

## The Rules of Gun Safety

As we all know firearms have the potential to be deadly. Being complacent is dangerous and one mistake could cause serious injury or even death. So it's important to take them seriously and understand the basic safety rules.

First, know that guns do NOT just go off. They are inanimate objects and need to be acted upon in order to be fired ... meaning human inter-action. There are four simple universal firearm safety rules that everyone must know when handling firearms. The next six rules were designed to be used with fighting with a gun.

These rules should be considered the credo of anyone carrying a defensive handgun. If you will use these 10 simple rules as a guide, you can greatly enhance your level of personal protection. We use these rules in training because they work and give us discipline.

### **1. All guns are always loaded - period!**

This must be your mind-set. If someone hands you a firearm and says, "Don't worry, it's not loaded," you do not dare believe them. You don't need to be impolite, but check it yourself. Remember, there are no accidents, only negligent acts. Check it. Do not let yourself fall prey to a situation where you might feel compelled to squeal, "I didn't know it was loaded!"

If we treat all guns as if they are loaded, the less likely we are to do stupid things with them, like pointing them at ourselves, your wife or husband, or your kids.

### **2. Never let the muzzle cover anything – meaning never point the barrel of your gun at anything that you are NOT willing to destroy.**

This rule is pretty straightforward, however it continuously violated, especially with pistols. It applies whether you are involved in range practice, daily carry, or examination, and with all firearms.

If a firearm is assembled and in someone's hands, it is capable of being discharged. A firearm holstered properly or even lying on a table is of no danger to anyone. Only when it is handled is there a need for concern.

This rule applies to fighting as well as to daily handling. If you are not willing to take a human life, do not point the gun at them. If you want to scare them, put on an ugly rubber mask. Never try to intimidate someone with a gun, if I put the sights on what I believe to be a threat, then place my finger on the trigger – my intent is to shoot them.

It also applies to you – I see this all the time, never allow the muzzle to cover your extremities, like using both hands to reholster the pistol or pointing the muzzle at the elbow to check it. Get a proper holster, a design that will allow for one-handed holstering, so avoid holsters which collapse after withdrawing the pistol.

### **3. Keep your finger off the trigger UNTIL you have your sights on target and have made the decision to fire your weapon.**

Whether on TV, in the theaters, or at the range, people seem fascinated with having their finger on the trigger. This is a natural reflex and a VERY bad habit. Usually this mistake happens when people are new to dealing with firearms and most times it occurs when they are simply holding the gun. It is natural for someone to want to do this, but it is a source for disaster.

Never stand or walk around with your finger on the trigger. I hear this all the time as well, "I'm not going to shoot myself in the foot" – this is usually said right before someone shoots themselves in the foot. Under stress with your finger on the trigger, any unexpected movement, misstep or surprise could result in you discharging a round – a bullet – and probably into something you were not willing to destroy – Rule 2.

Danger abounds if you allow your finger to dawdle inside the trigger guard. As soon as the sights leave the target, the trigger-finger leaves the trigger and straightens alongside the frame.

Something to keep in mind, speed cannot be gained from having your finger on the trigger before you are ready to shoot. Bringing the sights to bear on the target, whether from the holster or a ready position, takes more time than that required for moving the trigger finger an inch or so to the trigger.

One last point here - never fire a shot unless the sights are on the target and you have made a conscious decision to fire. Firing an unaligned pistol in a fight gains nothing. Remember, every round that leaves your gun has a lawyer attached to it.

### **4. Identify your target and what is beyond your target.**

Know what it is, what is in line with it, and what is behind it. Never shoot at anything you have not positively identified. We DO NOT shoot at sounds, shapes or shadows. Be aware of your surroundings, whether on the range or in a fight. Do not assume anything, know what you are doing.

Remember that even if you hit your target the bullet may go through the target and hit something beyond that. You may also miss—so know what is behind your target and identify what you are shooting.

It would be a really bad day if you successfully defended yourself either in your home or on the street – only later to realize you injured or even killed the neighbor's kid or the mother of two walking through the parking lot.

Improper gun handling results from ignorance and improper role modeling, such as handling your gun like your favorite actor does. Remember, on TV or in the movies the reason their partner did not get the back of their head blown off was ... it wasn't in the script.

Many of us, "grew up" with guns ... I have heard that too many times and we "think" we know how to handle a gun ... and usually that is wrong.

Hard to believe, but for many gun owners, the way to check to see if it is unloaded is to point it up in the air or at the ground and pull the trigger ... how many rules broken here? Or forget where the muzzle is pointing and then say "Don't worry, it's not loaded"

I have shown thousands of firearms to people – everything from pellet guns, handguns and long guns ... even gave a tour on a WWII Iowa class battleship, and the first place people's hands go is to the trigger ...

While out hiking one day, I came across a couple shooting at targets on a make shift stand - they were sighting in a scope on a hunting rifle – large caliber rifle. Beyond their "target stand" were simply trees – a stand of pines. They were completely unaware that there was a highway approx 100 yards on the other side of those pines.

You can make a difference by following these gun handling rules and insisting that those around you do the same. If you follow these rules exactly there is hardly an accident possible when dealing with firearms.

These next six rules are more for fighting with a handgun and are simply expressions of common sense.

#### **5. You have to be willing.**

If you are going to rely on a handgun for your personal protection, you have to be willing to carry it and you must be willing to use it. If that's a commitment you cannot make, then buy pepper spray, get a Rottweiler and a thick leash, or hire a bodyguard. You need the right mindset. You have to be willing to fight and you have to be prepared to fight to the end.

#### **6. Have gun, will travel.**

To protect yourself with a handgun, you have to have it with you. If you are accosted in the parking lot by some meth-fueled freak and your handgun is at home, it is worthless to you. Pick a gun you can operate well and carry ... and will carry - then carry it.

#### **7. Learn to run your gun and practice.**

If you're going to carry a gun, you need to know how to run it. A gun is after all, a very simple tool. But, in a life or death situation, you will experience the loss of fine motor skills and likely have tunnel vision. You need to be prepared to manipulate your handgun without conscious thought.

Know how to reload your gun, operate your gun, clear stoppages, shoot your gun, unload your gun, draw your gun, and holster your gun. Practice every chance you get and can afford.

#### **8. Be justified. Don't be stupid. Think!**

Here is an often asked question, "how will I know if I will be justified if I shoot someone?" Here's the answer, you won't know.

Reality is arguably 90% perception. Your perception of a situation is your reality. Perceptions can be 90% wrong, but our perceptions are what we must act upon. What matters is your ability to convey your perception of a situation to the police, a prosecutor, your lawyer, or a jury.

If you believe the only way you can survive without grave injury and/or death is to shoot your attacker, then you are negligent in your efforts to survive if you do not pull the trigger.

Don't be stupid. Don't put yourself in situations you cannot defend either physically or morally. Stay out of the bad side of town, don't park in dark areas, and avoid situations that may put your safety at risk.

Common sense says if you get into a fight, don't go home and get your gun and then wait on the guy in the parking lot. If you catch a woman sleeping with your husband, don't shoot her unless she's trying to shoot you while in the throes of passion.

### **9. Everything looks better with light on it.**

In the world of gun fighting, you cannot shoot what you cannot see. Neither can you justifiably identify a threat if you cannot see your attacker. Light also equals control. Bad guys are like vampires, they do not like the light. Even if you don't carry a handgun, carry a light and use it.

### **10. Never be more than five shots away from cover, a reload, or long gun.**

Bad guys may not give any visual indication they've been hit when you shoot them. Expect your worst shot in practice to be your best shot in a fight.

Remember you might run out of ammo and need more ... also handguns are not all that great at stopping a fight. They are not in the same league as a shotgun or a rifle. When we are out and about, have a reload with you. When you're at home, have a long gun where you can get to it... Just in case. Remember it will be harder for the bad guy to shoot you if you are behind something.

Humans do a lot of things every day of their life, from the time you get up in the morning until you put on your Batman pajamas at night. Most of the things we do are mundane, simple actions we don't even think about as we do them. Your personal protection should be just as incidental. It should not be complicated; it should not be some super tactical routine. It should be as seamlessly integrated into your lifestyle.

If you're a member of seal team six you have a lot of skills to learn. But those kinds of advanced gun fighting skills aren't really needed in every day life. When it comes to firearms safety, everyday survival, and the basics of personal protection with a firearm, the old axiom "keep it simple" applies.

Make these rules a part of your character. Never compromise them. Bottom line is that guns are not toys and they CAN NOT be treated as such. Follow these rules and be safe.