

SAFETY AWARENESS: YOUR FIRST PRIORITY!



The Safe Direction™ multi-layered, ballistic, containment pad (patent pending) is designed to be the focus of the muzzle during administrative firearm operations, such as unloading and chamber checks.

You may have your favorite guns for concealed carry and home defense, but these firearms certainly do not have their favorite owners. It bears keeping in mind that all firearms are dangerous, inanimate objects that do not forgive oversights or mistakes. They are weapons designed to kill two-legged, four-legged, many-legged and no-legged creatures! Being the dangerous tools they are designed to be, firearms, just like poisonous snakes and spiders, are ready to bite the first person who handles them carelessly. Thus, all gun owners must always make firearm safety awareness their first priority.

Stages in becoming an armed senior citizen: We all go through stages in learning and living the armed lifestyle. Initially, we were unaware of *what* we did not know and needed to learn about guns. Once we became aware of the vast amount of information we didn't know, many of us felt awkward at the gun shop or shooting range. Perhaps we felt that everyone else knew what they were doing [not!] while we stood out as beginners. So, many of us embarked upon an odyssey of reading, enrolling in basic classes, and taking

individual lessons from certified firearm instructors to learn what we needed to know.

Conscious competence: As we acquired essential knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude, many of us developed conscious competence in the basics of safe firearm handling and shooting. Firearm safety was not taken for granted; safety awareness took center stage. While handling and shooting different firearms, we kept in mind the basic reality that all

firearms are deadly and must be treated with care and respect. The four universal firearm safety rules became our mantra:

1. Treat all firearms as if they are loaded.
2. Always be aware of *where* you are pointing the muzzle of your firearm. You should never point the muzzle of any firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy; you should always point the muzzle of a firearm in a *safe direction*.

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3. Always keep your finger off of the trigger until your gun is on target and you have decided to shoot.

4. Always be sure of your target and what is around it.

Unconscious competence: Over several or more years, as we became more familiar with firearms and more comfortable around them, conscious competence evolved into unconscious competence. Gun handling and living with guns became second nature. We all developed certain gun handling habits. Not all of these habits were good.

The old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt" may be too extreme. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that familiarity can breed carelessness. The problem is that as we get used to being around firearms and living the armed lifestyle, there is a natural tendency to grow complacent about safety. This must not be allowed to happen!

Advanced skills in gun handling and shooting are not some new bag of tricks. They are the proficient and reflexive application of the basics. Therefore, as we become more experienced in living the armed lifestyle, we must continue to attend to the fundamentals of safe gun handling. We must remain forever on guard against the tendency to become complacent about firearm safety because once complacency in gun handling becomes a habit, we are headed down a very dangerous road. This dangerous road invariably leads to numerous day-to-day violations of the basic rules of firearm safety. This is a recipe for disaster because these rules are absolute imperatives. Therefore, it is worth discussing a few of the most common safety violations, so we can better guard against committing them.

VIOLATIONS OF SAFETY RULE #1: ALL GUNS ARE LOADED

A local newspaper recently reported a tragic story of a college student who accidentally shot and killed her sister with a handgun that she thought was not loaded. Police were called to the women's apartment and found a 21-year-old female with a single gunshot wound to the chest. She was taken to the hospital where she was pronounced dead on arrival. The investigating officer reported that the victim's 23-year-old sister told responding officers that she fired the shot accidentally with a handgun that she thought was unloaded, which was owned by a male roommate.

A guy was preparing to clean his Glock, semi-automatic pistol. Glocks require that you pull the trigger to decock the gun before you can field strip them for

cleaning. This guy removed the charged magazine from the pistol and just as he was about to eject the live round from the chamber, the phone rang. He put the gun down and answered the phone. After getting off of the phone, he picked up the pistol. Forgetting to check the chamber, because he always did so right after removing the magazine (if he wasn't interrupted!), he pulled the trigger. Fortunately, he made sure to point the gun in a safe direction because the gun discharged and all that was damaged was some property and the calm of the evening.

Another fellow who failed to observe safety rules one and two was not so lucky. The bullet went through the dry wall and into the next room, striking his wife in the neck. She was dead before she hit the ground.

The moral of these three true stories is that you must never assume that your gun is unloaded. Each and every time you pick it up, check it! Unloaded guns must be handled no differently than loaded guns. More people are unintentionally shot by "unloaded" guns than by loaded ones.

VIOLATIONS OF SAFETY RULE #2: MUZZLE IN A SAFE DIRECTION

Have you ever observed any of the following violations of this cardinal safety rule?

Violation: Drawing a handgun from the holster and bringing the support hand in front of the muzzle.

The problem: You can shoot your support hand!

The solution: Do not cross or cover any part of your body with the muzzle.

Violation: Positioning your support hand too close to the muzzle or ejection port when checking or clearing a semi-automatic pistol.

The problem: If you are startled and your finger is anywhere near the trigger, you could shoot your support hand. Also, it's possible for the live round you are ejecting from the chamber to be detonated while being ejected, injuring your hand.

The solution: Keep your hand away from both the muzzle and the ejection port! Many people check the status of their pistol by grabbing the slide somewhere forward of the ejection port (or worse, placing their support hand over the ejection port!) as they rack the slide back to expose the chamber. Some folks were taught to use their support hand to reach up from underneath the dust cover to rack the slide, using their fingertips. In fact, some pistols have serrations on the front of the slide just

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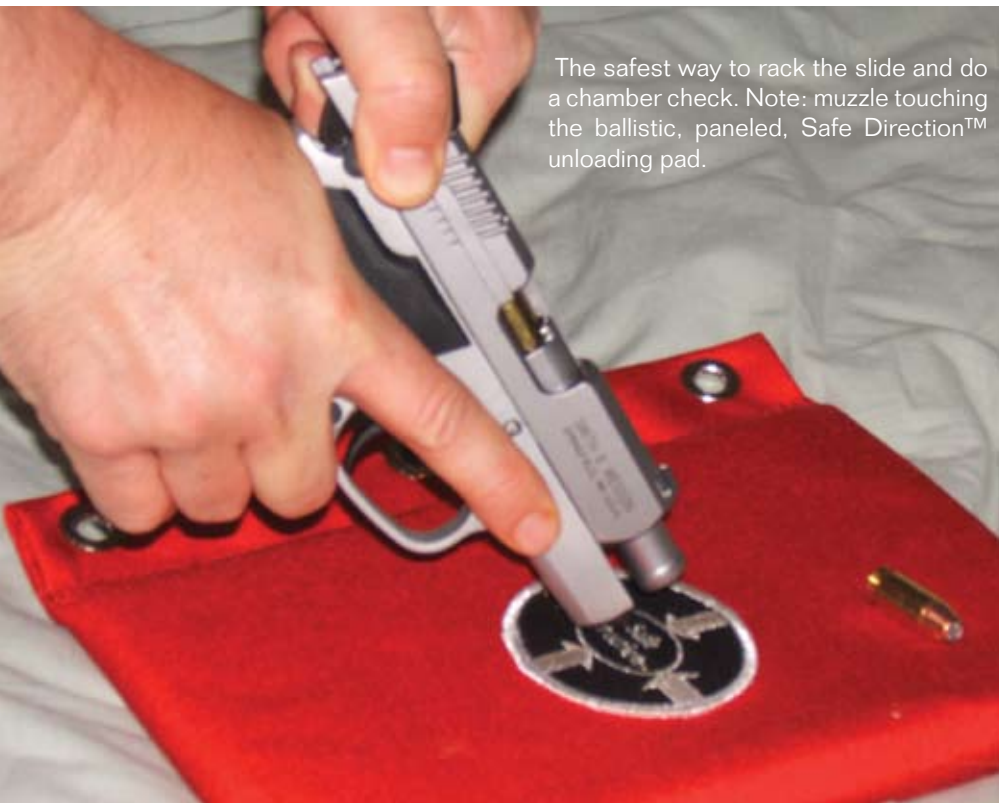
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The safest way to rack the slide and do a chamber check. Note: muzzle touching the ballistic, paneled, Safe Direction™ unloading pad.

for this purpose. However, most pistols have serrations on the rear of the slide to facilitate racking the slide from the rear. I strongly suggest using the rear serrations! Pull on the rear of the slide from behind to avoid placing your non-shooting hand anywhere near the ejection port. The “slingshot” method illustrated in the photo is probably the safest method.

Look at the photograph for an up-close-and-personal look at what happened to a fellow who had a .40 caliber round detonate on his hand after he grabbed the top of the slide with an overhand grip and racked it. He had his left thumb on the left



Damage to operator's hand caused by a detonated .40 caliber round.

of the slide, his other four fingers wrapped over the top, touching the right side of the slide, with the gun tilted to the left, and his left ring finger over the ejection port. As he racked the slide, there was a loud bang, and then he thought, “Damn, my hand hurts!” quickly followed by, “Oh no, I shot myself!” when he realized what happened. He surmised that his finger was over the ejection port just enough to block the round from ejecting, causing the round to hit the ejector and detonate.

This gentleman (who gave me his kind permission to use this photo) was very lucky that the damage was not more extensive! Needless to say, he recommends “...to everyone not to do the ‘over the top’ slide rack; it hurts when you do that!” If this annotated photo doesn't provide sufficient motivation to keep your fingers away from the ejection port, perhaps you deserve anything you get.

Violation: Holding on to a loaded handgun while doing something that requires two hands.

The problem: Do you really want to be holding a loaded gun and not have full control over it?

The solution: Secure the gun first!

Violation: Catching the live round in one's hand after ejecting it from a semi-auto's chamber.

The problem: Doing the flip thingy to catch the ejected round may look cool, but it's a foolish thing to do! If the pistol has a long, pointy ejector (e.g., as Glocks do), the ejector can impact the primer and detonate the round in your hand!

The solution: Let the round eject by itself! In another situation, a bulged case in an Officer size 1911 would not let the slide go fully into battery. The operator tried to rack the slide back to eject the case, but it wouldn't budge. So, he positioned his support hand over the ejection port to get better leverage as he racked the slide to break it free. The primer hit the extended ejector, there was a BANG! and brass chunks went flying. The lesson is: you must keep your hands away from that ejection port!

Problem: Carrying a handgun in a shoulder rig that points the muzzle straight up into one's armpit.

Solution: Don't use this type of shoulder rig! Do you want to carry a gun pointed at your brachial plexus?

Problem: Performing administrative procedures with a pistol that is not pointed in a safe direction.

Solution: Confine all administrative procedures to an area where you can be sure to point the muzzle in a safe direction. Use a ballistic paneled Safe Direction™ unloading pad.

The Safe Direction system is a multi-layered, ballistic containment system, designed to be the focus of the muzzle during administrative firearm operations. It will completely absorb and contain an errant bullet from duty/defensive type handguns, practically eliminating concerns about liability, injury or property damage should an unintentional discharge occur. Safe Direction products hold a NIJ IIIA rating for most factory loaded, standard duty/defensive handgun calibers (.22 LR through .45 ACP, including .357 SIG, .40 S&W and .44 Magnum).

Safe Direction also makes ballistic, panel lined, fanny packs and gun rugs which are not designed to be used for personal ballistic protection, but rather as convenient tools for unloading, loading and status-checking administrative procedures. Safe Direction products can be purchased directly from Personal Defense Solutions.

www.personaldefensesolutions.net
215-938-7283

Problem: A loaded gun unsecured on a dresser, under a pillow, under the bed or in a drawer.



Safe Direction ballistic containment fanny pack and gun rug.



Solution: Secure loaded handguns being used for personal protection in a quick access, lock box or handgun safe. Secure loaded long guns that are “on duty” in a quick access long gun safe. Gun safes are good things!

**VIOLATIONS OF SAFETY RULE #3:
FINGER OFF OF THE TRIGGER**

A student generated a negligent discharge (ND) while holstering her pistol. What she did wrong was to keep her finger on the trigger as she hurriedly holstered her Glock 17. The lip of her holster forced

her trigger finger against the trigger as she pushed the gun into the holster, and the gun subsequently did exactly what it was designed to do! Fortunately, she suffered only minor injury. The bullet, a 9mm hardball, struck a folding knife in her hip pocket, shattering the knife into a dozen pieces. However, the impact deflected the bullet and it hit the ground next to her. She got a nasty bruise on the back of her thigh, but fortunately, nothing penetrated her skin. This student is a competent shooter and competes regularly. Hopefully, she learned a very valuable lesson from this accident.



Re-holster your handgun slowly and keep your finger off of the trigger while doing so!

An acquaintance was in his gun closet rearranging things when he forgot to observe safety rules #1 and #3. The result was that his things got rearranged in a big way! At some point, he picked up one of his .380 caliber “mouse guns” and momentarily forgot that you must always treat all guns as if they are loaded (rule #1). He also momentarily forgot to keep his finger off of the trigger (rule #3). He launched a .380 ACP projectile into his opened gun safe. With a deafening roar, the .380 “mouse bullet” tore through a plastic container of empty Beretta magazines and lodged itself in the back wall of the safe, leaving a trail of shattered magazine tubes, followers and twisted magazine springs in its path. “Just a mouse gun,” you say? Fortunately for my acquaintance, said mouse gun’s muzzle was pointed in a safe direction!

**VIOLATIONS OF RULE #4:
BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET
AND WHAT’S AROUND IT**

I cannot count the number of occasions when I have witnessed someone changing targets down range, while shooters up range, behind the line, were loading or unloading their firearms. This is a recipe for disaster. Just as we must always be sure of our target, we must always remain totally aware of who and what is around our target! This is the reason that it is essential to have a good flashlight on you when you carry your handgun. The flashlight enables you to make out the location and identity of your target. It also enables you to determine if there are any innocents around your target. Collateral damage is not acceptable.

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