

FIREARM SAFETY

TIPS FROM THE POSSE

BY MARK RACKAY



**BEFORE YOU TAKE A
SHOT, BE CERTAIN
OF WHAT IS IN FRONT
OF YOU AND BEYOND
YOUR TARGET. IF
YOU ARE NOT SURE,
DON'T TAKE THE
SHOT. REMEMBER
THAT YOU OWN THAT
BULLET ALL THE WAY
UP TO, AND AFTER,
IT'S TERMINAL
RESTING SPOT.**

I GREW UP with a Dad who did not hunt but encouraged me to chase my hunting dreams. He pawned me off on an old man friend of the family, who hunted everything Colorado had to offer. This old man, who long ago passed to the great tax shelter in the sky, instilled hunting safety and ethics in me that I still carry today.

Before he would take me on a hunt, the old man signed me up for a hunter safety course. On a cold Saturday in the fall of 1972, I took my course in Golden, Colorado. I still have the card awarded to me that day, upon completion of the course, and remember the excitement of being a legal hunter.

Anyone who uses firearms or hunts has probably had safety drilled into their head. Nonetheless, excitement comes into play and accidents happen. I have found that a safety reminder is always welcome. The group I hunt with is very good about addressing safety concerns when we are afield.

Colorado requires that anyone born after January 1, 1949 must successfully complete a hunter education course. The course is full of safety information and useful survival tips as well.

Colorado also requires firearm hunters (for big game hunting) to wear at least 500 square inches of solid daylight fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink, on an outer garment above the waist while hunting. The law also requires a fluorescent orange or pink head covering, visible from all directions to be worn.

This law applies to all firearm hunters, including muzzleloaders, who hunt deer, elk, pronghorn, moose or bear. It is a good idea for any non-

hunters in your party to wear the fluorescent orange or pink while outdoors recreating during the hunting seasons.

Hunting is one of the safest outdoor activities there is. Still, accidents do occasionally happen, usually when excitement enters into play. The number one cause of hunting accidents is judgment mistakes. Mistaking a person for game, not sure of what is in front or beyond your target, or getting too excited, can all cause a mistake.

Muzzle control is the most important rule to follow. Never point the muzzle of your firearm at anything you do not intend to shoot. Do not rely on your rifle's safety. The safety is a mechanical object and is subject to failure. Control that muzzle at all times. Keep your finger off that trigger until you are ready to fire.

One of the biggest problems I encounter is people that have not spent enough time practicing with their firearms. The more range time you put in, the more proficient you will be with your weapon. Trigger control, basic operation and function, and aiming should all become second nature with enough practice. You want to be able to take your game cleanly, safely, ethically, and with a quick kill. This only happens with lots of practice.

Many accidents occur because of firearms loaded in vehicles. Not only is it illegal to have a round chambered in a vehicle, it is just poor judgment. It is not legal or ethical to fire from a vehicle anyway, so there is no sense keeping a rifle loaded.

Anytime you are using an ATV, your rifle or shotgun must be completely unloaded and stored in a case. The case also protects expensive firearms and rifles from dust, debris and banging around.

At days end, returning to camp, or at rest breaks, be certain to clear all firearms. Never leave a loaded firearm unattended or leaning against something. Someone could knock it over and cause an accidental discharge.

In camp or back at the vehicle, I like to unload my rifle and secure it in a case. I once saw a hunting dog knock over a loaded shotgun that was leaning against the truck bumper. The shotgun went off, but fortunately, nobody was injured, but that is the sort of thing that could really ruin the press of a man's pants.

Before you take a shot, be certain of what is in front of you and beyond your target. If you are not sure, don't take the shot. Remember that you own that bullet all the way up to, and after, it's terminal resting spot.

Don't hunt alone. Hunting with a partner is safer than hunting alone. A partner can help you be more aware of your surroundings, assist you with carrying out game, and be there to help if someone gets hurt. Besides, it is more fun to share the experience with someone.

HERE ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FIREARM SAFETY

- 1. WATCH THAT MUZZLE.**
- 2. TREAT EVERY FIREARM WITH THE RESPECT DUE A LOADED GUN.**
- 3. BE SURE OF THE TARGET AND WHAT IS IN FRONT AND BEYOND IT.**
- 4. KEEP YOUR FINGER OUTSIDE THE TRIGGER GUARD UNTIL READY TO SHOOT.**

- 5. CHECK YOUR BARREL AND AMMUNITION.**
- 6. UNLOAD YOUR FIREARM WHEN NOT IN USE.**
- 7. NEVER POINT A FIREARM AT ANYTHING YOU DO NOT INTEND TO SHOOT.**
- 8. DON'T RUN, JUMP OR CLIMB WITH A LOADED FIREARM.**
- 9. STORE FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION SEPARATELY AND SAFELY.**
- 10. AVOID ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES BEFORE AND DURING SHOOTING.**

I would also throw in there to wear eye and ear protection whenever you are shooting. I shot many years as a youngster without using any ear protection and am nearly deaf now because of it.

I have found that a safety reminder never hurts. When someone in your crew does something unsafe, point it out to him or her and discuss it. We all need a reminder at times. I still remember that old man lecturing me about firearm safety, and at times, it seemed monotonous. I wish I could hear it from him today. Enjoy your hunting seasons and hunt safely.

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