharged. The person handling the firearm is responsible for any and all damage done by the discharge. Proper handling and respect of firearms is necessary to be safe. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded. That means every firearm, every time, all the time.

4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety

TAB-K ; Series (A)

Do you remember when your mother taught you it was not polite to point your finger at anyone? I’m sure we all remember that. It also applies to firearms safety and etiquette. This is the second in a four-part series on the 4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety. “A” always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

This is one of those rules that we all violate no matter how safe you might think you are. It is impossible to know your muzzle is pointed in a safe direction all the time. A safe direction is defined as “any direction where the bullet or shot will not harm a person if the firearm is discharged.” What you can do is adopt certain styles of carries and specific practices while hunting with or handling firearms to help maximize on safety. We all know that it is never acceptable to point a firearm at another person or at anything you do not wish to destroy. What we don’t consciously realize is that sometimes when we are “getting ready” to use or put away our firearms we inadvertently point the muzzle in an unsafe direction. Let’s not forget rule number one either: Treat Every Firearm as if it is Loaded….all the time. Examples of safe directions would include straight up in a two-hand ready carry position or downrange when on the firing line at a shooting range. When not actively hunting or shooting you can also increase the safety factor by having the action open. This was a common practice in the days when shotgun hunters mostly hunted with break open action shotguns. When confronted in the field by another person hunters simply opened the actions on their shotguns. This was considered proper etiquette.

Did you know that many unwanted discharges occur when the firearm is being loaded or unloaded? Pointing the muzzle of your firearm in a safe direction when doing either function is critical and necessary to avoid an incident. Remember that if a firearm discharges the bullets or pellets can ricochet. Placing hunters in a circle all facing outward is one way to load and unload firearms in a safe direction. If you are hunting with only one other person you can stand back-to-back.

Self inflicted firearms injuries comprise about 33% of all hunting incidents annually in Wisconsin. The muzzles of those firearms were not pointed in a safe direction when the incidents occurred. Controlling the muzzle of your firearm is your responsibility. You should never be insulted if a person requests you to point your muzzle elsewhere or in a safe direction. Rather you should be thankful because they might have saved you from a tragedy and they were paying attention not only to their safety but to yours as well. In many circles these gentle reminders are viewed as mild "tune-ups" on safety practices. We can all be better as we are none perfect all the time. You are only as safe as your nest hunt no matter how safe you have been up until then.

4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety
TAB-K ; Series (B)

Have you ever looked at something and thought it was something other than what it actually was? How many times as hunters have each of us mistaken a branch on a tree for an antler on a deer or a bump on a log as a squirrel? It happens and we know how it happens. This is the third in a four-part series on the 4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety. "B" be certain of your target and what's beyond it. Coming to closure is the phenomenon we find ourselves in when we allow our brain to override what our eyes actually see. Think of it this way, remember the game you played in elementary school known as connect the dots? When you drew a line between all of the dots a picture was formed. Most of us could tell what the picture was before we connected all the dots. That's what happens when hunters are looking for something in particular and see a few of the dots connected such as an ear, leg, or tail flicker. When hunters are in an area known to contain the species they are after, expecting to see them and wanting to see them it doesn't take much to fill in the dots. What hunters must do is avoid the tendency of accepting their first mental impulse as being accurate. They must verify that what they think they see is actually what it really is. Be certain of your target both for legal and safety reasons. Once you fire the shot it cannot be called back and it's no excuse when you have to say, "I thought it was a ….." You must know it was and be right about that.

Knowing what's beyond your target is equally important. We don't all hit every target and with some of our firearms the projectiles be the pellets or solid slugs pass through or around the game we are shooting at. Knowing that if we miss or if our shots pass through the game that they will fall or impact in a safe place is important. Looking beyond the animals, planning on where we have safe shots before we take them is critical. If you are on a deer stand you should already know where the safe zones of fire are. During a deer drive with each step you should be making observations of the safe directions you can shoot and where you won't shoot. Hunters are responsible for their shots both when the hit their targets and when they don't. Their shots should fall on safe areas and on the property where you have permission to be hunting.

Taking risks on either of these issues is like gambling. You gamble that you are right, but when you are not then the stakes are high. Another tag filled or a bag limit obtained is not worth a citation for destruction of property, a person injured or a person killed. Remember to Be certain of your target AND what's beyond it. Safe hunting is NO accident.

4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety – K

In recent years one third of all hunting incidents have been self inflicted injuries. That means that hunters are shooting themselves! The 4th and last rule of basic firearms safety is the practice of keeping your finger outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot. Of course muzzle control is critically important as well since the muzzle most often is pointed at the hunter in almost 100% of the self inflicted injuries.

Keeping your trigger finger outside the trigger guard should be a habit and not just a practice. If you think about that it makes perfect sense. Here are a few examples that drive home the point. Say you are hunting in rough terrain and have your finger inside the trigger guard but off the trigger. If you stumble or fall your hand will automatically do what is called sympathetic response. It will do whatever your other hand does and in many cases that is it will close. Even if you don't close your shooting hand just having your trigger finger inside the trigger guard during a stumble or fall could cause the finger to touch the trigger. There is a reason that part of the firearm is called a trigger "guard;" its purpose is to protect the trigger so that nothing (not even your finger) touches the trigger when it's not supposed to.

Too often investigations find out that self inflicted injuries involve hunters that have the safety in the off safe position, a finger inside the trigger guard and the muzzle pointed at themselves when the firearm discharged. Keeping your finger outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot would reduce the number of self inflicted injuries and unwanted discharges. Remember safe hunting is no accident; you have to plan to be safe.