

A BASC PUBLICATION REVISED JULY 2013



A  
CODE  
OF  
PRACTICE



SHOTGUN SAFETY  
(GREAT BRITAIN)



The British Association for Shooting and Conservation

## **The most important rule of gun handling.....**

### **NEVER POINT A GUN, LOADED OR UNLOADED, IN AN UNSAFE DIRECTION.**

It is estimated that there are more than 1.4 million shotguns legally held in Great Britain, the vast majority of which are used in a safe and responsible manner. This leaflet provides a code of practice for those who acquire and use them.

### **SAFETY**

Above all, safety is the most important consideration. Always be aware of the direction in which the muzzle of your shotgun is pointing and NEVER point it in an unsafe direction. Whenever you shoot, make sure you know where the shot will go before you touch the trigger.

**Follow these simple directions to be safe:**

#### **1. Carrying a shotgun in a slip**

To prevent a shotgun falling out, if your slip fastening should fail, keep it with the barrels down and stock up when slung over your shoulder. A shotgun should be opened before removing it from the slip to check that it is unloaded. Do not touch the trigger even at this stage. Your next action should always be to check that the barrels are clear while pointing the gun in a safe direction. Don't point the muzzle end of the slip at anyone.

**REMEMBER, A SHOTGUN SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONSIDERED LOADED UNTIL PROVEN EMPTY AND, EVEN THEN, STILL HANDLED AS IF IT WERE LOADED...**

On replacing the shotgun in a slip, you should check the gun is unloaded and insert the barrels into the slip before closing the gun and then fastening the slip.

#### **2. Where to find the gun's information**

If in doubt about the cartridges which are safe to use in your gun, check for this information, which is usually found on the flats of the barrels. You are looking for proof marks, gauge or bore and chamber length. If you are not sure what it all means, then ask someone who does know. Your local club, gun shop, or police licensing section will always be pleased to help.

#### **3. Carrying a shotgun out of a slip**

When you are not shooting but have the gun out of its slip, it

should be carried empty, open and over the crook of the arm, not over the shoulder or in any other way. The muzzles should not be rested on your feet.

#### **4. Passing a shotgun to someone**

When passing a gun to someone it should always be proved empty: that is open, empty and passed stock first so that the empty chambers are visible.

#### **5. Crossing an obstacle on your own**

Open the gun and remove the cartridges, then close the gun and, ensuring that the muzzles do not point at you, lean the gun with stock down and barrels up against or partially through the obstacle so that it cannot slip or fall. Otherwise place the gun carefully on the ground and out of harm's way so that you can easily reach it from the other side. Climb over the obstacle and retrieve the gun, again using appropriate muzzle awareness, open the gun, check the barrel for obstructions and continue. Carrying the gun over the obstacle is not a good idea.

#### **6. Crossing an obstacle in company**

Guns should be open and unloaded and held by one person while the other person climbs over the obstacle. The guns are then passed over (open, empty and stock first) one by one; the other person then climbs over and retrieves his shotgun on the other side.

#### **7. Shooting safely**

**NEVER POINT A GUN, LOADED OR UNLOADED, IN AN UNSAFE DIRECTION.**

- Never shoot unless you are sure it is safe to do so.
- Always have the safety catch on 'safe' until the moment before you fire.
- Always bear in mind the possibility of a ricochet, particularly across water or off branches and vegetation.
- Never load a shotgun unless you are expecting a shot.
- Never travel with a loaded shotgun.
- Never put down a loaded shotgun or leave it unattended.
- Never touch the triggers until you want to fire.
- Never attempt to shoot unless you are steady on your feet.
- Never keep a dog attached to yourself while shooting, it may pull you off balance.
- Never shoot unless you are certain of your target and can see it clearly.
- Never shoot at, or near, overhead power lines or insulators.



## BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD

BASC and The Association of Chief Police Officers promote and insist on safe and sensible behaviour by shooters in all disciplines. By acting on these points you will reassure shooters and non-shooters alike that you can be trusted with a shotgun:

- Advise the owner and/or tenant in good time when you intend to go shooting and check that it is convenient.
- Confirm with the owner and/or tenant what quarry you may shoot.
- Always respect the owner's property, crops, livestock and fences and follow the Country Code and, in Scotland, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Open gates rather than climb them and close them after you. If you have to climb a closed gate, do it at the hinged end.
- Never break fences, walls, rails, or hedges. Never walk through standing crops or allow your dog to do so. Keep your dog under control. Avoid disturbance to livestock.
- Never leave litter and wherever possible collect that left by others.
- **Always** treat a shotgun as though it were loaded and keep its barrel pointing in a safe direction.
- On picking up or being handed a shotgun, check immediately that it is not loaded, i.e. that there is no cartridge in it and that the barrels are clear.
- Before you fire your shotgun, consider where the shot will go, allowing for possible ricochets. Do not fire at quarry unless you are sure it is within range and be sure you know what is behind it. ***If you are not sure, don't shoot!***
- Know your own limitations and those of your gun and shoot responsibly. If you are not reasonably sure of a humane kill, ***don't shoot!*** Shooting at quarry is not a competition.
- Be extra careful in cold and wet conditions which can lead to loss of feeling and difficulty in operating the safety catch and the trigger.

- Remember that **all** shooters will be judged by your actions and ensure that your conduct is always above reproach. Always try, whenever possible, to encourage the same attitude in your shooting companions and in any other shooter with whom you come into contact.
- **Above all – be safe and sensible**

## THE LAW

It is an offence (except in certain circumstances) to possess a shotgun without a current shotgun certificate or temporary police permit.

It is an offence to give or sell a shotgun to someone who is not authorised to possess it – usually by virtue of a shotgun certificate.

When acquiring a shotgun, you must inform the police force which issued your certificate. If you give or sell a shotgun to anyone, (or lend a gun for more than 72 hours) you must enter it on the other person's certificate and also notify the police force which issued your own certificate within seven days.

It is an offence to sell or offer for sale a shotgun which is out of proof.

One certificate holder may borrow a shotgun from another for 72 hours or less without notifying the police, or entering the details onto the borrower's certificate.

In most cases it is an offence to sell cartridges to someone without seeing their shotgun certificate.

**YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SECURITY  
OF ANY SHOTGUNS IN YOUR POSSESSION  
AT ALL TIMES.**

When not in use, shotguns must be stored securely, in order to prevent – so far as is reasonably practicable – access by unauthorised persons. When in use, reasonable precautions must be taken for their safe custody.

It is an offence to sell or hire a shotgun to someone under 18 years of age.

It is an offence for a person under the age of 15 to have with him or her, an assembled shotgun except while under the supervision of a person of 21 or more, or while the shotgun is so covered with a securely fastened gun cover that it cannot be fired.

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It is an offence to be in possession of a loaded shotgun in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse.

The government has abolished the game licence in England, Wales and Scotland. It is an offence to shoot game on Sundays and Christmas Day in England and Wales.

In Scotland and certain counties in England and Wales it is an offence to shoot wildfowl on Sundays. Always check if you are unsure - never guess at what the law requires.

All birds and many animals are protected. There is an 'open' season for quarry species and it is an offence to kill or attempt to kill them at other times. Certain pest birds may be shot by authorised persons at any time under the General Licences issued annually by Defra and the devolved governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Individuals do not need to carry or even hold a copy of the licences. Further guidance should be sought from BASC ([www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)).

It is an offence to shoot wildfowl or game with a self-loading shotgun having a magazine capacity of more than two cartridges.

You may only lend a shotgun to someone without a certificate if you are with that person, on land of which you are legally the occupier OR if you are at a clay pigeon shoot where the chief constable has granted special permission to allow non-certificate holders to shoot.

**REMEMBER - IGNORANCE OF THE LAW IS NO EXCUSE. IF IN DOUBT, ALWAYS ASK.**

## **SECURITY**

Keep your shotgun secured - for preference in a purpose-built gun cabinet - when not in use. Ensure that no-one else has access to the keys - remember it is YOUR responsibility to ensure that unauthorised persons (which includes anyone who hasn't got a shotgun certificate) do not have access to your guns. Store your shotgun ammunition separately from your guns. The law does not require you to keep shotgun cartridges secure; however, it is good practice to do so. They are best stored in a cool, dry place where inquisitive children cannot get hold of them.



When travelling in a vehicle, keep your guns and ammunition out of sight, preferably in the locked luggage compartment. It is preferable to keep the guns in their slips or cases. If you have to park your vehicle for any reason, park it where you can see it - if at all possible. The vehicle must be locked and any anti-theft devices set. It is a good idea to park in a manner that prevents easy access to the part of the vehicle containing your guns, such as backing the car very close to a wall to make it difficult for a thief to get at the boot.

Where possible, remove the fore-end of the shotgun and take it with you. There are also various security devices that can be used if necessary.

## THE SHOTGUN

Always ensure that your shotgun is in a safe and serviceable condition.

Hammer guns require particular care, such as carrying them uncocked, except when expecting a shot.

Pump-action and self-loading shotguns, such as semi-automatic also require care, as it is more difficult to check their status (ie: loaded or otherwise) than the standard single or double-barrelled shotgun. For added safety it is always good practice to store such a gun with a breech flag in the chamber to indicate that it is empty and safe.

Always clean and dry your shotgun after use. Never put a damp gun into a steel cabinet.

If a fault develops, have it rectified before using the gun again. Never use a gun with badly dented or pitted barrels. Have your gun serviced regularly by a competent gunsmith.

## THE CARTRIDGE

Ensure that the cartridge type and shot size is suitable for both your purpose and your gun. If you use non-lead shot make sure gun and cartridge are compatible, otherwise damage could occur. Information is available from BASC.

Never imagine that a heavy load and a tight choke justify shots at extreme range.

Do not allow cartridges of different bores to become mixed. A smaller size (say a 20 bore) can be inadvertently loaded into a 12 bore gun and lodge in the barrel. If a 12 bore cartridge is then loaded and fired, it can burst the barrel and cause fatal injuries. In

the case of a misfire, keep the barrels pointed in a safe direction and open the gun cautiously, after waiting 30 seconds.

## HOW DO I KNOW I AM SHOOTING SAFELY?

BASC has a simple assessment carried out by accredited assessors called the Safe Shot Award. It is not a test of competence. The assessment takes just 20 minutes and can be done at a game fair or organised by yourself anywhere in the UK. To find out more, contact BASC Shooting Standards on 01244 573018.

If you require a shotgun coaching lesson or want to learn more about shooting sports contact your local BASC accredited shotgun coach. Details of your nearest coach can be found on the BASC website.

## INSURANCE

It is advisable to have adequate legal liability (third party) insurance when shooting. Membership of BASC currently provides insurance.

**NEVER GUESS AT WHAT THE LAW ALLOWS.  
IF IN DOUBT, CONTACT BASC OR YOUR LOCAL  
POLICE FIREARMS LICENSING DEPARTMENT.**

**Always follow the appropriate code of practice for the type of shooting you are engaged in. These can be obtained from BASC head office by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the mailing/sales administrator or download from [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)**

**BASC is a representative body for sporting shooting.**



Association of Chief Police Officers

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Shooting and Conservation**

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