



# Firearms Safety

*"Safety is something that happens between your ears,  
not something you hold in your hands."*

--Jeff Cooper

Information for this presentation was found at:  
<https://thecmp.org/wp-content/uploads/JrSafetyGuidetoARSafety.pdf?ver-051817>



Bolt: open action by moving bolt handle

Loading port and breech end of barrel

Action



Muzzle

Trigger



Trigger Guard



Everyone should know the primary parts of a gun, whether or not they will ever participate in target shooting, so that they can apply the rules for safe gun handling any time they are in a situation where a gun is present.

**MUZZLE.** The forward end of the barrel. The muzzle is the point where the pellet or projectile leaves the barrel when the gun is fired. A gun is aimed by pointing its muzzle at the target. Whenever a projectile is fired, it will strike exactly where the muzzle is pointed.

**ACTION.** The working mechanism of the gun. Gun actions typically have a bolt or cocking lever that is used to open and close the action so that the gun can be loaded and unloaded. A gun cannot ordinarily be fired unless its action is closed and locked.

**TRIGGER.** The trigger is part of the action or working mechanism of the gun. The trigger is a lever that projects out of the bottom of the action. A trigger guard protects the trigger. After a gun is loaded and the action is closed, the gun is fired by pulling or applying pressure to the trigger.

***The rules for safe firearm handling covered in this presentation are NOT just for target shooting but apply to other firearms as well.***

The rules for safe gun handling follow a step-by-step sequence designed to prevent the unintentional firing of a gun. These rules ensure that even if a gun is unintentionally fired, it cannot cause personal injury. Follow these steps every time you handle a gun:

1. The **first step** in picking up or taking a gun is to do this with all fingers outside of the trigger guard and to immediately **control the direction the muzzle points**. Immediately point the gun in a safe direction where it is not directed at another person and would do no serious damage even if the gun were unintentionally fired. The first thing to do when picking up a gun or when taking a gun from someone else is to point it away from other people in the area. The safest direction to point a gun is usually upward with the muzzle held above head level. **If a gun is on a range, the safest direction is to point it downrange towards the targets.**

2. As soon as the gun muzzle is pointing in a safe direction, **the second step is to check the action of the gun and open it, if it is not already open, and insert a safety flag.** Since the gun's action contains its firing mechanism, it cannot be fired unintentionally or accidentally if the action is open. All guns, except muzzle loading guns, have a bolt or lever on the action that opens the action. Be sure to learn where the bolt or cocking lever is on any gun you handle. With the action open, it is possible to visually check most guns to see whether the gun is loaded and has a cartridge or pellet in the breech end (rear end) of the barrel. If you check a gun action and see that the gun is loaded with a cartridge or pellet, the cartridge or pellet must be removed to make the gun safe.

3. With the muzzle pointing in a safe direction and the action open so that the gun cannot be fired, **the third safety precaution is to continue to hold or carry the rifle with all fingers held outside of the trigger guard and not on the trigger.** The trigger guard is a protective band around the trigger. Its purpose is to prevent the trigger from being pulled unintentionally. By keeping the fingers outside of the trigger guard, it is impossible to accidentally pull the trigger should the action somehow become closed. Pulling, lifting or pushing a lever on the action opens the loading port and action. **Your finger must remain outside of the trigger guard at all times until the rifle is in the firing position and you *begin to look through the sights* and start to aim in preparation for firing a shot.**

## **RULES FOR SAFE GUN HANDLING:**

- 1. MUZZLE.** Always keep gun muzzles pointed in a safe direction. Gun muzzles must never be pointed at other persons under any circumstance. On a range, the safest directions to point a gun muzzle are usually upward or downrange towards the target.
- 2. ACTION.** When handling any rifle or firearm, the action must be open with a safety flag inserted. Gun actions must remain open except when the gun is on the firing line and preparation or firing periods have begun. When shooting is finished, the action must be open and a safety flag must be re-inserted, even when the gun is on the firing line. The gun action may be closed when it is placed in a gun case or storeroom but must be opened and a safety flag inserted as soon as it is picked up again.
- 3. TRIGGER.** Keep your finger off of the trigger until after shouldering the gun and preparing to fire a shot. It is especially important to keep the finger outside of the trigger guard when loading the gun and placing it in the shooting position.

The 4 (sometimes called Universal) rules of firearms safety. Wording can vary from source to source, but all have the same message.

## The 4 Rules Of Gun Safety:

1. Treat Every Gun As If It Is Loaded.
2. Always Point The Gun In A Safe Direction.
3. Keep Your Finger Straight And Off The Trigger Until Ready To Shoot.
4. Be Aware Of Your Target And What Is Beyond It.



The most important part of firearms safety is the person holding the firearm.

All firearms safety rules apply to air rifles even though some may be less powerful, some air rifles have nearly the same power as firearms that fire cartridges.

Firearms safety is ALWAYS important and more that just knowing some information to pass a test.

## The 4 RULES of FIREARM SAFETY

1 ALWAYS TREAT EVERY FIREARM AS THOUGH IT IS LOADED.



2 NEVER LET THE MUZZLE COVER ANYTHING YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO DESTROY.



3 KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOUR SIGHTS ARE ON THE TARGET.



4 BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT IS BEYOND IT.



## **SAFETY FLAGS**

Safety flags are now mandatory for use in target shooting to positively demonstrate that gun actions are open, and barrels or chambers are unloaded. Safety flags used for air rifles were previously called Clear Barrel Indicators or CBIs, but now they are simply called safety flags, a term that everyone understands. Air rifle safety flags are cut from orange or bright-colored weed-trimmer cord (.065-.095" dia.). They must be long enough so that when inserted in the air rifle barrel 4-6 inches of the cord projects out of each end of the barrel.

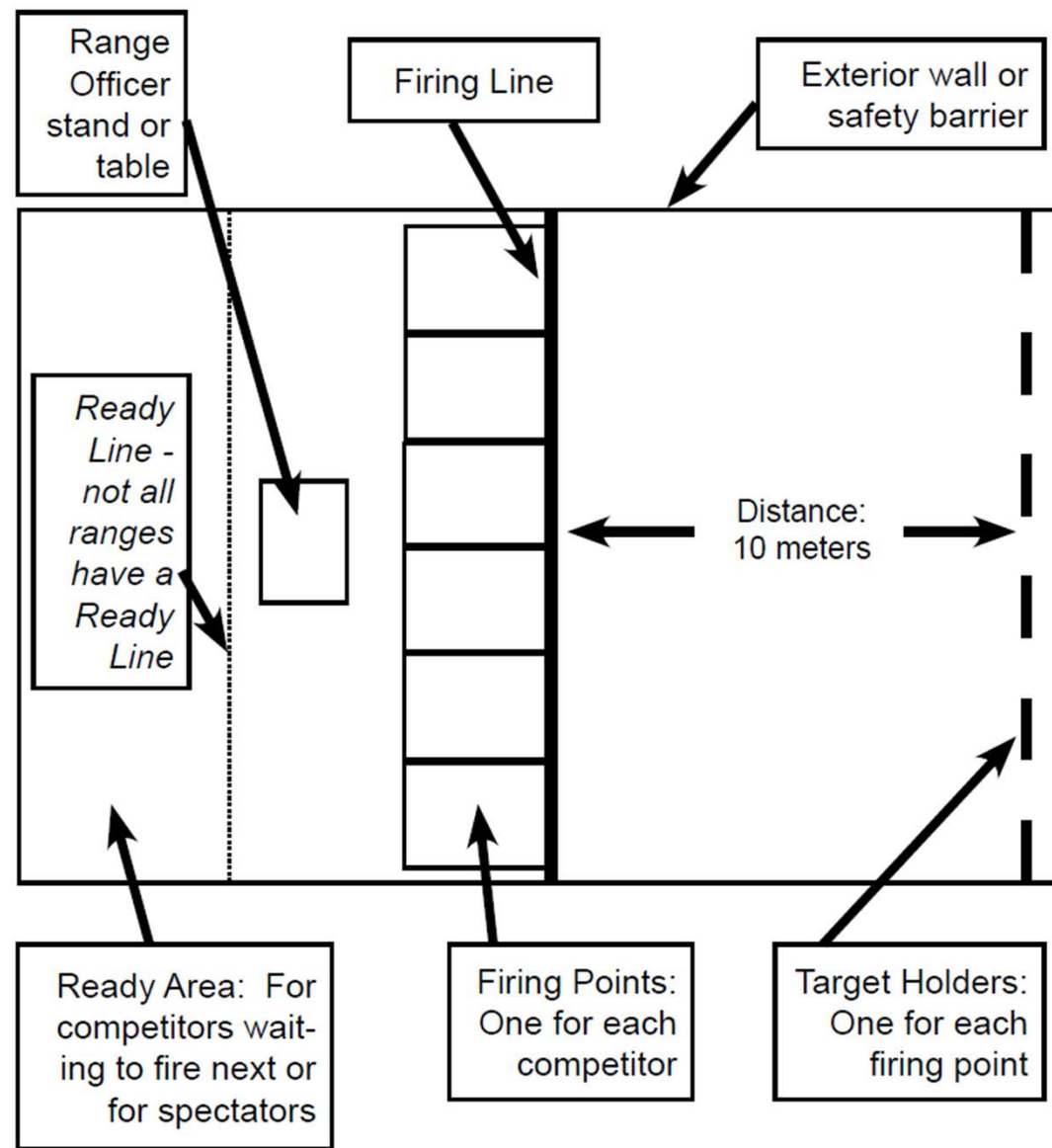
Here are some rules for the proper use of safety flags in air rifles:

1. Insert a safety flag before bringing your rifle to the range or when removing it from a gun case.
2. Remove the safety flag only on the firing line after the Range Officer instructs you to handle rifles and begin preparations for firing or dry firing.
3. **When you finish firing, immediately open the action, insert the safety flag and ground your rifle.** When all firers are finished, the Range Officer can quickly and accurately verify that all air rifles have open actions and empty barrels by looking for safety flags in each rifle on the firing line.

**A rifle is considered "grounded" when it is lying on the floor with the action open and a safety flag inserted.**

**A rifle is considered "unloaded" when the action open, no pellet in the barrel, and a safety flag inserted.**

Individuals who use rifles in junior marksmanship or other target shooting activities also need to know and practice additional rules for the safe operation of target shooting ranges. To understand these safety rules, it is first necessary to know something about how target ranges are designed and laid out. Study the diagram of the range that is shown above so that you understand how the firing points and targets are positioned on a typical range. This diagram is for a 6-point range, but target ranges can have as few as three or four and as many as 80 or even 100 firing points.



**Air rifle ranges have these primary features:**

**Safety Barrier.** Ranges must have an outer wall, or some means of preventing unauthorized persons from entering the range area while firing takes place. During firing, the entire safety barrier forward of the firing line must be secured so that no one can enter the range from the outside.

**Target Holders.** At the front end of the range there are a series of target holders and backstops. Most target holders have a metal plate behind the targets that serves as a backstop to stop and collect the pellets that are fired at the targets. The target holders are designed so that targets can be hung on them at heights appropriate for the three shooting positions.



A portable 10-meter air rifle range with target holders, pellet catchers and backstop. Targets can be placed the proper heights for firing from the prone, standing and kneeling positions.

**Firing Line.** At a distance of 10 meters from the targets, a firing line is marked on the floor of the range. The firing line is normally a red or colored stripe or tape that is two or three inches wide. Competitors must take their positions on their firing points so that no part of their feet or body touches the back edge of this firing line.

**Range Officer.** Immediately behind the line of firing points, a table, stand or working area for the Range Officer is located. The Range Officer is in charge of firing on the range and gives commands and instructions for the firers. Range Officers use standard range commands to control the conduct of shooting.



A Range Officer, or instructor, is in charge of the firing on every range.

The commands and instructions of the Range Officer must always be followed.

**Firing Points.** The firing line is divided into firing points. Firing points are rectangular spaces located immediately behind the firing line. Firing points are approximately 1 meter wide by 2 meters long. The width of each firing point corresponds to the distances between the targets. Only one competitor may occupy one firing point at a time.

**Ready Area.** Most ranges also have an area behind the firing line that is designated as a preparation or ready area. If there are other competitors who are waiting their turn to fire, this is the area where they should remain. If there are spectators, this also is the area where they should stand or sit. Individuals in the ready area must remain in that area and not go forward to the firing line until instructed to do so by the Range Officer.



Ready Area



Firing Points

## **RANGE COMMANDS**

The Range Officer conducts the firing activity on a range and is responsible for giving range commands and instructions. To begin a range activity, the Range Officer designates the persons who will use the firing points and instructs them to move their equipment to the firing line and take their shooting positions. The group of persons who shoot at the same time is called a “relay” of competitors.

When rifles are brought to the range, muzzles must be pointed upward with the muzzles held above head level. When the rifles are on the firing line, muzzles must be pointed upward or downrange towards the targets, never to the rear of the line or towards other persons on the line. Rifle actions must be open, and guns must be unloaded, and safety flags must be inserted. After competitors get into their shooting positions and are ready to begin firing, the Range Officer will give a series of commands to start and stop firing.

**If a rifle is brought to the range in a case, the case should be positioned so that the muzzle of the rifle inside the case will be pointed in a safe direction when it is removed from the case. If the case cannot be close with the action open, the action must immediately be opened and safety flag inserted once the rifle is removed from the case.**

**LOAD.** No one may load any rifle until the Range Officer gives the command **LOAD**. Then competitors may charge their rifles, insert a pellet in them and close the actions. It is a serious offense to load a rifle on a range before the command **LOAD** is given.



**START.** The next command tells competitors that they can begin to aim and fire at their targets and that they may continue loading and firing until the firing exercise is finished. **No one may fire a shot until this command is given**, even if the command **LOAD** was given. Whenever competitors finish their firing exercise, they must open their air rifle actions, ground their rifles and insert safety flags.

**STOP.** When shooting is finished, the Range Officer commands **STOP**. If the command **STOP** is given during firing, every competitor must immediately stop firing, take their finger off the trigger, open the actions on their rifles and wait for further instructions. No one is authorized to fire a shot after the command **STOP** is given. The Range Officer or any other person on the range can command **STOP** if they become aware of a dangerous or unsafe condition.

***Emergency STOP Situations***

On rare occasions, it may be necessary to stop firing in the middle of a series because of a real safety emergency. If this becomes necessary, the Range Officer, or anyone observing a safety emergency, should call the STOP command three times, **STOP-STOP-STOP!** When people are not expecting a STOP command, repeating STOP three times will get everyone's attention.

**UNLOAD.** If anyone on a range has a loaded air rifle after the command **STOP-UNLOAD** is given, they must notify the Range Officer by raising their hand and calling out "**loaded rifle.**" The Range Officer will then give instructions for unloading that rifle.

After firing is completed, the Range Officer will check each rifle to be sure it is grounded with a safety flag inserted. When that check is completed, the Range Officer will declare that the line is clear and instruct competitors to change or retrieve targets or to leave the firing line so the next group of competitors can move up to the firing line.

**When you finish firing, even time has not expired, open the action and insert the safety flag and ground your air rifle.**

The basic range commands, **LOAD**, **START**, **STOP**, **UNLOAD**, were adopted by the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), National Three-Position Air Rifle Council, Civilian Marksmanship Program and USA Shooting for official use in air rifle competitions. The range commands, **LOAD**, **START**, **STOP**, **UNLOAD** are the most commonly used range commands for air rifle shooting in the USA, but some ranges and Range Officers may still use other range commands such as COMMENCE FIRING and CEASE FIRING. If you are on a range where these commands are used, just remember that COMMENCE FIRING means **START** and CEASE FIRING means **STOP**. Other range commands that are more detailed are often given with these commands (i.e., IS THE LINE READY, READY ON THE RIGHT, READY ON THE LEFT, READY ON THE FIRING LINE, etc.). If you hear these commands, regard them as instructions from the Range Officer, which of course, must always be obeyed.

### **SAFE LOADING PROCEDURE**

To safely load an air rifle, follow these steps:

**Pneumatic Air Rifles** (must be charged with a charging lever):

1. Open the action (bolt). Do not charge an air rifle with a closed action.
2. Open and close the charging lever to charge the rifle with air.
3. Insert a pellet in the loading port or breech end of the barrel.
4. Close the bolt (action).
5. Shoulder the air rifle to prepare to fire the next shot. Keep the index finger on the outside of the trigger guard while shouldering the rifle.

When we get PCP air rifles, we will cover those procedures.

### **SAFETIES**

A safety is a mechanical device that blocks the trigger or firing mechanism when it is engaged (safety is on). Many air rifles used in junior marksmanship programs have safeties, but many other target air rifles do not. Safeties are made for general purpose guns where there is a possibility that a gun may be carried loaded. For example, hunters use safeties when they carry a loaded rifle or shotgun in the field or woods. Safeties are not normally used in target shooting because the primary 'safety' in target shooting is the open action and the safety flag. More importantly, rifles on target ranges are loaded only on the firing line and only when they are to be fired at a target so there is never any reason to carry a loaded rifle to any other location on a range.

## **RANGE AND SAFETY PROCEDURES**

There are other rules that are used on shooting ranges to assure the safe and orderly conduct of the shooting activity. Every competitor must be familiar with these rules and any special rules that apply to the range you are using.

1. **PROPER AIR RIFLES FOR THE RANGE.** Only .177 caliber air rifles designed for target air rifle shooting can safely be used. Target air rifles may be pneumatic (air cylinder is charged by hand), or compressed air rifles. These rifles are designed to fire soft lead pellets weighing 0.50 grams (8 grains) at velocities of 500 to 600 feet per second. Pellet or air rifles that fire larger or heavier pellets, steel projectiles or pellets at velocities in excess of 600 feet per second **are not allowed**. Air rifles must fire 600 fps or below to fire in a CMP sanctioned match or clinic. It is also unsafe to fire BB guns at any target holder or backstop that is not expressly designed for BB gun target shooting.
2. **TARGET.** Shoot only at the target designated for you (your assigned firing point). Be sure your target is placed in front of a safe backstop. Shooting at any object on a range other than your own target is strictly forbidden.
3. **LOADING.** Rifle muzzles must remain pointed downrange or upward with the muzzle held above head level whenever the rifle is charged and loaded. Special care must be taken to be sure that a rifle muzzle is never pointed at a neighboring competitor, a basketball backboard, or towards any area behind the firing line during charging and loading. A loaded rifle must remain in your hands; **never lay a loaded rifle down**.

4. **MALFUNCTIONS.** If at any time during a firing exercise, your air rifle fails to fire or does not function properly, **stay in position, keep the muzzle pointed downrange and raise your hand so the Range Officer can see it.** The Range Officer will give instructions on what to do with the air rifle. If the air rifle is loaded with a pellet, the pellet must be cleared from the barrel before the air rifle may be removed from the firing line. The Range Officer may use a .177 caliber cleaning rod to remove the pellet from the barrel before the air rifle is taken off of the firing line.

5. **FIRING COMPLETED.** Immediately after you fire your last shot in a firing exercise or when the command **STOP** is given, you must open the action on your air rifle, place the rifle on the ground or bench and insert a safety flag. The Range Officer will check the rifle.

6. **LOADED RIFLE.** A loaded air rifle is an air rifle that has a pellet in the barrel. Any pellet that is in the barrel must be removed before the air rifle may be grounded or removed from the range. **If you still have a loaded air rifle after the command STOP is given, stay in position, keep the muzzle pointed downrange, raise your hand and announce, "loaded rifle"**. The Range Officer will give you instructions for discharging your air rifle to unload it. This may be done by instructing you to fire into an open target backstop or to fire into a pellet discharge container (PDC).

7. **GROUNDING RIFLE.** A grounded rifle is an unloaded rifle that is lying on a shooting mat or bench with its action open and a safety flag inserted. When you bring your rifle to the firing line, you will be instructed to "ground" it. You must also ground your rifle after you finish firing and insert a safety flag so the Range Officer can check it.

8. **LINE IS CLEAR.** When conducting firing, the Range Officer will alternately describe the firing line as being “clear” or “not clear”. A firing line is clear when all firing is completed, and all rifles are grounded with safety flags inserted and have been checked by the Range Officer. No one can move forward of the firing line until the Range Officer announces **THE LINE IS CLEAR.**

9. **GOING DOWNRANGE.** Whenever it is necessary for someone to go forward of the firing line (downrange) to place or retrieve targets, or for any other purpose, **all rifles must be grounded with safety flags inserted and checked by the Range Officer.** No one may go forward of the firing line until authorized to do so by the Range Officer. No one may handle rifles while anyone is in front of the firing line. After everyone returns from downrange and is behind the firing line, the Range Officer will announce **THE LINE IS CLEAR** and give instructions to handle your rifles again.

10. **PERSONAL HYGIENE.** Lead is a toxic substance that must not get into your body. Medical research and testing conducted at the U. S. Olympic Training Center confirms that simple hygiene precautions effectively prevent individuals who shoot air rifles from ingesting harmful amounts of lead. The rules are simple: Do not bring food into the range or consume food on the range. Do not bring any drinks into the range unless they are bottled and can be closed. **Wash your hands after handling air rifle pellets** (preferably in cold water). Cleaning the target backstops of spent lead pellets must be done by the instructor or another adult.

11. **GUN CASES.** Air rifles are often brought to ranges in gun cases used to transport the rifles. Make sure the case is positioned so the rifle is pointed in a safe direction. As soon as you open the case, open the rifle action and insert a safety flag in the rifle. You can then take the rifle from the case to ground it on your firing point or ready area. When firing is completed the Range Officer will give instructions to discharge air downrange and replace the rifle in the case. When placing an air rifle in its case, it is authorized to remove the safety flag, close the action and release the trigger.

12. **EYE AND HEARING PROTECTION.** Regulations on some ranges require the wearing of eye protection for air rifle shooting because of the remote possibility that a lead pellet fragment could bounce back from the backstop. Because of this possibility, you are encouraged to wear eye protection while on an air rifle range. Safety glasses with polycarbonate lenses or regular prescription eyeglasses, especially if they have polycarbonate lenses, provide adequate protection. Some competitors elect to wear hearing protection (ear plugs or earmuffs) while shooting air rifles, although this is normally done by individuals who wish to reduce the effects of noise in the range to improve their ability to concentrate. Air rifles do not generate enough sound to cause hearing loss.

13. **AIR RIFLE STORAGE.** After a shooting session is completed, the air rifles must be stored in secure, locked storage. When firing is completed, you may be instructed to bring the rifle to a storage area where your instructor will be in charge of accounting for and locking up the rifle. Whenever you carry your rifle from the range to the storage area, be sure to keep the muzzle pointed upward and in a safe direction.

# The Goal—No Gun Accidents

In addition to learning to follow safe gun handling rules, range commands and established range and safety procedures, there are two additional safety goals that must become part of your continuing efforts to be safe with guns.

**Everyone is a Safety Officer.** In an emergency when a safety hazard occurs or when someone in your presence does something unsafe with a gun, you can and must become an “Emergency Safety Officer.” **If you see someone close the action on a gun or fail to open the action of a gun while handling it, it is necessary for you to step in and make sure the action is opened.**

**Self-Discipline and Focus.** Gun safety is not a matter of learning safety rules and then assuming you will always be safe with guns. Gun safety requires that you consciously practice safe muzzle control, check for open actions and keep your fingers outside of the trigger guard every time you handle a gun. That requires self-discipline and focus. **You must discipline yourself to always pay attention to safety**—for yourself and for those around you.

*Everyone who completes marksmanship and safety training learns how to be safe while handling any type of air rifle or firearm. By learning and following the rules of safe gun handling and by practicing those rules during target rifle practice, you will ensure that your rifle marksmanship training and competition experiences or your activities with any other types of firearms will be is safe and enjoyable.*