

# Safe hunting requires common sense

In 2004, a pheasant hunter in North Dakota was injured by a shotgun fired by another hunter. The hunter shot was “out of sight” of the other hunter. It happened more than once. A deer hunter was struck by a bullet fired by another hunter who “failed to check beyond the target.” A goose hunter was injured by a firearm due to “careless handling.”

Each year, thousands of North Dakotans enjoy the sport of hunting. And each year, hunters are injured – sometimes killed– because simple safety guidelines were ignored.

The following 10 Commandments of gun safety cover just about every problem faced by shooters. These commandments are widely-publicized by state agencies and hunting organizations. Every firearm accident can be traced to a violation of one or more of these safety rules.

**WATCH THAT MUZZLE.** This is the one rule that has to have been broken for a firearm accident to have occurred. If the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction and an accidental or intentional discharge occurs, no one will be hurt.

**TREAT EVERY GUN AS IF IT WERE LOADED.** Anytime you handle a firearm always treat it as though it is loaded even if you have just checked and are sure it is not loaded. This will help you develop safe gun-handling skills.

**BE SURE BARREL AND ACTION ARE CLEAR OF OBSTRUCTIONS.** Shooting a firearm is nothing more than a controlled explosion. When the muzzle end of the barrel is clear, the bullet is able to be propelled out of the barrel. If the muzzle is clogged with dirt or another substance, the explosion is no longer controlled, and you have a bomb

in your hands.

**BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET BEFORE YOU PULL THE TRIGGER.** Our eyes can play tricks on us, and things can be something other than what they appear to be. Once you pull the trigger and fire the gun, you cannot say “I’m sorry,” and recall the projectile. Never play around with a firearm. Never point it at anyone even if you know it is not loaded.

**UNLOAD GUNS WHEN NOT IN USE.** Never keep a loaded gun around the house, in a vehicle, or while walking to or from your shooting or hunting spot. No one has ever been shot with an unloaded gun, although people have said they “Thought it was unloaded,” when someone was shot.

**NEVER POINT A GUN AT ANYTHING YOU DO NOT WANT TO SHOOT.** Guns are mechanical devices and the safety mechanisms can break. You do not want to have to try to live with the memory of accidentally shooting a friend or loved one. Guns can provide a lifetime of enjoyable sporting activities when handled safely or a lifetime of misery if not.

**NEVER CLIMB A FENCE OR TREE OR JUMP A DITCH WITH A LOADED GUN.** Always be sure the gun is unloaded. Hand your gun to your hunting partner on the other side of the fence or ditch and then cross the obstacle. If you are using a tree stand, always unload the gun and tie a rope around the grip of the gun and pull the gun up to you with the muzzle pointing toward the ground.

**NEVER SHOOT A BULLET AT A FLAT HARD SURFACE OR WATER.**

Bullets can ricochet and travel off in any direction, including bouncing back at the shooter if shot at a hard surface. Never shoot at cans, bottles, or other items floating in the water. A bullet could travel for a great distance and hit someone out of your sight.

**STORE GUNS AND AMMUNITION SEPARATELY.** Never store your ammunition with your guns. Always keep them separated and under lock and key.

**AVOID ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES BEFORE OR DURING SHOOTING.** Never stay around anyone who has been drinking alcoholic drinks and handling a firearm. Also, remember that some drugs, including prescription drugs, can impair your movement or judgement. If the label reads, “Do not drive a vehicle or operate machinery while taking this drug,” do not handle a firearm while taking this medication.

You may have noticed that firearm safety comes down to common sense, courtesy, and respect. If you think about what you are doing and show common courtesy while handling a firearm, you will earn the respect of your fellow hunters and shooters.

Also, be respectful of other hunters and of landowners. Courtesy, cooperation, and common sense are as important as ammunition, scopes, and decoys when it comes to hunting. All hunters need to keep their emotions in check.

Finally, consider your own safety. Wear eye and ear protection as appropriate for each situation. Wear clothing that takes into account rapid changes in weather that will make you visible to other hunters.

## – ATTENTION HUNTERS –

Be mindful of fire danger

Remember that hunting on private property is a PRIVILEGE, so take time to ask permission

Be considerate of both private and public land

Stay on maintained roads during wet season

Close all gates

Bag litter and take it home

