

Rules for Using or Storing a Gun

When actually engaged in shooting—whether in hunting, recreational practice, or competition—always follow these rules.

- **Know your target and what is beyond.** Be absolutely sure to identify the target beyond any doubt. Equally important, be aware of the area beyond the target. This means observing the prospective area of fire before shooting. Never fire in a direction in which there are people or where any other potential for mishap might exist.
- **Know how to use a gun safely.** Before handling a gun, learn how it operates. Know its basic parts and how to safely open and close the action, and remove any ammunition from the gun or magazine. Remember, a gun's mechanical safety device is never foolproof. Nothing can replace safe gun handling.
- **Be sure the gun is safe to operate.** Just like other tools, guns need regular maintenance to remain in good working order. Regular cleaning and proper storage are part of the gun's general upkeep. If there is any question about a gun's ability to function, a gunsmith should look at it.
- **Use only the correct ammunition for the gun.** Only the BBs, pellets, cartridges, or ammunition designed for a particular gun can be fired safely in that gun. Most guns have the ammunition type stamped on the barrel. Ammunition can be identified by information printed on the box and sometimes stamped on the cartridge. Do not shoot the gun without loading the proper ammunition.

- **Wear hearing and eye protection.** Shots fired from guns are loud, and the noise can damage the hearing of shooters and bystanders. Firing a gun also emits debris and hot gas that can cause eye injury. For these reasons, shooters should wear shooting glasses and hearing protection.
- **Never use alcohol or drugs before or when shooting.** Alcohol, or any other substance likely to impair normal mental or physical functions (including prescription and nonprescription medicines), must not be used before or while handling or shooting guns.
- **Store guns so they are not accessible to unauthorized persons.** Deciding where and how to store guns and ammunition depends on several factors, such as security and accessibility. Safe and secure storage requires that untrained individuals (especially children) be denied access to guns and ammunition.