



Firearm Safety Code



Revised by
Firearm Safety Foundation Inc. Vic. 2011



FOREWORD

The Victorian Government recognises the right of citizens to participate in lawful recreational shooting throughout Victoria. However, with this right comes great responsibility. There is a community expectation on those who engage in recreational shooting that they treat their firearms with respect and handle them safely at all times.

Developed by members of the Firearms Safety Foundation Inc. (FSF) with expert knowledge in the safe recreational use of firearms, the Victorian Firearm Safety Code (the Code) is a comprehensive guide in the fundamental principles of firearms safety. The Code is a guide relied upon by recreational shooters, Victoria Police and safety instructors who conduct firearms safety courses for new firearms licensees and those maintaining their firearm safety knowledge.

Most importantly, the Code identifies ten basic rules that are fundamental to safe recreational shooting. The FSF has taken special care in highlighting the ten basic rules to educate shooters on what behaviour is expected every time they intend to use a firearm. The Code also includes important information on how firearms are best maintained to ensure reliability and understanding of both firearms and ammunition.

The Code is a vital tool that has been developed in the interests of community safety and recreational shooting. I strongly encourage Victorian shooters to recognise the Code's importance and actively practice the ten basic rules. In this regard, shooters will be able to continue enjoying their sport safely while avoiding endangering the welfare of others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Ryan'.

The Honorable Peter Ryan MLA
Deputy Premier of Victoria

FIREARMS SAFETY CODE

This booklet has been approved by the **Firearms Consultative Committee and Victoria Police** to assist applicants for shooter's licences to undergo the written test of their knowledge of safe firearm handling practices.

Before attending the **Firearm Safety Course** and completing the **Firearm Safety Test**, you should read this booklet thoroughly.

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge and thank the **Commissioner of Police New Zealand** and the **New Zealand Mountain Safety Council Inc** for their assistance in supplying their Arms Code Book and illustrations.

We also wish to acknowledge the **Licensing and Regulation Division, Victoria Police** for its assistance with and contribution to the content of this booklet.

We would also like to thank **David Farrar from Parks Victoria** and the **Department of Sustainability and Environment** for supplying some of the images used in this booklet.

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SECTION ONE:

What you must know about firearms

1a) The ten basic rules

1. Treat every firearm as loaded
2. Always point firearms in a safe direction
3. Load a firearm only when ready to fire
4. Identify your target beyond all doubt
5. Check your firing zone
6. Store firearms and ammunition safely
7. Avoid alcohol or drugs prior to and while handling firearms
8. Never have loaded firearms in the car, home or camp
9. Never fire at hard surfaces or water
10. Don't climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms

The ten basic rules explained

As long as a firearm is in good condition and handled and stored properly, it cannot hurt anyone. You are responsible for making sure your firearm is in good condition and handled safely.

Rule 1: Treat every firearm as loaded

- Keep your finger off the trigger; always point the muzzle in a safe direction; open the action and inspect the chamber and magazine.
- Do not take anyone's word that a firearm is unloaded. Check every firearm yourself. Only pass or accept a firearm that has the muzzle pointed in a safe direction; the action open; and is not loaded.
- If you do not know how to open a firearm, leave it alone. Keep clear of the muzzle.
- If it is someone else's, ask them to show you that it is empty.



Figure 1: A firearm must be open and empty before you pass it to or accept it from anyone.

Rule 2: Always point firearms in a safe direction

Loaded or unloaded, always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

- A safe direction will depend on where you are. Remember that bullets can go through walls and ceilings and they can ricochet against flat or hard surfaces.
- Never point a firearm at anyone or at yourself.
- Keep focussed when handling firearms

- To avoid unintentional firing or damage, firearms should never be leant against vehicles or any place where they could slide or fall.
- Always be particularly careful when placing firearms in, or removing them from, vehicles, boats or storage. The muzzle should be pointed away from you (and anyone else nearby) and your finger should be **off** the trigger.

Be aware that firearms can go off unintentionally when:

- Closing the action
- Releasing the safety catch
- Uncocking
- Or opening a loaded firearm

Rule 3: Load a firearm only when ready to fire

Only load a firearm when you intend to use it, and only in an area where it can be safely and legally discharged. Remember to unload it when you have used it.



Figure 2: The cartridge must be removed when not firing a shot.

- Only load your ammunition into the magazine when you have reached your shooting area. (The firearm is then carried with the bolt or action closed on an empty chamber. The rounds (i.e., ammunition) are readily available from the magazine and it only takes a second to open the action and feed a round into the chamber.)
- Do not load the chamber until you are ready to shoot.

- Unload the chamber when not firing a shot (Put the round back in the magazine and close the bolt on an empty chamber.)
- Unload completely – no rounds in the magazine or chamber – before leaving a shooting area or entering a hut or camp. Double check.

Self loading shotguns and rifles

Because it is not practical to apply this rule to self loading shotguns and rifles, it is recommended that when you acquire your target you load the firearm and place the **previously tested** safety catch on 'safe'. If you have released the safety catch and then decide not to shoot, re-apply the safety catch. Whenever a round is in the chamber you must be **absolutely** sure that the muzzle is pointing in a safe direction. Test the safety catch before loading any rounds into the chamber. If you have any doubt about the safety catch **don't trust it.** Have it inspected by a gunsmith.

Note: No matter what type of firearm you use, you should be cautious when using the safety catch. In most cases they lock the trigger or the bolt but, like all mechanical things, they are subject to wear and tear and may not work properly. The safety catch is only one of several safety precautions you should use when handling firearms.

*** A safety catch only supplements safe handling.**

Rule 4: Identify your target and what is behind it

- You must positively identify your target beyond all doubt before firing. **If in doubt, don't shoot!** The shooter, and anyone supervising an unlicensed shooter, must both positively identify the target.
- Make absolutely certain that the movement, colour, sound and shape of your target is identified correctly.
- Identify the whole animal
- Do not fire at movement only

- Do not fire at colour only
- Do not fire at sound only
- Do not fire at shape only

Target identification issues

When a hunter is tired, or excited about sighting game animals, emotions may override rational thinking (buck or stag fever). Perception can play tricks and you may 'see' what you expect to see. Objects – often people – look like game animals.

There could be other hunters nearby. They may make noises imitating the calls of game. Even the definite sighting of skin and antlers is not positive enough – hunters have been shot while carrying a deer.

BEFORE you shoot! Ask yourself:

“Is this a person?”

This will focus your mind toward expecting to see a person, rather than assuming it is an animal.

Keep your finger away from the trigger until you are ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN it is safe to fire.

Bright coloured clothing and gear can help you to be seen, especially in dim or fading light such as that in the early morning, late evening or under the cover of bush. However, no one colour will be easily seen at all times of the day and in all surroundings. Wear a colour that stands out from the background you are shooting in, and is different from any game animals in that area. While this may minimise your risk of being shot, it will only do so if other hunters properly identify their targets. **Blaze orange** is the recommended colour for all field shooting.

Hunters should use binocular vision, rather than rifle telescopic sights only, to identify their target. If using binoculars or telescopic sights, beware of the 'tunnel vision' which limits your field of view. Sweep the telescope or binoculars from side to side to ensure no person is close to your field of fire.

Remember – it is ALWAYS the responsibility of the shooter to clearly identify the target.

This is regardless of whatever strategies other hunters may or may not use to be seen.



Figure 3: Positively identify your target beyond all doubt. Other hunters may be wearing clothing that blends with the surroundings so – Do not fire at movement. Do not fire at colour. Do not fire at shape. Do not fire at sound.

Rule 5: Check your firing zone

Be aware of what is between you and your target, and in the area beyond your target.

Ask yourself: "What could happen if I miss my target?"

Extreme range for projectiles may be as much as:

.22 rimfire	1.5 kilometres
.308 calibre	4.5 kilometres
Airgun	up to 400 metres
Shotgun	from 250 metres to 750 metres (Depending on the type of shot)

Sights need to be correctly aligned to prevent rounds falling short or going far beyond the target.

Check your



Figure 4: When firing a shotgun, be aware that the spread of the shot may endanger something other than the target.

Safety points

- Never fire when companions are ahead of you, especially when you have lost sight of them.
- Never shoot when stock, human activity or buildings are in the area.
- It is unsafe to shoot at a target on the skyline. Remember that many hunting areas have rural and urban developments close by.
- Night shooting can be dangerous, especially if using telescopic sights, so only shoot at night if you are certain it is safe to do so. Spotlights light up only a small part of the firing zone and the projectile's range.

Telescopic sights restrict your field of view

- **Use extra care when shooting at a moving target, particularly with telescopic sights, because your field of view is restricted/limited and changes rapidly. There is a greater danger of someone moving into your firing zone without you noticing.**
- When shooting near thick bush or scrub you may not be able to see your whole firing zone.
- A charge of shot from a shotgun is very wide, particularly at longer ranges.
- Ricochets can be caused by any flat or hard surfaces – rocks, snow, trees and even water. Be especially careful in rocky river beds.



Figure 5: A hard, flat surface, stones or water, may cause a ricochet.

Firing zones

Your firing zone changes rapidly when you follow a moving target with a firearm. As you swing the muzzle around in an arc be aware of the position of other hunters. Make sure they are not caught in the path between your firearm and the target, or beyond the target. This applies particularly when shooting with shotguns. Duck shooters sharing a hide can drive vertical poles into the ground to prevent an ‘over-swing’ endangering a companion.

Rule 6: Store firearms and ammunition safely

You are required by law to have a safe and secure place to store your firearms. All firearms and ammunition should be stored separately, out of the reach of children, out of view and in an approved cabinet.

A complete firearm is dangerous in the wrong hands, so lock away your unloaded firearm and ammunition **separately**. Do this **immediately** when you return to camp or home from shooting.

Securing firearms out of sight will help prevent removal by thieves.

For legal requirements in relation to transportation of firearms and ammunition, see pages 34 and 35.

Firearms Storage

The **Firearms Act 1996 (Schedule 4)** provides for storage standards for firearms and ammunition. The following is a brief summary of the storage requirements which you must be able to satisfy.

Storage Requirements (for Category A + B Firearms)

- Hard wood or steel container - not easy to penetrate.
- If the container weighs less than 150kg when empty, it must be securely fixed to the floor or wall frame.
- When a firearm is in the container, the container **MUST** be locked with a lock of sturdy construction.
- The premises must be fitted with an 'intruder alarm system' if more than 15 firearms are stored on the premises. 'Intruder alarm system' means an alarm system which is installed, maintained and operated in accordance with Australian Standard 2201.1.2007 (as amended from time to time) and which, in the event of an intrusion, activates an audible alarm warning device and an external visible alarm warning light.
- Ammunition must be stored in a **separate** locked container (not within the firearm) unless the receptacle is purpose built to store ammunition separately from the firearms.
- All Victorian Licence holders should when travelling interstate, check with that states Police Firearms Registry as to licensing and storage requirements.

All family members, especially children, need to know what a firearm is, what it is designed for, and why it must not be touched. It is essential that children realise that firearms are not playthings and must be treated with caution and respect. Children should be taught not to touch a firearm without an adult present, and if they find a firearm to seek the assistance of an adult.



Figure 6: Securing firearms enhances family and community safety.

Rule 7: Avoid alcohol or drugs prior to and while handling firearms

When handling a firearm you must be able to think clearly. Alcohol and drugs (even those prescribed) dull and slow your mental and physical reactions.

Alcohol and Firearms do not mix! Ever!

- Wait until your firearm has been safely locked away before you consume alcohol.
- Do not shoot with others who are, or have been, drinking alcohol or taking drugs.

Rule 8: Never have loaded firearms in the car, home or camp

Many people have been injured or killed in these situations due to this rule being broken.

- Before entering a car, home or camp completely unload your firearm.
- Ensure that the action is open and that there is no ammunition in either the breech or the magazine.
- Pay particular attention to tubular or rotary magazines to ensure that all rounds are removed.

Rule 9: Never fire at hard surfaces or water

Consider the area in which you are shooting. Could a ricochet occur? **A ricochet will almost certainly occur from shooting at water or smooth flat surfaces and rocks.**

- Remember that when a ricochet occurs you have lost control of where the projectile will finish up, resulting in possible injury to another person or damage to property.
- Be especially careful when shooting with an air rifle due to the slow velocity of pellets they fire. They are very prone to ricochet and should be treated with the utmost of caution.
- Rimfire and centrefire bullets are prone to ricochet as they lose velocity at the end of their travel.

Rule 10: Do not climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms

Each year there are shooters who are shot (usually by their own firearm) as they attempt to cross/climb fences and/or obstacles with loaded firearms.

Before attempting to negotiate a fence or obstacle unload your firearm. **Do not rely on safety catches.** Safety catches are only intended to supplement the safe handling of firearms.

If attempting to cross/climb a fence alone:

- (a) unload your firearm;
- (b) place it through the fence and lay it on the ground with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction. Then cross the fence away from your firearm.

If crossing/climbing a fence with a friend:

- (a) ensure all firearms are unloaded;
- (b) use the same method as for crossing alone, or hand your unloaded firearm to your companion and then cross the fence. Then have your companion hand to you your unloaded firearm and his or her unloaded firearm.

*** Think before you cross: unload that firearm**

SECTION TWO:

Firearm safety

2a) Ways to keep yourself and others safe

Always obey the TEN BASIC RULES –

Treat every firearm as loaded

Always point firearms in a safe direction

Load a firearm only when ready to fire

Identify your target beyond all doubt

Check your firing zone

Store firearms and ammunition safely

Avoid alcohol or drugs before and while handling firearms

Never have loaded firearms in the car, home or camp

Never fire at hard surfaces or water

Do not climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms.

NEVER SHOOT AT:

movement only; colour only; sound only; shape only;
a target on the skyline; and when companions are ahead
of you.

And observe the following SAFETY GUIDES:

- Get permission before shooting on private property, land, local and privately owned land and check your State Game regulations for shooting on Crown land.
- Be aware that others may be in the same area. This applies especially to public land. You will be sharing public land with other bush users.
- Make sure there is nothing obstructing the barrel of your firearm before you fire.
- Completely unload before you leave the shooting area and never leave your firearm loaded.
- Unload your firearm before crossing a fence.
- Walk through a stream while carrying firearms rather than jumping or crossing on rocks.
- Always stay focussed when around firearms – no daydreaming!
- Give advice on safety if you see any careless or unsafe

behaviour with firearms. Irresponsible use of firearms causes injuries and deaths.

- Have your firearm checked periodically by a gunsmith who knows about the firearm you own.
- The wearing of blaze orange when hunting is highly recommended

2b) Carrying your firearm safely



Hazards

- If you fall or stumble when carrying a firearm, your first and most important responsibility is to **make sure the muzzle is pointing in a safe direction, and that you do not touch the trigger.**
- It is vitally important that the barrel is kept free from any obstruction at all times. If you fall and the muzzle touches the ground, **after unloading - always stop and check** for signs of blockage. Always carry your firearm in such a way that you can control the direction of the muzzle should you stumble.
- To prevent water getting into the barrel in **heavy rain or snow**, keep the muzzle pointed down. (Make sure it doesn't touch the ground.) A small square of insulation or masking tape over the muzzle can keep snow and mud out of the barrel. Never insert a plug of cloth or other material into the barrel.
- When hunting in **heavy scrub**, watch for twigs getting

into the barrel. If you have a firearm action with an exposed hammer, be especially careful that the hammer is not cocked accidentally by brushing through scrub.

- Pay attention when walking along **riverbeds** or **dry creek-beds**. They are often slippery or icy.
- Always ensure your firearm is unloaded.
- If your firearm misfires you must check the barrel, from the breech end, in case a bullet is stuck in it.

Crossing /climbing fences

If there is a gate – use it! Never climb a fence while carrying a firearm. Carrying loaded firearms through fences and over obstacles can result in injury and death.



Figure 7: Crossing/climbing fences must be done carefully.

- If there are two or more people, one should climb over the fence without a firearm. Then, pass the unloaded firearms across with the actions open, and pointed in a safe direction.

- If you are on your own, unload the firearm and place it, muzzle first, through the fence. Lay the firearm on the ground, and then climb over the fence.
- Take special care when crossing electric fences. Have your firearm unloaded and the action open before you get near an electric fence. An electric shock can cause your muscles to contract and your hands to clench.

When hunting

Half-open bolt or action in a state of semi-readiness (Shotguns and rifles except self loading)

The state of 'semi-readiness' can be taken up prior to taking a shot. Hold the firearm in both hands, with a cartridge pushed partly forward into the chamber.

Do not close the action completely unless you know you have correctly identified your target and you have time to make a safe shot. If you do close the action but then do not take a shot, go back to the 'semi-ready' state with a half-open action.

A 'break open' shotgun can be carried in the hinged open position with cartridges in the chambers. This is semi-ready with a shotgun. The firearm is safe while open and can be closed and fired quickly and easily.

The semi-ready condition with half-open bolt is not always practical. Unless the bolt is held with the thumb, it may slide backwards and eject the round completely. In this case, the bolt is best left closed on an empty chamber. When you have reached the shooting area and you are ready to take a shot, only then should a round be fully loaded into the chamber and the bolt fully closed.

2c) Spotighting from a vehicle for vermin

Spotighting from a vehicle is a common practice on private land, however it has the potential to be one of the most dangerous forms of vermin control. Having shooters in the back of a utility vehicle where there is a potential for a driver to inadvertently run into a culvert or hit a hidden stump, may result in the occupants being thrown out onto the ground with their firearms and an accidental discharge may occur. (You must not spot light on public roads or in a recognised deer habitat. Please contact the DSE Customer Service Centre on **136 186** for further information.)

If you must spotlight from a vehicle we suggest you follow these rules to ensure your safety:

- Never have more than one firearm in use at any one time
- Position the shooter in the front passenger seat of the vehicle with the firearm unloaded (no ammunition in the chamber) and pointing out the front passenger side window. Never shoot from the back seat
- Load the firearm only when ready to shoot and then unload the firearm after the shot has been taken or when you have lost the opportunity to shoot
- If you have shot an animal, the shooter should unload the firearm and exit the vehicle before placing the firearm on the ground
- After attending to the animal, and when everyone else has reentered the vehicle, the shooter should pick up the unloaded firearm and reenter the vehicle
- Remember - the more people there are, the more potential for a mishap. At all times point the firearm in a safe direction which will depend on where you are at the time

2d) Hunting with Vehicles

Statistics have shown that the use of vehicles *is a significant factor* in the number of the people who are injured or killed whilst hunting.

You should **NEVER HAVE A LOADED FIREARM IN A VEHICLE** - see the previous section on SPOTLIGHTING.

It is against the law to have a loaded firearm in a populous place or on a *public* road, see current Victorian Legislation.

The practice of riding in the back of a utility, tray vehicle or a “bush basher” [vehicles with the roof cut off and no roll bars or seat belts.] is plain *irresponsible*.

Vehicles in the bush or paddocks often hit rocks, stumps hidden by grass and soft banks and inclines result in many vehicles rolling over.

MAKE SURE YOU AND YOUR PASSENGERS ARE SAFE BY ALWAYS WEARING A SEAT BELT.

2e) Handling your firearm safely

Cleaning firearms

Firearms are made of metal and wood or composite material. Regular cleaning and maintenance will keep your firearm safe and reliable.

It is essential that the barrel is free from obstruction.

Before storing your firearm you should clean the barrel with a rod, clean patches and solvent. Where possible, insert the cleaning rod from the chamber end of the bore to avoid damaging the muzzle.

When you have cleaned the barrel push an oily patch through it. Clean the action and the outside of the firearm. Wipe all metal parts with a **lightly oiled rag**.

When you are **taking your firearm out for use**, point it in a safe direction then check that it is not loaded. Push a clean patch through the bore and check that the barrel and action are clean and **dry**. Grease or oil in the action can cause a misfire. If either gets into the barrel, they can cause it to bulge or burst.

When hunting, take cleaning gear with you – at least a pull-through, patches and oil. At the end of each day clean and oil the barrel.



Figure 8: Cleaning a firearm. The rod is inserted from the chamber end of the barrel.

If you have any doubts about a safety catch – take it to a gunsmith!

Correct ammunition

It is important to use the correct ammunition for your firearm. Even if you have the right calibre, it may not necessarily be the right ammunition. The chambering may be unsuitable or the action may not be strong enough e.g. .22 short, .22 long, .22 long rifle and .22 magnum are all .22 rimfire, yet are not suitable for every .22 rimfire rifle.

If the wrong ammunition is chambered it may be too big to allow the action to close. If it is too small it can slip so deeply into the chamber that it is out of reach of the firing pin. Worse still, it may fit, allow the action to close and fire the wrong calibre bullet. This could burst the barrel or cause a dangerous blowback of gas in the shooter's face.

Numbers that show the calibre are stamped on the base of the cartridge case. However, sometimes there are other numbers or words to identify one cartridge from another. You should know the correct and full description of the cartridges your firearm requires. To make sure there is no mistake, use that description when ordering ammunition, and also check the description on the ammunition packet.

Many shooters reload their own cartridges because of economy and accuracy. Brass cartridge cases are sometimes pressed through resizing dies to become a type different from the original e.g. a 30.06 Springfield case may become a .270 cartridge. So, the information stamped on the base of the case can be misleading. A new shooter would be wise to use only factory-made ammunition purchased from a shop.

Do not use old or corroded ammunition. It can cause misfires, burst cases and block the barrel. Wet or damp ammunition can increase pressure in the firearm and could also damage and injure. **Never** attempt to dry wet ammunition by heating it.

Loading your firearm safely

Old shotguns

Shotguns with any pitting of the barrel should not be fired. Modern ammunition must not be used in old shotguns. The barrels may not be strong enough for the high pressure of modern ammunition or the chambering may not allow for modern star crimp cartridges, which can cause the firearm to blow up.

The chamber is the slightly enlarged section of the barrel bore where the cartridge is locked up before being fired. In the case of a star crimp shot cartridge, the chamber needs to be long enough to allow the crimp to peel forward, out of the way of the shot and wad.

Get a gunsmith to check your old gunshot before you use it.

Firearm magazines

All repeating and firearm actions have a magazine where the ammunition is held before being fed into the chamber. Most bolt action rifles have box-type magazines with the cartridges placed one on top of the other. Many lever action and pump action firearms, and some self loading, have a tubular magazine where the cartridges are placed end-on, one behind the other.

A tubular magazine can be dangerous. If the tube has been dented, the cartridge can stick temporarily. If it later becomes free it can be fed into the action without you even knowing about it.

To obey Basic Rule 2 – *always point firearms in a safe direction* – and Basic Rule 5 – *check your firing zone* – you need to know about **Patterning** and **Sighting In**.

Patterning

Before you use a shotgun for hunting you need to see what sort of pattern it fires with the cartridge and choke combination you intend to use. Patterning is a practical exercise that involves shooting a specific barrel, choke and

shotshell combination onto a flat (vertical) recordable surface (sheet of paper). For more information refer to the *Shotgunning Education Handbook* at www.dse.vic.gov.au.



Sighting in

'Sighting in' with a rifle is even more important. If your rifle has a telescopic sight a dealer or gunsmith can check that the sight is correctly set according to a collimator. However, it will still require checking with the ammunition you intend to use. Do this on a range or suitable rural area.

Setting of sights for accuracy

Sights must be correctly set. If they are not, rounds may fall short or go far beyond the target. Adjust the sights for distances suitable for the calibre and intended use.

'Sighting in' is best carried out on an established range. Otherwise, it should be somewhere away from people, stock or property, and with a safe backstop.

- Shoot from 25 metres and adjust sights until the point of aim and the bullet impact are the same.
- If you are using iron (open) sights always move the rear sight in the direction you want the shot to move. The foresight is the reverse of this. With a scope, follow the arrows on the scope adjustment.
- Now, from 100 metres, fire shots in pairs, and adjust sights.
- Most high-powered rifles are best zeroed so the bullet hits the target about 75 mm high at 100 metres.

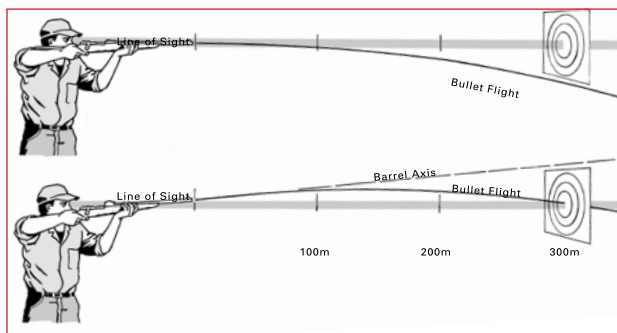


Figure 11: A bullet begins dropping from the moment it leaves the barrel, so if your sights are just lined up with the barrel, the bullet will drop below where you are sighting

Mechanical fitness of firearms

It is dangerous to tamper with firearms. Even minor repairs or adjustments should be carried out by a competent gunsmith. **Never** exchange bolts, bolt heads or other action parts yourself. Get a gunsmith to fit these.

Items that need to be checked:

Headspace

Firing pin protrusion and shape. (for safe, reliable firing.)

Tightness of action and stock. (affects accuracy.)

Condition of barrel and chamber. (for safety and accuracy.)

General condition of firearm, including action and stock.

Safety catch. (only supplements safe handling)

Trigger pull. (for safety and accuracy the trigger pull set by the manufacturer should be used. Trigger pull should only be changed by a competent gunsmith.)

Reloading ammunition

When you have gained experience you may wish to reload ammunition yourself. This can save you money if you fire a lot of rounds. It also offers you the chance to learn a new skill.

Before you begin, you will need to speak to an experienced reloader for advice and instruction. You will also need the right equipment, powder and projectiles. You can find more information online, or in books dealing with this subject.

Before using your firearm

If you intend to use your firearm on a shooting range or in the field check that:

- The firearm is mechanically sound
- It is not loaded
- The barrel is not blocked
- The grease and oil is removed from the barrel and action
- The ammunition is correct for the firearm
- The firearm is not left unattended
- The firearm is made safe and secure.

SECTION THREE:

Understanding firearms

Rifles

A rifle normally fires a single bullet and generally range in calibre from .17 to .45. All are used for target shooting.

- The .17 and .22 rimfire is suitable for small animals such as rabbits and hares.
- The centrefire .22 is suitable for hunting goats and foxes.
- Minimum legal calibre, cartridge length and projectile weight are set for deer hunting in Victoria. Please check with the Department of Sustainability and Environment Customer Service Centre on **136 186**.
- Some cartridges such as the .308 Winchester, .270 Winchester, 30.06, and the .303 British are popular for hunting pigs and deer.

Shotguns

Shotguns are used for clay target shooting and to hunt small animals such as rabbits. They are the only firearms allowed for hunting game birds on the wing. There are a number of pellets in a 12-gauge cartridge that spread out when they leave the muzzle.

Different sized animals require different sized shot to ensure effective pellet penetration for a humane kill. All hunters must not use a shot gun with a gauge greater than 12 gauge to hunt game birds.

Some recommended shot sizes are:

- 7, 8 and 9 for smaller birds
- 4, 5 and 6 for rabbit
- 3 and 2 for foxes
- buckshot, or a single solid slug, for pigs
- duck hunters cannot use or possess toxic shot in Victoria whilst out in the hunting area.

Recommended non-toxic shot sizes for Australian game birds can be found at **www.dse.vic.gov.au**.

The size of the shot for clay target shooting depends on the competition.

Please contact the *Department of Sustainability and Environment* on **136 186** for more information.

Types of actions

All cartridge firing firearms used for target shooting or hunting have the following things in common: the cartridge is fed into the chamber; it is locked there by the action; the action is cocked; it is fired; it is unlocked; and the empty cartridge case is extracted and ejected.

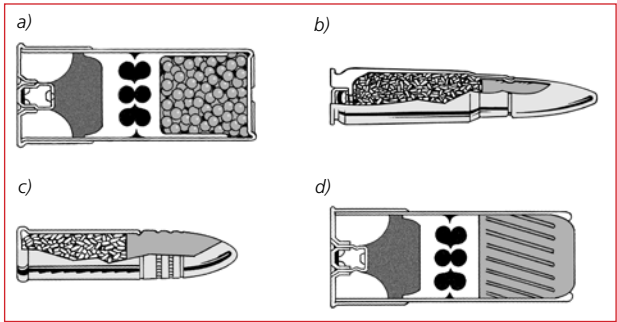


Figure 16: Cutaway drawings of four different types of cartridge.

a) A shot cartridge

b) A centrefire cartridge

c) A rimfire cartridge

*d) A rifled slug for use in a shotgun
(single projectile)*

The **bolt action** is one of the simplest and most trouble-free firearm actions. Starting from the unloaded condition, the action is unlocked by lifting the bolt handle and pulling it back. A cartridge is fed into the chamber by pushing the bolt forward. The bolt handle is then turned downwards, locking the bolt and cartridge in place. A firing pin is usually cocked by movement of the bolt or bolt handle, and when the trigger is squeezed the pin is released, firing the cartridge. The empty cartridge case is then ejected by lifting the bolt handle again and pulling the bolt back.

The **lever action** works on the same basic principle, except that a lever is pushed down to unlock the bolt and move it backwards. This movement also cocks the action. When the lever is pulled upwards again it feeds a cartridge into the chamber and locks, ready to be fired by the trigger. After the cartridge is fired the empty case is ejected by once more pushing the lever down.

A **pump action** is again similar. A pump slide is pulled backwards to open the action and cock it. When the slide is pushed forward the action feeds a fresh cartridge, locks, and is ready to fire.

A **self loading** also known as a **semi-automatic action**, operates in the same way as the above firearms. However, ejection and loading is carried out automatically by the force of either the recoil or by gas pressure. Because of the automatic reloading, a cartridge is ready to be fired each time the trigger is squeezed.

The most common **shotguns** in Australia are the break-open variety where the barrel(s) hinge downwards. There are over-and-under, side-by-side and single barrel shotguns. Some shotguns are self loading or pump action.

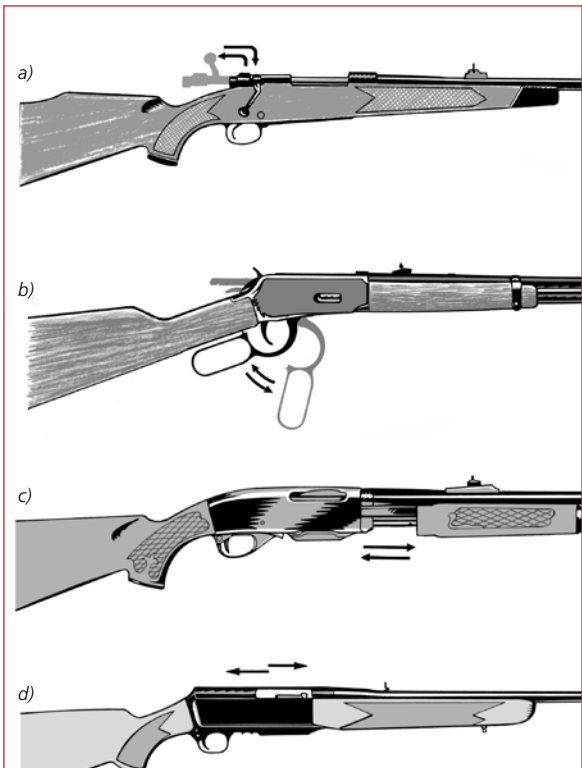


Figure 17: Common firearm actions.

- a) A bolt action*
- b) A lever action*
- c) A pump action*
- d) A self loading*

3) Where and when you may use firearms

Before you do any shooting, whether with a firearm or airgun, you need to know when and where it can be safely and lawfully used.

You should take steps to ensure that your shooting does not endanger property or frighten, annoy or put neighbours at risk. Telling your neighbours about what you are doing is always a good first step.

The permission of the land owner is required before shooting anywhere.

.22 Rimfire rifles

A .22 rimfire rifle has been the traditional first rifle of many shooters. It is regarded as a safe and inexpensive firearm for a young person. This rifle can be just as deadly as any other firearm and must be handled with respect caution and care.

Shotguns

A shotgun is the only firearm suitable for shooting at birds on the wing. Firing a rifle in the air carries the danger of some person or property being struck when the bullet falls back to earth. Although shotgun pellets fall too, they do not travel so far and are much lighter. This means they are less likely to endanger someone.

The shotgun is used for fast moving game on the ground and in the air. A shotgun is also used for competitive shooting at clay targets.

Centrefire rifles

Centrefire rifles in various calibre are suitable for a whole range of game and target shooting. There is such a variety of calibre, projectile type and weight, however, that no single firearm or cartridge is suitable for every purpose. It is important, therefore, to think about where you can use your firearm before buying one. Ask someone who is involved in that sport.

SECTION FOUR:

Firearm licensing and acquisition

4a) Purchasing or acquiring a firearm

You must have your current firearms licence with you whenever you carry your firearm. Anyone who sells you a firearm (i.e., licensed firearms dealers) will need to see your licence. You will also need a permit to acquire a firearm. All sellers (licensed firearms dealers) are legally required to see the purchaser's current firearm licence and permit to acquire.

Keep a record of the firearms you have bought or sold because if one should be lost, destroyed or stolen you must immediately inform Victoria Police in writing. Upon providing those details (including any police report), Victoria Police will update your firearms records to reflect the change in firearms status.

Ammunition

Only a firearms licence holder can purchase ammunition for the category of their licence.

4b) Disposing of firearms and ammunition

You can hand in any unwanted firearms and ammunition to Victoria Police (including to a Divisional Firearms Officer) or to a Licensed Firearms Dealer. A list of Divisional Firearms Officers is available on www.police.vic.gov.au/firearms.

4c) Other important legal requirements

Change of address

You must notify the Chief Commissioner of Police of any change of address (residential/postal/ordinary storage/place of business for firearms dealers) in writing (to the Licensing and Regulation Division) within 14 days after the change occurs.

Expiry of Licence

If you intend to make application for renewal of your licence, you must do so to the Chief Commissioner of Police prior to the expiration of your firearm licence.

If you do not intend to apply for renewal of your licence, you **must** dispose of your firearm(s) to a Licensed Firearms Dealer prior to the expiration of your firearm licence. Failure to dispose of your firearm(s) in these circumstances will result in penalties imposed against you including fines and/or imprisonment.

SECTION FIVE:

Your duties and legal requirements

5) Transporting firearms and ammunition

Even before you buy your first firearm you need to know how you will carry it home and where you will keep it. Bear in mind that it is illegal to carry or use a loaded firearm in a vehicle.

All Victorian Licence holders should when travelling interstate, check with that states Police Firearms Registry as to licensing and storage requirements.

You are strongly advised to get a **padded cover or hard case** in which to carry your firearm. This ensures the firearm is protected and stays in good condition. It also makes it less obvious so is less likely to alarm other members of the public.



Figure 18: A hard case with a soft lining will protect your firearm while travelling. A soft padded cover is useful but not as protective.

You must have a particular lawful, proper and sufficient purpose to have firearms with you, so you should have firearms – unloaded – in your vehicle only on the way to or from a hunting trip, shooting range, or for some other genuine reason.

It is vital for community safety and crime reduction to keep your firearms and ammunition secure at all times. You may lose your firearms licence if you fail to do so.

Car

- It is advisable that you, make the firearm inoperable e.g. by taking out the bolt.
- You cannot drive a vehicle on a road with a loaded firearm. This includes the magazine - when in the firearm it must be empty.
- Even on private property it is dangerous to have a loaded firearm in a vehicle, or to get in or out of the vehicle with a loaded firearm.
- Be careful when moving your firearm in or out of a vehicle. Treat it as loaded. Do not point it at yourself or at anyone else. Do not pull it towards you by the muzzle and make sure the firearm action is open.
- Duck shooters should take particular care when using a firearm in a boat.
- Each year, a significant number of firearms are stolen from motor vehicles and places of temporary accommodation. You should not leave your firearms unattended in a vehicle or at the very least, ensure you take adequate measures to secure your vehicle and avoid leaving any firearms within view when in your vehicle. A good starting point is to ask yourself 'is there anything more I can do to ensure my firearm(s) cannot be stolen?'

Other forms of transportation (bus, train, aircraft)

On some shooting trips you will need to carry your firearm by public transport.

Similar/in addition to the above-listed precautions relevant to transport by car, always ensure you take precautions when travelling by other forms of transportation such as bus, train or aircraft.

Recent events have demonstrated that transportation of firearms via 'public transport' has the potential to arouse fear and alarm amongst other passengers, despite the fact that this was unintended.

Remember to make suitable arrangements when planning your trip, including discussing transport requirements with your travel agent or the carrier.

GLOSSARY:

Action

Effective Motion – a mechanism – the breech action of a firearm. The operating part that transmits power to the mechanism.

Ammunition

Ammunition is the consumable component of firearms system. Ammunition is required to fire a firearm. A single unit of ammunition in modern firearms is called a cartridge. The units of measure for quantity of ammunition are rounds. There are hundreds of sizes of ammunition; examples include .223 Remington, 9mm Luger, 30.06, .308 Winchester, .300 Winchester Magnums, and .50 Browning Machine Gun (BMG). The ammunition used must match the firearm.

Barrel

A narrow hollow cylinder portion of a firearm through which the bullet travels during the acceleration phase of its journey to the target.

Bolt

The mechanism of some firearms that holds the cartridge in place during the firing process. See also Bolt Action.

Bolt Action

A type of firearm, almost always a rifle, in which an empty shell casing (remnant of a cartridge) is removed from the firing chamber by the turning and retraction of a metal cylinder shaped mechanism called a bolt. A new, unfired, cartridge is inserted and secured into the chamber by reversing the action of the bolt. Bolt action firearms are typically the most accurate.

Bore

The hollow portion of a barrel through which the bullet travels during its acceleration phase.

Breech-Block

The metal block at the base of the breech which retains the cartridge after it has entered the chamber. The bolt of a bolt action rifle is a breech-block.

Bullet

A generally cylindrical shaped projectile that travels through the air after being fired from a firearm. This is only one component of a cartridge, which is a single piece of ammunition.

Butt (of a stock)

The stock of a rifle or shotgun is usually placed against the shoulder to fire. The contact point with the shoulder is the butt of the firearm.

Butts

A target range. An obstacle behind a target for stopping a shot. (dictionary.com)

Chamber

The portion of a barrel where a cartridge is placed just prior to being fired. This is a high-pressure containment area that is very precisely aligned with the bore of the barrel. A firearm cannot be fired when the chamber is empty.

Cartridge

The assembly of a bullet, shell casing, gunpowder, and primer that is put in the chamber of a firearm.

Calibre

1) The diameter of the bore of a firearm. Typically in millimetres or a decimal fraction of an inch. 2) Common usage, but imprecise – the name of the cartridge used in a firearm. Examples include .223 Remington, 220 Swift, 22-250 which all use the same bullet, but different cartridge, because they have the same diameter of bore.

Centrefire Cartridge

A cartridge that has a primer located in the centre of the base of the shell casing. This is as opposed to a rimfire cartridge.

Crimp

In cartridge making, to fold the edge of (a cartridge case) inward so as to close the mouth partly and confine the charge. (dictionary.com)

Cocked

A state of readiness of a firearm. The hammer (or similar mechanism if there is no hammer) only needs to be released by the trigger to cause the firearm to fire.

Dowel

A usually round pin (often wood) that fits tightly into a corresponding hole to fasten or align two adjacent pieces. (dictionary.com)

Elevation

1) The setting on the sights of a firearm that controls the vertical placement. 2) The altitude above mean sea level. This is important for long range precision shooting because the air density changes with elevation and affects the path of the bullet.

Firearm

A firearm which uses the combustion of some chemical mix, typically smokeless gunpowder, to propel a projectile (see the definition at the beginning of this manual).

Firing Line

A line, either imaginary or marked, from which people shoot their firearms down range.

Firing Pin

A needle-like metal part of a modern firearm that gives a vigorous strike to the primer initiating the firing of the cartridge.

Flush Game

To frighten from cover. To drive or force into the open. To excite, to animate. To stir. See also Game. (dictionary.com)

Game

Game animals are any kind or taxon of wildlife declared to be game by the Wildlife Act 1975

Gunpowder

A chemical mixture or compound that burns rapidly with or without the presence of air to produce hot pressurised gases capable of propelling a bullet. There are two basic types of gunpowder – Black Powder and Smokeless Powder. Black Powder is composed of a mixture of charcoal, sulphur, and potassium nitrate and produces a cloud of white noxious smoke when it burns. Smokeless Powder burns much cleaner but may still produce a small puff of smoke. All modern firearms use smokeless powder, not only because there is less smoke, but also because the bullets can be made to exit the firearm faster.

Hammer

Similar in function to the carpenter and mechanic's tool, the hammer of a firearm is propelled by a spring to strike either directly or via a firing pin the primer of a cartridge causing the firearm to fire.

Heel (of a stock)

The top of the butt, when the firearm is in position on the shoulder to be fired, is called the heel.

Iron Sights

Sights made of metal with no optics.

Lever Action

A type of firearm that uses a lever operated mechanism to remove an empty shell casing and insert a new cartridge in the chamber of a rifle. Other types of mechanisms include bolt action and pump action.

Magazine

An ammunition feeding device that holds the cartridges just prior to them being put in the chamber of the firearm by the operation of a mechanism on the firearm. This mechanism may be operated manually as in a bolt action or semi-automatically when the firearm fires after pulling the trigger. The magazine may be detachable or part of the firearm (as in a tubular magazine common with lever action rifles and most semi-auto and pump shotguns).

Muzzle

The end of the barrel where the bullet exits as it is being fired.

Pellet

A bullet or piece of small shot. (dictionary.com)

Primer

A small metal cup that contains a tiny explosive charge that is sensitive to impact. A primer is placed in the base of a shell casing to ignite the powder of the completed cartridge. It is detonated by the striking of a firing pin in the firearm.

Projectile

An object given an initial velocity which proceeds on its own inertia through the air and perhaps solid objects in its path. A bullet fired from a firearm is a projectile.

Pistol Grip

- 1) A section of a rifle stock shaped like the grip of a pistol.
- 2) A variation of stock type that is often fitted to military-type firearms, and is not permitted on a sporting semi-automatic firearm.

Powder

See gunpowder.

Pump or Pump Action

A type of mechanism for removing a spent shell casing from the chamber of a firearm and inserting a fresh cartridge into the chamber. This type of mechanism is most commonly used in shotguns and rimfire rifles.

Ramrod

A rod used to force the charge into a muzzle-loading firearm. A rod used to clean the barrel of a firearm. (dictionary.com)

Receiver

The portion of a rifle that has the serial number on it. The stock, barrel and other components such as the bolt are typically attached to the receiver. Some firearms may have a multi-part receiver such as an upper receiver and a lower receiver.

Recoil

The sudden rearward push made against the shooter when a firearm is fired. This push is due to Newton's Third Law of Physics (for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction). The heavier the bullet and the faster it leaves the muzzle of the barrel the more recoil. The weight of the powder and the velocity of the gases it produces at the muzzle also enter into the equation describing the total recoil.

Rifle

A firearm designed to be fired from the shoulder and fire only a single projectile at a time, as opposed to a shotgun, which can throw many small projectiles (shot) at the same time.

Rimfire Cartridge

A type of cartridge whose primer is integral to the shell casing and located along the edge of the base in a rim. When the firing pin strikes it pinches the rim against the chamber and causes it to detonate and ignite the powder.

Rounds

A unit of measure for ammunition. One cartridge. Typical quantities are 20 rounds and 50 rounds in single box. A serious target shooter will normally go through about 100 rounds in one day. At some pistol matches a shooter may go through several hundred rounds. In a weekend of training, a pistol shooter may go through 1500 or more rounds.

Safety (mechanical)

A mechanical device used to block the firing pin or trigger such that the firearm cannot be fired.

Self Loading

A firearm that uses the energy and momentum of the just fired cartridge to eject the spent shell casing and load a new cartridge into the chamber. This is an automatic loader. This is sometimes shortened to 'automatic' which some confuse with a full-auto (machine gun).

Shot

1) *n.* A term used to describe the round pellet projectiles fired in a shotgun. The shot may be one of many different sizes described by a number. The smaller the number the larger the pellet. The numbers do not go negative, but start adding additional zeros to the designator. 00 (pronounced 'double-nought') is larger than 0. Number 8 shot is about the size of a head of a pin. 00 shot (also sometimes called 'buck-shot') is about the size of a large pea. 2) *v.* Act of firing a firearm.

Shotgun

A (typically) smooth bore long firearm that shoots a group of pellets called shot instead of bullets. Depending on the bore size and the size of the pellets there may be from less than 10 to two hundred or more pellets in a single shotgun cartridge. Shotguns are designed for shooting moving targets (such as flying birds or moving rabbits) at close range.

Shell Casing

A hollow, bottle or drinking glass shaped, piece of metal that is closed on one end except for a small hole which holds a primer. The open end holds the bullet. The hollow portion holds the powder. Together the assembled unit is called a cartridge.

Sights

The device that aids the eye in aiming the barrel of a firearm in the proper direction to hit a target. The most common sights are iron and telescopic.

Stalk

To move threateningly or menacingly. To track prey or quarry. To pursue by tracking stealthily. To approach under cover of a screen, or by stealth, for the purpose of killing, as game. (dictionary.com)

Stock

The supporting structure of a long firearm to which the receiver, barrel, trigger, and other components are attached. Typically this is the portion of the firearm the shooter holds while firing. See also heel and butt.

Telescopic Sight

A sight which has an integral telescope.

Toxic Shot

As determined in Wildlife (game) Regulation 2001.

Trigger

The mechanism used by the shooter to initiate the firing of a cartridge. Typically this is a lever type piece of metal that must be pulled with the index finger.

Trigger Lock

A locking device put on a firearm to render it unable to be fired.

Trigger Pull

A piece, as a lever, which is connected with a catch as a means of releasing it; especially (Firearms), the part of a lock which is moved by the finger to release the cock and discharge the piece. (dictionary.com)

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION:

Victoria Police

www.police.vic.gov.au/firearms

Log onto this website for:

- the instructional video which complements this brochure;
- information on firearms licensing; firearms registration; firearms identification; and classification;
- updates on legislative changes;
- newsletters;
- information brochures;
- Frequently Asked Questions;
- form downloads etc.

Licensing & Regulation Division **1300 651 645**
(between 8.30am and 4.30pm Mon to Fri)

Department of Sustainability & Environment

www.dse.vic.gov.au

Customer Service Centre **136 186**

Parks Victoria

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Customer Service Centre **131 963**

Firearm Safety Foundation Victoria

www.firearmsafety.org.au

Game Hunting In Victoria

Opportunities to see and hunt game in Victoria are world class. Game species are resilient to harvesting and able to adapt to extreme and unpredictable environmental conditions. They occur in relatively large numbers, have a high replacement potential, mature quickly and can breed at an early age, have high rates of turnover, are fast escapers and are very wary in their natural surroundings

Game species that can be hunted in Victoria include eight species of native duck, stubble quail and six species of introduced deer seasons and bag limit may apply to these species. Also Californian, European and Japanese Quail, pheasants and partridges may be hunted for the whole of the year with shotgun only.

Game Management in Victoria

The *Department of Sustainability and Environment* (DSE) manages game hunting sustainably by monitoring game harvest levels and ensuring that they do not exceed the annual rate of production.

Game hunting in Victoria is regulated to:

- Provide continued sustainable (except where other management objectives seek to control or reduce populations), humane, ethical and safe recreational hunting opportunities.
- Ensure equitable sharing of game resources between stakeholders.
- Minimise the destruction of non-game species.
- Ensure the protection of wildlife habitats.

Open seasons and daily bag limits for game species are prescribed by the *Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2001*. Minimum legal calibre, cartridge case length and projectile weight are set for game hunting in Victoria.

Game Licence

Anyone wishing to hunt game in Victoria, including juniors (12-17 years), must hold a current Game Licence. A range of licence types is available, depending on the requirements of the individual hunter.

Before you can hunt game ducks, you need to pass the *Waterfowl Identification Test*. This test ensures that only those hunters able to demonstrate adequate identification skills are permitted to hunt ducks in Victoria. Furthermore, before you can hunt Sambar deer with hounds, you also need to pass the *Hound Hunting Test*. This test is designed to ensure that hunters using scent-trailing hounds to hunt Sambar Deer are aware of their legal, ethical and safety requirements when hunting.

Should you wish to apply for a Game Licence or require further information on game hunting in Victoria, please contact the Customer Service Centre on **136 186** alternatively visit **www.dse.vic.gov.au** and follow the links to "Game Hunting".

Firearms record:

Make:

Model:

Serial No:

Reg. Serial No:

Action:

Calibre:

Purchased from:

Address:

Firearms record:

Make:

Model:

Serial No:

Reg. Serial No:

Action:

Calibre:

Purchased from:

Address:

Firearms record:

Make:

Model:

Serial No:

Reg. Serial No:

Action:

Calibre:

Purchased from:

Address:

The Ten Basic Rules of Firearm Safety

- 1 Treat every firearm as loaded
- 2 Always point firearms in a safe direction
- 3 Load a firearm only when ready to fire
- 4 Identify your target beyond all doubt
- 5 Check your firing zone
- 6 Store firearms and ammunition safely
- 7 Avoid alcohol or drugs when handling firearms
- 8 Never have loaded firearms in the car, home or camp
- 9 Never fire at hard surfaces or water
- 10 Don't climb fences or obstacles with loaded firearms