

**Wildlife Achievement Chapter, Inc.
The Izaak Walton League of America
Est. 1937**



Shotgun Safety Overview

Designed for Skeet, Trap and 5-Stand

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Overview - Why are we here to talk about Safety?

The privilege of shooting carries with it certain responsibilities, and **safety is number one!**

Our safety overview is specifically aimed at shotgun clay target shooting for the games of **skeet, trap and 5-stand**. Although there are many common safety procedures for hunting, there are also many procedures that are not common.

From the Medesto, CA newspaper—July 14, 2008:

“A 71 year old man died Sunday morning when a member of a skeet shooting group accidentally shot him in the head...

“A group of club members met Sunday to go skeet shooting...A few of them were near their vehicles...One of the gentlemen accidentally touched his trigger and discharged his weapon...A past president of the club said he had heard of no other injuries or deaths at the club since it was established in 1920...The shooter has managed and run the club’s skeet range for years.”

This was a terrible tragedy. It was an accident, but an accident that easily **could** have, **should** have been avoided. There were at least 5 basic safety rules that were broken. If **any one** of them had been adhered to, the victim would still be alive.

Course presenter now asks participants what basic safety rules were broken:

- * Muzzle was not pointed in a safe direction
- * Gun’s action was closed, not left open
- * Shooter didn’t check action
- * Shooter’s finger was on trigger
- * Live shot shell was left in gun

We have an admirable safety record at our club, and this overview is aimed at ensuring it stays that way.

Again, safety is our first and foremost responsibility. From the time we pick up a firearm, we’re part of a system over which we have almost total control.

To begin...all members and guests using the shotgun ranges must sign in *inside* the shotgun range house before proceeding to the ranges. They must also sign out before leaving the facility. The sign-in sheet outside the rear of the shotgun range house is for range officers only.

All members who have taken the *new combined* Range Orientation/Shotgun Safety course, as well as those who have taken only the Range Orientation (RO) course, and those who have taken both the RO *and* the Shotgun Safety Overview course, must exhibit their range cards to the on duty range officers upon signing in, and display their range cards while on the ranges.

The privilege of using the shotgun ranges is similar to that of the rifle and pistol ranges. Only members who have successfully complete either the new

***combined* RO/Shotgun Safety course or the old RO course *and* the Shotgun Safety course may shoot on any of our shotgun ranges any time the ranges are open. Those who have not completed the Shotgun Safety Overview or the *new combined* course can only shoot as a “guest” of another member who has completed the course, and must be accompanied on the range by that member. The cost will be the same for both members.**

A round of skeet, trap or 5-stand consists of 25 clay targets. We pay for these rounds by buying special coins from the Range Officers on duty in our range house. One coin will allow 27 targets to be thrown. The extra 2 targets are to accommodate breakage and other circumstances which legitimately allow an extra target to be thrown. If nothing happens to cause more than 25 targets to be thrown, please do not throw more than 25 targets. Doing so may lead to our having to raise prices.

**\$3.50 for members
\$3.00 for Range Officers
\$4.75 for guests**

Our ranges are open (with occasional exceptions, such as Christmas and Thunder Valley days) every Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5:00 pm. During Daylight Savings Time, we are also open on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 7:00 pm.

Range Officers get special privileges. For the most part, they serve one day each month. They pay \$3.00 rather than \$3.50 per round, and they can shoot at times when the ranges are not officially open. For details, please get in touch with Bob Cooley, of the Shotgun Committee and Board of Directors, or any other committee member.

Types of Shotguns

Only shotguns with a barrel length of 18 inches, the legal limit, or longer are permitted on the shotgun fields, though we prefer 22 inches or longer because the shorter barrels are designed for self-defense rather than clay target shooting.

The “chamber” of a shotgun is at the back of the barrel, where the shot shell sits as the gun is ready to fire. The “receiver” of a shotgun is the part that contains the trigger, the hammer and the firing pin. It is between the stock and the barrel.

The shotguns that are used for the clay target games are of 3 basic types:

1. **Break-Open**

These types of shotguns are loaded by breaking them open and separating the barrel chamber from the receiver. The shells are loaded directly into the chambers and the gun is closed and ready to fire—or “in-battery.” “In Battery” means the gun is loaded and ready to fire.

There are three varieties of break-open guns:

- A. Over and Under
- B. Side by Side
- C. Single Barrel

(Demonstrate these guns—without ammunition)



2. **Pump Action**

These single-barreled guns have magazines, located under the barrel, that can hold 3 to 10 or more shotgun shells. Most are loaded by pulling back on the fore-end, inserting a shell in the receiver and pushing the fore-end forward. A second shell can be loaded by inserting it in the magazine, which is the tube under the barrel. It's accessed through a hole in the bottom of the receiver.

When loaded, after the first shot is fired, the shooter pulls back on the fore-end, which ejects the fired hull. At the same time, a shell feeds from the magazine into the receiver. When the fore-end is pushed forward, the shell is fed into the chamber and the gun is in “battery.”

(Demonstrate pump action gun—without ammunition)



3. **Semi-Automatic**

These are also single-barreled, and in some ways look similar to pumps. They have similar magazines, but they do not require “pumping” to load a new cartridge after the first shell is fired. They are loaded by placing a shell in the receiver. But instead of pushing the fore-end forward, you push a button on the receiver, which causes the shell to be shoved into the chamber, thus putting the gun “in battery.” An additional shell can be loaded into the magazine in the same manner as a pump gun.

When the trigger is pulled on the first shell, the energy from the explosion causes the bolt to move back into the receiver. As this is happening, the fired hull is ejected from the receiver. The unfired shell from the magazine is fed onto the chamber. The gun is then “in battery” once again, and the gun is ready to fire. This all happens in a split second.

They are called *semi*-automatics because one needs to pull the trigger one time for every shell fired. A fully automatic gun fires many shells if the finger is left on the trigger.

(Demonstrate semi-auto gun—without ammunition)



Shotgun Shells

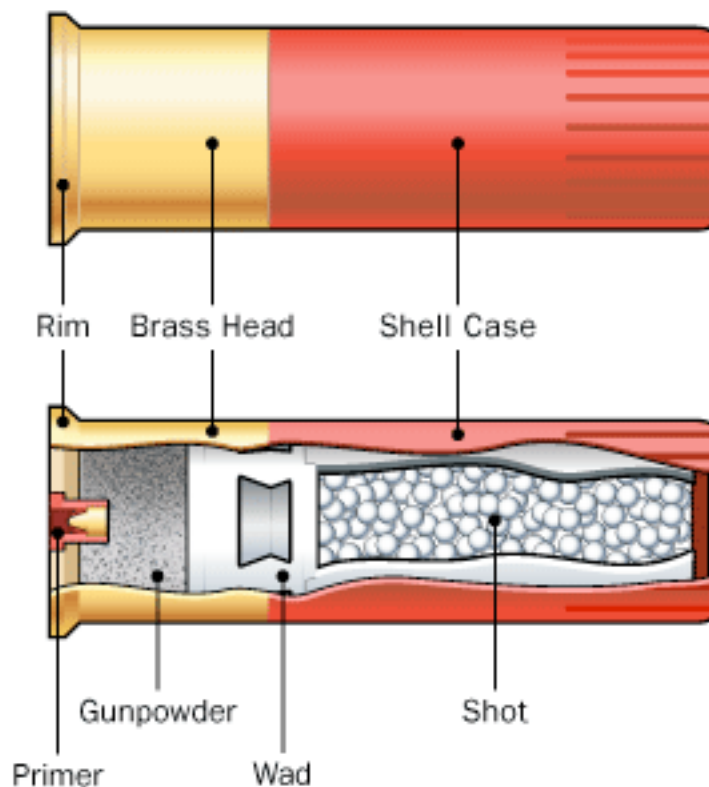
Cartridges filled with lead shot are the most common type of shotgun ammunition. Shot consists of small, round lead pellets.

A modern shot shell consists of 5 components—The hull (which includes the rim, the brass head, and the shell case), primer, gunpowder, wad and lead shot.

The hull holds all the other elements. Into the empty hull, from the bottom up the elements are first, the primer, then the gunpowder, the wad and finally, the shot.

When the shell is loaded into a shotgun, the primer is struck by the firing pin and creates a spark that ignites the powder. This happens in a confined area and creates a lot of pressure. That pressure pushes the wad, which contains the shot in the only direction it can go--toward the muzzle. Once it exits the muzzle, the petals on the wad open up and the shot spreads out.

(Demonstrate components and show a loaded shot shell)



Basic Clay Target Shotgun Safety Rules

1. Always keep firearms pointed in a safe direction.
2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.
The "Safety" is not generally used on shotgun clay target fields and cannot be counted on to prohibit a shotgun from firing.
3. Eye and ear protection is required for everyone on the range area located beyond the safety fence.
4. Firearms will only be loaded at the shooting station immediately prior to shooting. Aiming and pointed a firearm is only permitted toward the target area from the shooting station.
5. If any person is in front of the shooting stations, or down range, all firearms shall be unloaded, with actions open, and chambers empty.
6. While a "low gun" mount is permitted, shooting with an unmounted gun (with the butt stock off the shoulder) is prohibited. Shooters must be in a stationary position when preparing to fire. Walking between stations with a loaded firearm to simulate hunting conditions is prohibited.
7. Firearms authorized for use on chapter ranges are restricted to those designed to be fired from the shoulder. No handguns with shot loads are permitted. Use only firearms that are known to be mechanically safe and sound.
8. No shotgun shell or shell larger than a 12 gauge 3 ¼ dram may be fired anywhere on the shotgun range. *No shell with more than 1 1/8 ounces of shot may be used.*
9. Only lead shot may be used on the shotgun ranges as follows: Shot sizes 7 ½, 8, 8 ½ and 9 are permitted on ranges 1,2 and 3. Shot sizes 8, 8 ½ and 9 are permitted on ranges 4 and 5.
10. ***In the game of skeet, one should never have more live shells in a gun than he/she plans to shoot on that station and never more than two.***

Never have a live shell in the gun after taking the last shot on any station.

When shooting the game of skeet, during the shooting of single targets, a shooter may load two shells—except at station 8 high house, or for the last single target on any station. When shooting station 8 (both high and low), the target must be fired upon before it reaches the center stake. Do not turn around with a loaded firearm.

On station 8 all shooters must shoot the high house first. When everyone has completed shooting the high house all shooters should then, in turn, shoot the low house.

11. "Misfires" or "hang fires" occur when the trigger is pulled, the hammer falls, but the firing pin doesn't ignite the shell's primer. You'll hear a snap, but nothing happens. After hearing the snap, it's still possible for the primer to ignite. This is potentially very dangerous, and shall be handled as follows:

- *DO NOT IMMEDIATELY OPEN THE GUN!*
 - Continue pointing the firearm down range for not less than ONE MINUTE.
 - Unload and clear the firearm. If shooting a break open gun, observe the shot shells you unloaded. If they are intact, you may have a bad primer. The safest thing to do is place them in the cans for bad shells located on the fences, or take them home and take them apart, or give them to the range officers to dispose of.
 - *DO NOT DISCARD MISFIRES ON THE GROUND OR IN THE TRASH.*
12. A “**squib fire**” occurs when the firing pin strikes the primer and the primer ignites, but the shell is improperly loaded, and it is quite clear from the weak sound of the explosion.

*This is a potentially dangerous situation because the **shot shell wad** could be stuck in the barrel.*

If a new shell were placed in the chamber and the gun fired, the barrel would likely be severely damaged and injury could easily occur. This is not an unusual situation and should be taken very seriously. Sometimes, aside from the plastic from the hull being stuck, the brass (metal part of the shot shell) will separate from the plastic and the plastic part of the hull will be stuck in the barrel.

Barrels must be examined very carefully!

- Break-open guns are to be opened and the barrels should be carefully visually examined from the chamber end to make sure there are no obstructions. Also, run a rod through the barrel from either end to double-check. Clear obstructions, if necessary.
- In the case of pumps and semi-autos, all shot shells are to be removed from both chambers and magazines.
- The bolts are to be placed in the rear positions and the chambers are to be examined to make sure they are empty. *NEVER* assume the barrel is clear.
- Long rods, usually hanging on the fences, are provided. Ask a squad mate to double-check you as you go through this safety procedure. Make sure the bolt is in the rear position in the receiver (action opened). Insert the rod in the muzzle end of the gun and make sure it extends all the way through to the receiver. After making sure the rod goes through the barrel from the muzzle to the receiver, visually examine the barrel from the muzzle end to make sure a hull is not stuck in the barrel. *ALWAYS* examine your barrel and insist other shooters do the same.

13. Firearms which are not in use or unattended shall be cased or stored in the range gun racks. Firearms stored in the range racks shall be unloaded (chambers and magazines empty), with the action open, where applicable (pump and semi-autos).
14. Before leaving the range area, all firearms must be unloaded (chamber and magazine empty), cased or carried with the action open.
15. Do not walk in front of the low house skeet window. If a clay pigeon were to be thrown, serious personal injury would likely occur.

Handling a Shotgun Off the Shooting Stations

Off the shooting stations, shotguns should always be **unloaded** and carried in manners that demonstrate they are not loaded. In the case of break-open guns, they should be carried with “action” open and the barrels pointed toward the ground.

In the case of pumps and semi-autos, they should also be carried with the action opened, which means the “bolts” are locked in the rear position. They should be carried with the muzzles pointed either straight up or toward the ground.

When removing a pump, semi-auto or assembled break-open shotgun from a car or a case, the shooter, while making sure the barrel is pointed in a safe direction, should first open the action, making sure the gun is not loaded.

(Demonstrate carrying positions with break-open and pump or semi-auto)

In the process of placing a gun in, or removing a gun from a rack, be careful that the muzzle continues to be pointed in a safe direction.

(Demonstrate)

Never assume a gun is unloaded.

Relieving the pressure on a gun’s hammer springs may be done *only with break-open guns—single barrels, over/unders and side by sides—and only after the barrel has been removed from the action..*

A relatively common accident is for a shooter to think he/she is placing an empty hull or “snap-cap” in the gun, when they’re actually placing a live shot shell in the chamber and pulling the trigger. This “**dry firing**” is prohibited.

Handling a Shotgun On the Field and On the Shooting Stations

In all three games, trap, skeet and 5-stand, the shooter steps onto the shooting station with an empty gun and finger off the trigger. The gun is to be loaded only when the shooter is standing on the station with the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.

In all the games, no more than 2 shells are to be loaded. Once the shells are loaded, if the shooter is interrupted for any reason that requires him or her to turn around or take time to discuss something, the gun's action must be opened and the shells removed.

After firing at the station's targets, break-open guns must be opened while the muzzles continue to be pointed down-range, and empty shells must be removed before turning to step off the station. The last fired shell in a pump gun must be ejected and the action left open. In the case of a semi-auto, shooters should check that the last fired round has been ejected and the action is open with the bolt in the rear position in the receiver.

In stepping off the stations, shooters should take care to keep the muzzles pointed in a safe direction.

To ensure safety in skeet and "Chinese trap," shooters who are not on the station should stand (or sit) *behind* the shooter who is on the station. This is also as a courtesy to the shooter, as being in the shooter's field of vision is a distraction. In the game of 5-stand, all guns must be loaded with the barrels held *over* the horizontal stand barrier. No shooter is permitted to walk from station to station with a loaded gun.

Safety Infractions Witnessed at Our Club

Safety violations are not limited to inexperienced shooters. All of us, at times, are capable of complacency. Experienced shooters can just as easily have accidents.

Some of the Infractions (Things NOT to DO) witnessed were as follows:

- Shooter shooting skeet station high 8, places two shells in gun, shoots high house, then turns around to shoot low house--facing up-field direction, pointing loaded gun at other shooters during turn.
- Shooter puts a 16 or 20 gauge shell in 12 gauge barrel.
- Shooter walks off the station with semi-auto action closed.
- Shooter walks off the station with pump action closed.
- Shooter, with loaded gun, action closed, turns to ask question of another shooter, pointing muzzle at other shooter.
- Shooter loading more than two shells in gun.
- Shooter loading gun while off station.
- Shooter, after shooting, turns and points muzzle at other shooters before opening gun.
- Skeet shooter placing son (with button) on high house steps while shooter shoots around course.
- Shooter fires two shells into ground outside range house, thinking he had placed empty hulls or "snap-caps" in chambers.
- Shooter, with loaded gun, swings gun toward foot before shouldering gun.
- Shooter holding loaded gun in horizontal position—parallel to the front of his body, which points gun at other shooters.
- Shooter putting two "snap-caps" in chambers, and pulling trigger twice while muzzle is pointed at another club member.
- Shooter walks in front of low house window while trap machine is turned on.
- Before breaking down break-open gun to put in case, shooter places his closed-action gun on table, pointed at shooters on the next field.
- Shooter with a semi-auto gun has a weak sounding shot shell and places new shell in chamber. Another member of the squad asks if the shooter checked the barrel for obstructions. Shooter says it's not necessary. The other squad member asks for the shooter to "humor" him and check. Shooter checks barrel. There was a wad stuck in the barrel.
- Shooter walks across entire skeet field with the action closed on his over/under.
- People on the field side of the safety fence without eye and/or ear protection.

General Conduct at the Shooting Ranges

- All members are expected to maintain an attitude of SAFETY, PATIENCE AND COURTESY at all times.
- Only members and their guests are permitted to use the shotgun ranges.
- Any member bringing guests to the shotgun range must remain with his/her guests at all times.
- Members sponsoring guests using the chapter facilities are personally responsible for the conduct of their guests, and will be liable for damages attributable to their guests.
- In the event of a machine malfunction, immediately notify a Range Officer. Do not attempt to repair the machine.
- Children of members are prohibited from bringing guests to the shotgun range.
- A member or spouse bringing children under 18 years old to the shotgun ranges must maintain absolute control over the children's activities at all times.
- Members are responsible for keeping the shooting areas clean and safe, and for picking up and properly disposing of all hulls, trash and debris, regardless of its origin.
- Unauthorized off-road vehicular traffic is prohibited at all times.
- The cost of repairs for any damage to chapter property and the possible loss of range privileges will be assessed for violations of these rules and regulations.
- Alcohol and other drugs are not permitted on ranges or range spectator areas. No ingestion of alcohol or other drugs is allowed before or during shooting. Persons under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are not permitted on ranges or in range spectator areas. There are times when alcohol will be available at supervised special events. At those events, persons under the influence of alcohol are not permitted on the ranges.
- Emergency calls to 911 are authorized if conditions present the possibility of injury to anyone.

Everyone is a Range Safety Officer

- All shooters are required to be observant of other shooters and bring to their attention any safety violations. Don't be timid when it comes to gun safety. If you observe anyone violating any safety precautions, you have an obligation to insist on safer handling practices.
- Anyone witnessing a violation of the shotgun safety rules and regulations or safety standards is responsible for calling it to the violator's attention.
- We highly recommend, as a general rule, to approach the offender calmly, and with an attitude that you're trying to help. If possible, speak quietly so as not to embarrass the shooter. In almost all cases the shooter did not intend to commit a violation and he/she will appreciate your help.
- If the violator is argumentative or uncooperative, disengage immediately and report the violator's identity or vehicle license number to the Range Safety Officer, Chapter Caretaker, or other Chapter official.
- If someone criticizes your safety procedures, please try not to act defensively. Listen carefully. If you disagree, err on the side of the criticism. Keep the debate civilized. Exchange contact information with the other person. Check with the Shotgun Committee for an interpretation and communicate that with the other person.
- On-duty Range Officers are to be called upon to settle any safety disagreements. Although the subject may be brought before the Shotgun Committee at a later date, the decision of the Range Officers on duty shall be adhered to.
- Adherence to all standard rules of firearms safety is mandatory.
- The flagrant violation of safety rules shall be cause for immediate termination of range privileges, and could also lead to expulsion from membership in accordance with the provisions of Article X of the constitution and by-laws.
- In order to enjoy our shotgun sports and our shotgun facility, we must all understand that nothing is more important than firearm safety.
- *There are a very small number of accidents that are unavoidable. Almost all accidents are caused by human error. It's up to us to keep them from happening.
- *If you are a new or inexperienced shooter, please talk to the Range Officer on duty when you sign in at the Range House. They will help you on your first trips to the skeet, trap, or five stand ranges.