

Introduction to Guns and Gun Safety: A Course for Youth and Adults

Clinic Participant's Handbook

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Goal

Provide an opportunity for the inexperienced gun handler to **replace misinformation, curiosity, and fear about guns with knowledge, understanding, and respect**. The course also introduces participants to the lifetime skills that can be learned through shooting and presents information about gun use for recreation and in various professions.

Objectives

Young persons, including babysitters, and their parent(s) or guardian will learn basic gun handling techniques, rules of gun safety in the home, and have the experience of shooting an air rifle.



Activity #1 - Recreational Injuries

Please complete the following activity while you wait for the clinic to begin.

Directions

In the box below are a list of activities and a list of numbers representing the number of accidents per 100,000 participants. Draw a line from the activity to the number that you believe corresponds to the number of accidents that activity has per 100,000 participants. While these cannot be directly compared, it is often surprising how many accidents are associated with various types of recreation.

Recreational Activity	Number of Accidents* per 100,000 Participants
Baseball	6
Bicycle riding	162
Golf	216
Hunting	554
Ice skating	937
Swimming	1,218

*Accident requires at minimum an emergency room visit.



When you have completed Activity #1, you may compare your responses with the answers on page 12.



Please do not do any more of these activities until told to do so during the clinic.



Activity #2 - Gun Ownership

Circle the response which you think is most correct.

1. Approximately what percentage of U.S. households have guns in them?

19% 38% 54% 76% 87%

2. Approximately what percentage of households with children and guns keep a loaded gun in the house?

15% 30% 50% 65%



Activity #3 - First Rules of Safety

Fill in the blanks with the correct answer.

1. A child should only hold or touch a gun if a parent or responsible adult is

_____ and _____.

2. If no parent or responsible adult is present when a child sees a gun, they should:

- stop
- don't _____.
- _____ the area.
- _____ an adult.



Activity #4 - Safety in the Home

Fill in the blanks with the correct answer.

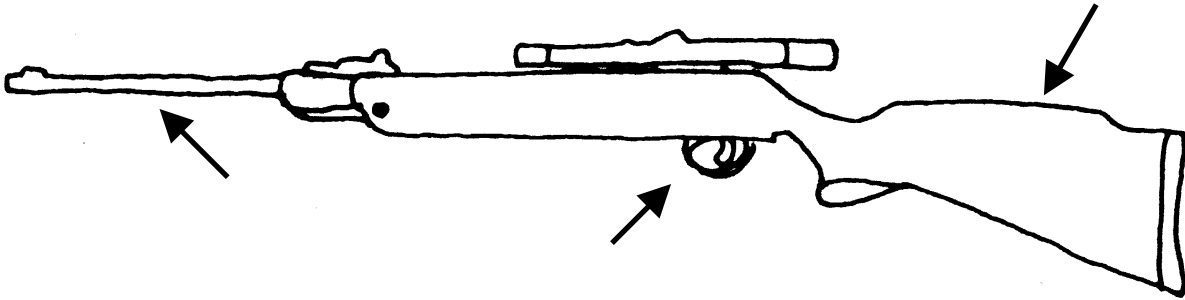
A babysitter should ask the person for whom they are babysitting:

- 1. Are there any _____, _____, or _____ in the house and are they stored properly?
- 2. What are the rules you have regarding the children using play as well as real _____ and _____ while I am babysitting here?
- 3. What do you _____ if a _____ is found?



Activity #5 - Parts of a Gun

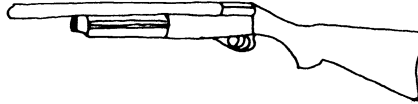
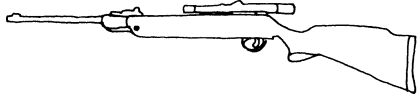
Using the terms: ACTION, BARREL, and STOCK, identify the three main parts of a gun.





Activity #6 - Types of Guns

Identify the types of guns shown below by filling in the blank under each drawing.



Rifle

Is used for long distance shooting and shoots a single projectile. The main types of actions are semi-automatic, bolt, lever, and pump. The ammunition is called a rifle-cartridge.

Shotgun

Is used for shorter distances, generally 50 yards or less and, except for a slug, shoots multiple projectiles each time. The main types of actions are semi-automatic, pump, hinge, and bolt. The ammunition is called a shotgun-shell.

Handgun

Two types

- **Revolvers** (cylinder revolves as hammer is cocked). Cocking means that the hammer is brought into a position that, when released, will fire the ammunition. A “double-action” trigger performs two actions—it cocks the hammer and releases the hammer which in turn fires the revolver.
- **Semi-automatic.** New ammunition is automatically fed from a magazine and the hammer cocked with each trigger pull. This all happens “instantly.”

Handgun ammunition is called cartridges.

“Rounds” is a generic term sometimes used for ammunition.



Activity #7 - Basic Gun Handling Safety Rules

Fill in the blanks with the correct answer.

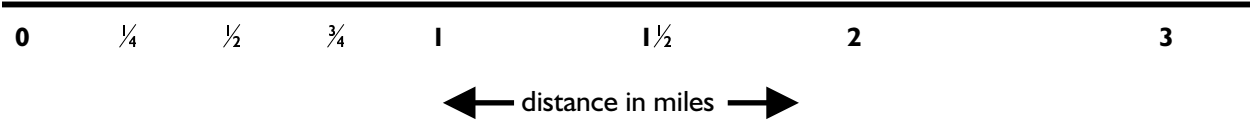
Keep your **finger outside of the trigger guard** and _____ the receiver, and:

1. Treat every gun as if it were _____. Load it only when you are ready to shoot.
2. Keep the **muzzle always pointed** _____, so if it is unintentionally discharged, the projectile would not cause injury or damage.
3. Be sure of your target and what is _____.



Activity #8 - Distance a Bullet Travels

Write a small **P** on the line for how far you think a pellet will go; a **.22** on the line for how far you think a .22 bullet can travel; and an **R** on the line for how far you think a .308 rifle bullet can travel. One-quarter mile is over four football fields in length.

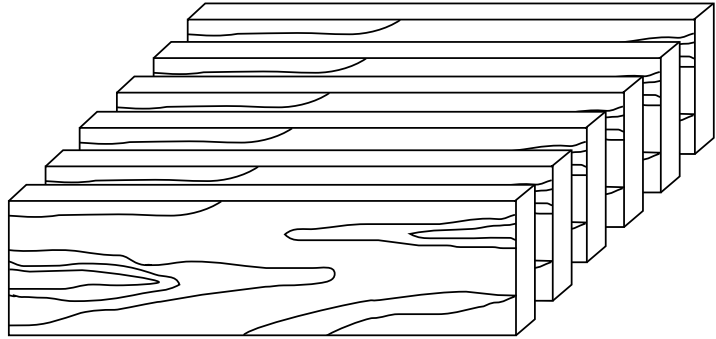




Activity #9 - How Many Pine Boards Does it Take to Stop a Bullet?

How many one-inch pine boards will a .22 rifle bullet penetrate?

Put an **X** on the board where you think the bullet will be stopped.



Activity #10 - Determining Eye Dominance

1. Pick out a distant object and look at it with both eyes open.
2. Extend one arm in front of your body, with the thumb pointed straight up, and cover the object with the thumb.
3. While continuing to look at the distant object, close one eye at a time. Determine which eye continues to see the thumb covering the object.
4. This is your dominant eye.

Circle: I am **right left** handed. I am **right left** eye dominant.

Shooting fundamentals

- **Position** - sitting at 45° to table with shooting shoulder farthest from target.
- **Sight alignment** - red dot in center of glass.
- **Sight picture** - red dot in center of glass and on target.
- **Trigger control** - smooth and steady pull.
- **Breathing** - half breath out and then hold.
- **Follow through** - keep sight picture for a second after firing the gun.



Activity #11 - Range Safety Command

Fill in the blank with the range safety command: _____.

Range activity stations (check off as you complete each activity)

- A. Shooting an airgun
- B. Handling a gun
- C. Setting up an airgun range
- D. “Look-a-likes” and selecting equipment
- E. Safe gun storage

Benefits from learning to shoot

Learning a new skill can be fun and rewarding at any age. Remember the thrill of hitting your first home run? Or the sense of pride you felt when you learned how to ride a two-wheeled bike?

People have often looked to sports and other recreational activities as a way to challenge themselves both physically and mentally. But unlike many sports that require great strength or natural talent, shooting sports can be mastered regardless of age or physical ability.

Practiced individually or with family and friends, shooting can present many immediate and lifelong rewards.

Benefits

- Develops eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills.
- Enhances visualization skills.
- Teaches self-discipline and self-control.
- Improves concentration.
- Increases one’s sense of responsibility.
- Provides an opportunity for goal setting.
- Builds confidence and self-esteem.

Babysitters who find a gun that is not locked up should:

- Remove the children from that area and lock that area.
- If this is not possible, they should move the gun or call an adult who can move the gun.
- As a last resort, if they are familiar with the specific gun, they MIGHT be able to disarm/unload it.



Activity #12 - Young Child Suddenly Appears With a Gun in Hand

- A. **Determine** which is **safest direction** for child to point gun.
- B. **Distraction question + pointing:** Point to a location to the safest side and slightly behind the child and ask the question: “What is that?” or “Is that _____ (person such as Grandma)?”
- C. Step forward and **control muzzle**—walk toward the child and, while keeping the muzzle pointed away from you, take hold of the barrel and control the muzzle direction.
- D. Have **child release grip** on the gun.
- E. **Store gun in a locked area.**
- F. **Advise parent(s)** of incident.

——The following is reference material for adults——



Activity #13 - Loaded or Not?

If you do not know how a particular action works, do not experiment. Rather, have someone who knows show you.

Begin by pointing the gun in a safe direction and keeping your finger outside of the trigger guard and alongside the receiver.

Inspect the gun (look at, but do not move “things” around) to see if you can determine where the safety is and how it works. Put the safety on if you can.

You may or **may not be able to do** the next steps. It depends on how familiar you are with the type of gun. Determine how to open the action. If you open the action, leave it open so a cartridge can not “accidentally” move into the firing chamber.

The following methods are used to open the actions of and unload various guns:

Rifle

Bolt action

Remove the magazine if possible, lift bolt upwards (generally) to unlock, slide bolt backwards (may have to do several times until no more cartridges come out) and visually or mechanically (with your little finger) inspect chamber to see that it is empty.

Pump action

Press the release, pull rearward on the forearm (may have to do several times until no more cartridges come out) and visually or mechanically inspect the chamber.

Semi-auto action

Remove the magazine if possible, pull the bolt back (may have to do several times until no more cartridges come out) and lock open if possible. Then visually or mechanically (with your little finger) inspect chamber to see that it is empty.

Lever action

Push the lever down and forward (may have to do several times until no more cartridges come out), then visually or mechanically inspect the chamber.

Shotgun

Pump action, bolt, and semi-auto

Similar to the rifle.

Hinge or break action

Push the release lever (usually on top at the base of the barrel), hinge it open, and manually remove shells if they do not “fly” out.

Handgun

Revolver

Release the cylinder release latch and visually check the cylinder. On some you can check them all at once, and on others you can only check one chamber at a time by viewing through the loading gate.

Semi-automatic

Remove the magazine, hold the gun by its grip and grasp, then pull the slide backwards and lock open if possible. Visually or with your little finger check to see that there is no cartridge in the chamber.

Children and guns

As children desire to shoot a gun, parents should ensure that:

- Children know the **gun safety rules** and how to apply them before they start shooting.
- They **encourage, coach, and supervise** children’s shooting practice. Adult supervision is important. Parents play a major role in helping their child learn the proper respect, use, and safety associated with a gun.

Additional concepts which parents may wish to discuss with their children regarding guns include:

1. That regardless of what they see on their video games and television, **death is real and irreversible**. Studies show that through media programming, children are less sensitive to death and violence. Parents need to help children learn the finality of death and how to react in real-life situations.
2. That violence is **not an appropriate response for anger**. Road rage, shootings, gang wars, etc., are inappropriate responses to anger.
3. To have **respect for authority** and not use **inappropriate language**. Studies show this to be more significant than most people realize.
4. That **teasing is not appropriate** and can have a long-term negative impact on others. Studies of the perpetrators of shootings at schools show a high correlation of youth who were either teased or abused.
5. That one should not use **alcohol or drugs** when using a gun. Even over-the-counter drugs can have negative effects on one’s ability to stay alert and think clearly. Being tired, getting excited, or not having eaten properly can also affect your ability to stay alert and think clearly.

How old should a youth be before they can handle a gun without adult supervision?

Just like handling a kitchen knife or driving a car, it will vary with the individual. Look for all of the following. A youth, with proper training and certification, may be able to handle a gun without adult supervision when:

1. They show consideration for others and things.
2. They are responsible—that is:
 - able to make decisions based on right and wrong,
 - able to think and act rationally, and
 - able to account for their behavior.
3. They show organization, discipline, and control in their life.

Until a child can demonstrate this level of maturity, adult supervision is mandatory. After that, it is up to the parent or guardian to determine when the time is right and to make sure that they are in compliance with the local ordinances and laws for the state in which they live.

MSA 609.666 requires that a person takes reasonable action to secure loaded firearms against access by a child—a child is someone under 18 years old.

Store ammunition, bolts, and magazines separately from guns and have all in locked areas.

It is also a serious law violation to furnish an airgun to a person under 18 without the permission of a parent or guardian. Further, youth 13 and younger must have parent or guardian supervision when using firearms and airguns.

Safety tips

By following a few simple rules, your shooting experience can always be safe and fun.

- Treat each gun as if it were loaded.
- Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- Be sure of your target and what is beyond.
- Never load a gun until you're ready to shoot.
- Make sure you have adult supervision.
- Never try to shoot a gun before you understand how it works.
- Use safety glasses.
- Always practice and teach gun safety.
- Store guns safely.

“Introduction to Guns and Gun Safety”

Next clinic:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

The DNR’s general information number is:

1-888-MINNDNR (toll-free greater Minnesota)
1-888-646-6367

651/296-6157 (Twin Cities metro)

The DNR’s web site is: www.dnr.state.mn.us

For a list of Firearm Safety courses, call 651/296-4819. It includes a list of upcoming courses, or for a recording which lists upcoming courses call:

Firearms Safety course: 651/296-4819
Advanced Hunter Education seminar: 651/296-5015
Bowhunter Education seminar: 651/296-5015

If you live outside the metro area call toll free: 800/766-6000 or 800/366-8917.

Answers

Activity #1 - Recreational Injuries

While these cannot be directly compared, it is often surprising how many accidents are associated with various types of recreation. The number of injuries per 100,000 participants is:

- 1 = baseball1,218
- 2 = bicycle riding 937
- 3 = ice skating554
- 4 = swimming.....216
- 5 = golf162
- 6 = hunting 6

Appendix I

Setting up an indoor airgun range

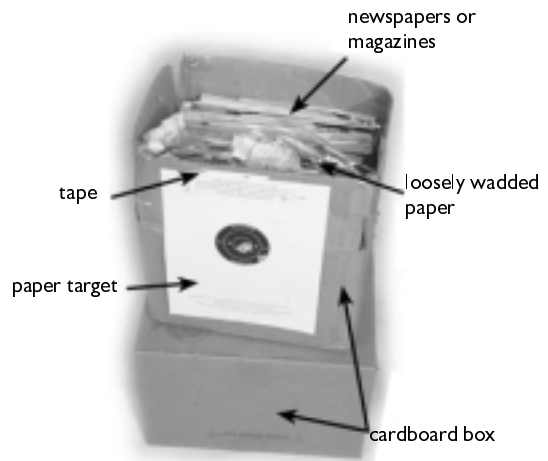
Easy and inexpensive to make, a home airgun range can provide hours of fun and relaxation for the whole family.

A basic set-up consists of two backstops placed approximately 15–35 feet from a table rest. The distance between the backstops and the table can be adjusted to accommodate the skill level of the shooter and the amount of space you have available.

The primary backstop can be made from materials you probably already have around the house—a cardboard box, newspapers, magazines or telephone books, tape, and paper to make a target.

A piece of carpeting, canvas, or cardboard will work for the secondary backstop. Avoid using metal fasteners or clothes pins to hang the secondary backstop or to secure the target. A pellet hitting those types of items could cause a ricochet. If you don't have masking tape, small push pins can be used to attach your targets.

Airguns, ammunition, and safety glasses can be purchased at many hardware, discount, and sporting goods stores. Eye wear with polycarbonate lenses offer the best protection. Before you shoot, make sure you read and understand the operating instructions for all your equipment.



Good shooting skills are the result of training and practice.

A home airgun range provides a safe place to practice shooting skills year-round.

Appendix 2

Hunting safety

Basic rules of firearm safety

Most hunters practice safety. However, there are some who do not. Each hunting accident that occurs sends the message that “hunting is a dangerous activity.” Safety must be part of your hunting plan. Develop a “safety attitude”; hunt with safety in mind.

To prevent hunting accidents, the basic rules to follow when handling firearms are:

1. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded—even when you think it is not.
2. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
3. Be sure of your target and what is beyond.

What can you do to hunt safely?

Discuss with your hunting group how your group can plan to avoid incidents. Discuss situations that might occur. Listed below are some causes of hunting accidents. Discuss how to avoid them. They are:

1. Victim out of sight of shooter.
2. Victim covered by shooter as shooter swings toward game.
3. Victim mistaken for game.
4. Victim moved into line of fire.
5. Firearm removed from or placed in vehicle.
6. Firearm discharged in vehicle.
7. Horseplay with loaded firearm.
8. Insecure rest; firearm fell.
9. Shooter stumbled and fell.
10. Trigger or exposed hammer caught on object.
11. Loading or unloading firearm.
12. Defective firearm or bow.
13. Careless handling of firearm.
14. Improper crossing of obstacle.

There are many other causes of hunting accidents, all of which are significant. Develop a “safety attitude.” Always follow safe hunting techniques and be sure those who hunt with you do the same.

Knowing why hunting accidents happen helps you develop safe hunting practices. After considering the causes listed above, adopt the following practices:

1. Know what might be beyond your target (game animal). This area will be far beyond your target because bullets used to take big game can travel three miles or more. The distance traveled depends upon the type of bullet, the angle of the rifle barrel when fired, and the altitude (with the higher altitudes allowing greater range). Shotgun slugs can travel a mile if shot at the proper (or improper) angle. Small bore rifle bullets can travel 1½ miles or more. Shot pellets can travel 300 yards or more. Be aware of these ranges any time you are about to pull the trigger.
2. Always establish your safe zone of fire, and insist that your hunting partners do the same. Be sure you are not in another hunter’s zone of fire.
3. Carefully load your firearm after you have left camp or your vehicle and have reached your hunting area. Carefully unload and double check the chamber before returning to camp or your vehicle.
4. Care for and maintain your firearm. Have a competent gunsmith check your firearm if you have any doubts about its condition.
5. Handle your firearm carefully when crossing rough terrain; unload your firearm when crossing fences or other obstructions.
6. Learn the different methods of safe carrying and use them at all times. The method will depend upon the circumstance of your hunt.
7. Do not permit horseplay or careless handling of firearms at any time.
8. Correctly identify your game target. Be sure to see what is there, not what your mind wants to see. If you are unsure of your target, don’t shoot.

These are just a few suggestions. Develop your own safe hunting practices and follow them. You are responsible for hunting safely and helping other hunters to do the same.

Responsible hunters learn, before they hunt, how to operate their firearm properly and safely. This includes sighting in, patterning, and knowing their effective shooting distance as well as how far their bullet or shot will travel.

Keep the action of the firearm open except when actually shooting or when storing an unloaded gun. Use the right ammunition for your firearm. Carry only one type of ammunition to be sure you will not mix different types.

Firearm safety when traveling

Whether your firearm is being carried in a car, boat, motorcycle, or in any other vehicle, you must follow these safe firearm handling rules:

1. Be sure the firearm is unloaded.
2. Place the firearm in a protective case.
3. Position the firearm securely so it will not move about during travel.
4. Be aware of laws and regulations regarding transportation of firearms for the area you are in or will be traveling through. Laws and regulations are different in various localities.

Safe firearms carrying practices

There are several ways to carry a firearm safely and at the same time have it ready for a quick, safe shot in the field. Whichever carrying method you use, these basic rules apply:

1. Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, away from yourself and others.
2. Keep the safety in the “on” position when carrying a firearm. Remember that the safety is a mechanical device and can fail.
3. Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you have positively identified your target, determined that it is safe to shoot, raised your firearm to a shooting position and determined that it is still safe to shoot.

Firearm safety in the field

1. Be positive of your target’s identity before shooting. Look past your target to be sure it is safe to shoot. Do not shoot where a bullet or pellet can ricochet, such as water, rocks, trees, or metal.

Plan the Hunt to Eliminate Risk

When a hunting accident occurs, there are only two possible explanations: either someone did not know or understand the rules, or someone failed to follow the rules.

Practice Safe Gun Handling at all Times

More firearms accidents happen in non-hunting situations than during actual hunting.

2. Take time to fire a safe shot. If you are unsure or must move too quickly, pass up the shot. When in doubt—don’t.
3. If you fall, control where the muzzle points. After a fall, check your firearm for dirt and damage and make sure the barrel is free of obstructions.
4. Unload your firearm before attempting to climb a steep bank or to cross terrain where you may be unsure of your footing.
5. When you are alone and must cross a fence, unload your firearm and place it under the fence with the muzzle pointed away from where you are crossing. Use an article of clothing such as a cap or glove to lay the muzzle on to reduce the possibility of an obstruction getting into the barrel.

To cross a fence when hunting with others, unload the firearms and keep the actions open. Have a companion hold your firearm while you cross. When you have crossed over the fence, take the unloaded firearms so your partner may safely cross the fence.

6. Never use your scope sight as a substitute for binoculars.
7. If you and your group take a break while field hunting, or if you meet and talk to other hunters, unload the chamber or open the action of your firearms. When hunting with dogs, never leave firearms unattended.
8. Alcohol, drugs, and shooting do not mix. Drugs and alcohol impair your judgement. It is illegal to hunt while intoxicated.
9. Beware of fatigue. When you become tired, quit hunting. Fatigue can cause carelessness, clumsiness, and an inclination to see things that are not there. Any of these factors can contribute to hunting incidences.
10. Hypothermia can cause the same carelessness and clumsiness that fatigue does. Dress prop-

erly for the weather. If you become cold, you are more likely to mishandle your firearm, thus allowing accidents to happen.

11. Be aware of special safety procedures necessary for the specific species of game you are hunting.
12. When finished hunting, unload your firearm before returning to your vehicle or camp.
13. If a hunting companion does not follow firearm rules, you should not hunt with that person. Handling a gun carelessly demonstrates disregard for your life and the lives of others.

Loading and unloading

Loading and unloading firearms at the proper time and place can greatly reduce the risk of having an incident. Keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction is the rule, but in many situations, just having the firearm loaded is unnecessary and creates risk. All it takes is a movement, a slip, or a fall, and a loaded firearm is pointed at someone.

Hunters should set rules for themselves when loading and unloading:

- Load when you are in position—actually in the woods, in the blind or in the stand. Do not load in camp, near buildings or parking areas, or when in a group of people.
- Load only when you know your zone of fire, that is, point the firearm in the direction you can safely shoot.
- Load only when there is no danger of slipping, falling, or dropping the firearm.
- Unload whenever you are unable to give your full attention to controlling the firearm.
- Unload before setting the firearm down.
- Unload before entering/exiting an elevated stand.
- Unload and set your firearm down before crossing a fence.
- Unload before approaching landowners, hikers, or other hunters.
- Unload before retrieving or carrying game.
- Unload before crossing slippery or rough terrain.
- Unload and consider putting your firearm in a lightweight “stocking type” case before returning to camp, the parking area, or the highway.

These basic rules of safety aren't covered by law and regulation. This is all the more reason why hunters need to sit down and decide for themselves the rules for the hunt. Your actions determine safety and how others look at hunting.

Cold weather; a factor in hunting accidents

Cold weather is very much a factor in Minnesota's hunting accidents. If we look at the way we hunt, our attitudes toward the cold, and the effect the cold has on our ability to think and move, it's easy to see the connection.

Minnesotans learn to tolerate the cold. We shiver, stiffen up, and sometimes lose the sense of touch in our fingers and toes. When we hunt with firearms in Minnesota, we may tell ourselves that this is how we can expect to feel on opening day.

Cold causes us to use up energy—blood sugar—faster (hypoglycemia) and our body temperature drops (hypothermia). What many hunters fail to consider, however, is that as this begins to happen, we shiver, begin to lose our sense of balance, and start losing our ability to think clearly. The risk of dropping the firearm or falling increases. Our judgement begins to fail. We may even forget to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.

The scary part is that we actually lose our ability to think clearly, to concentrate on what we're doing. Too long in the cold and a hunter can end up both clumsy and careless. Hypothermia is not limited to below freezing temperatures. Getting wet on a windy day in 50 degree weather can be as dangerous as freezing temperatures. Even on a nice, sunny fall day where a hunter is walking and begins to sweat, then stops and sits, chills may set in, indicating the beginning of hypothermia.

The ability to resist the cold can vary greatly among people in a group. A key symptom to watch for is severe shivering. If you or someone else starts to shiver, that's the signal to get warm and dry immediately. Severe shivering is the “final stage” in which a person still can think clearly enough to yet help themselves.

Appendix 3

Hunting behavior

Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to affirm that hunting, fishing, and taking of game and fish are a valued part of our heritage that shall be forever preserved for the people and shall be managed by law and regulation for the public good? —Question on the Minnesota General Election Ballot November 1998

On election day, November 1998, 1,567,844 Minnesotans, (77.2 percent of those who voted) said yes, that hunting and fishing in Minnesota are important enough activities to protect them by including language in the Minnesota Constitution to do so. Hunters need not be concerned about their right to hunt, right? 461,179 people on the same day said no. Even with protection from the amendment, hunters need to be aware that there are those who oppose the action of hunters and/or are against hunting. Hunters need to know how to conduct themselves in order to continue to be accepted by the people of Minnesota.

People are judged by their actions. How we behave and how we follow the rules affect other people. Rules are developed to be followed. As a hunter, you must be aware of how your personal behavior and activities, as well as the actions of your companions, will affect others.

When driving a car, we are expected to drive carefully following the rules of the road. When we play any sport we are expected to follow the rules of the game. Hunters, too, are expected to behave responsibly while hunting—to hunt according to the rules.

Many of our rules are in the form of game laws which are designed to fulfill one or more of three basic needs:

1. To protect people (hunters and non-hunters) and property.
2. To provide equal hunting opportunities for all hunters.
3. To protect game populations.

Other rules are unwritten. They are referred to as ethics and can be defined as a standard of behavior or conduct that the individual believes to be morally correct.

Usually, if a large number of the population (a group of hunters, for example) believes in the same ethic, then they have it made law by the governing body—the state legislature in the case of game laws. It is the lack of good ethics on the part of a few individuals who call themselves hunters, that create the need for ethics becoming laws. As laws multiply, so do restrictions. Such restrictions can lead to excessive control that spoils hunting.

Because each game species has different habitats, the species that a person hunts may require a special set of ethics. Therefore, each hunter must develop his or her own ethics for the game they are hunting.

Future opportunities to enjoy hunting in Minnesota will depend upon the hunter's public image. If hunters are viewed as "slobs" who shoot up the countryside, vandalize property, and disregard the rights of landowners and citizens, they will lose the privilege to hunt on private land and public land as well. However, if an increasing number of hunters follow the honorable traditions of their sport and practice a personal code of hunting ethics which meets public expectations, the future of hunting will be assured.

A real threat to hunting today is the way it is being promoted and increasingly thought of as a competitive event. The escalating win/lose fever resulting from competition can only serve to discourage restraint and encourage risk-taking. Until hunters make it very clear that hunting is not competitive as are the shooting sports, there will continue to be accidents and unacceptable hunter behaviors.

To make hunting safe and place it in its proper perspective, hunting should most appropriately be thought of as a ritual, or rite. Webster's dictionary defines rite as a ceremonial or formal solemn act, observance or procedure in accordance with proscribed rule or custom. To suggest that hunting should be a solemn act demonstrates respect. "In accordance with proscribed rule," affirms the importance of learning and following the rules. By following rules, hunters eliminate unnecessary risk. Risk-taking need not, or should not ever be, a part of the hunting ritual.

Definition of ethics and laws

Ethics are standards of behavior or conduct which are considered to be morally right. Ethics begin with an individual's standard of behavior. Each individual must make a personal judgment about whether certain behavior is right or wrong. If we believe that a specific action is morally right, then it is ethical for us to act that way.

For example, if a hunter truly believes that it is right to shoot a duck with a shotgun while it is sitting on the water, then it is ethical for that particular hunter to do so. The hunter's behavior is consistent with his or her personal code of ethics. If, however, a hunter believes it is wrong to shoot a sitting duck, then it would be wrong to do so. Such action would not be ethical.

Most hunters have a personal code of ethics which is very similar to the laws which are associated with hunting. Usually, hunters agree that the hunting laws are fair and just, and find these laws easy to obey.

Positive Role Model

Hunting enthusiasts and "role models" are needed in Minnesota today. Positive role models will do more for hunting than laws and regulations. This may require hunters to refuse to go along with certain members of their party or even to change hunting groups.

Are you a positive role model?

Personal code of ethics

Personal ethics are "unwritten laws" which govern your behavior at all times—when you are with others, and when you are alone. They are our personal standard of conduct. Our personal code of ethics is based upon our respect for other people and their property, for all living things and their environment, and our own image of ourselves.

"The hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience rather than by a mob of onlookers."

—Aldo Leopold

The basis of a personal code of ethics is a "sense of decency." You must ask yourself repeatedly, "What if someone else behaved the way I am—would I respect that person?"

Many of us probably developed a personal code of ethics long before we became hunters. Because we want the respect of our parents and family, our friends and neighbors, we develop a standard of acceptable behavior. Some of us went on hunting trips even before we were old enough to hunt and learned what was acceptable from the example of others.

However, in today's common, single-parent families, many beginning hunters do not have a role model to guide their development of hunting ethics. Also, because only about three percent of the population lives in a rural setting, many hunters do not have opportunities to begin hunting until they

are in their late teens and early twenties. When they do, they may begin with others of their age and hunting experience. Without an experienced hunter to help form their hunting ethics, they may not know what is best for them and hunting.

Hunters must be willing to reconsider their hunting ethics. This may require changes in attitude and behavior. Concerned, experienced hunters are needed to assist less experienced hunters in “doing what is right.” Positive role models will ensure good hunting traditions for the future.

Stages of the hunter

Your personal code of ethics and your hunting behavior may change through the years. Research has found that it is usual for a hunter to go through five expectation stages.

1. First is the “shooter stage”—a time when shooting the firearm or bow is of primary interest.
2. Next is the “limiting-out stage”—when the hunter wants, above all, to bag the legal limit of game he or she is entitled to.
3. The third stage is the “trophy stage”—the hunter is selective, primarily seeking out trophy animals of a particular species.
4. Fourth is the “technique stage”—the emphasis is on “how” rather than “what” they hunt.
5. The last stage is called the “mellowing-out-stage”—this is a time of enjoyment derived from the total hunting experience: the hunt, the companionship of other hunters, and an appreciation of the outdoors.

When hunters mellow out, bagging game will be more symbolic than essential for their satisfaction. This hunter does not hunt to kill, but rather kills to have hunted.

Hunters’ personal codes of ethics will change as they pass through each of these five stages—they often become more strict and impose more constraints on their behavior and actions when hunting. These self-imposed restrictions, however, will add to the enjoyment of the hunting experience.

Responsible hunters appreciate hunting more. Only they understand the new sense of freedom and independence that comes from hunting legally and responsibly.

Ethics for consideration

Many people have proposed ethical standards which they feel should be adopted by all hunters. Some are presented for your consideration. Consider each ethic carefully. Decide whether it is right or wrong in your opinion. If it is right, incorporate it into your personal code of hunting ethics and practice it when afield. In the final analysis, your standards of conduct while hunting will be the true indicator of your personal code of ethics.

Hunter-landowner relations

Responsible hunters realize they are guests of the landowner while hunting on private land. They make sure they are welcome by asking for permission before they hunt. On the rare occasions when permission is denied, they accept the situation gracefully.

To avoid disturbing the landowner early in the morning, a responsible hunter obtains permission to hunt on private land ahead of time.

While hunting, the responsible hunter takes extra care to avoid disturbing livestock. If hunting with a dog, special precautions should be taken to ensure it does not harass cattle, chickens, or other farm animals. Disturbances can cause dairy cows to reduce their milk production, and poultry may crowd together and suffocate. Beef cattle can suffer a weight loss costly to the rancher.

Responsible hunters leave all gates as they find them—and if closed, they make sure the gates are securely latched. They cross fences carefully and avoid loosening the wires and posts. They only enter on the portions of private land where the owner has granted permission to hunt. They never assume they are welcome on private property simply because other hunters have gotten permission to hunt there.

Responsible hunters avoid littering the land with sandwich wrappings, pop cans, cigarette packages or other garbage, including empty casings, empty shell boxes, and shells.

They never drive or walk through standing crops, nor do they send their dog through them. When driving across pastures or plowed fields, they keep their vehicles on the trail or road at all times. They understand that the ruts left by vehicles on hill-sides can cause serious soil erosion. They hunt as much private property on foot as possible. When parking their vehicle, they are careful not to block the landowner's access to buildings, equipment, and roadways.

If they see anything wrong on the property such as open gates, broken fences, or injured livestock they report it to the landowner as soon as possible.

Responsible hunters limit the amount of game they and their friends take on a landowner's property. They realize the landowner may consider several bag limits as a sign of greed.

Unless they are close personal friends of the landowner, responsible hunters do not hunt on a specific farm or ranch more than two or three times each season. They do not want to wear out their welcome.

Before leaving, they thank the landowner or a family member for the privilege of hunting the property and they offer a share of their bag if they have been successful. In appreciation for the landowner's hospitality, a thoughtful hunter offers to help with chores. If the offer is accepted, they cheerfully pitch bales, mend fences, fork manure, etc. They may even use their special skills such as plumbing, mechanical ability, painting or carpentry.

If they own property elsewhere such as a farm, ranch or lake cottage, responsible hunters will invite their host to use them. They note their host's name and address and send a thank you card in appreciation for the landowner's hospitality.

Remember, a landowner has no respect for trespassers. It only takes a moment to request permission and you may be able to come back again.

Regard for other people's feelings

When hunting on public lands, responsible hunters show the same respect for other users of the land and their property as they show for landowners on private land.

They hunt in areas where their activities will not conflict with other's enjoyment of the outdoors. They treat the land with respect—being careful not to litter or damage vegetation. They limit the use of vehicles to travel to and from their hunting area, always remaining on trails or developed roadways.

They know that alcoholic beverages can seriously impair their judgment while hunting. They restrict drinking to the evening hours after the firearms have been put away. Even then, they drink in moderation to be sure that their actions do not offend others.

Responsible hunters recognize that many people are offended by the sight of a bloody deer carcass tied to vehicles or a gut pile lying in full view of the road. People may also be put off if hunters parade vehicles through a campground or the streets of a community with a gun rack full of firearms. Having respect for the feelings and beliefs of others, responsible hunters make a special effort to avoid offending non-hunters. They are consistently aware that many of these people are their friends, neighbors, relatives, and even members of their immediate family.

They appreciate the fact that many people do not hunt and understand some people are opposed to hunting. They respect these people as human beings whose likes and dislikes differ from their own. They accept the fact that hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters are equally sincere in their beliefs about hunting.

Relationship with other hunters

Responsible hunters show consideration for their companions. When leaving for a hunt, they are ready to go at the appointed time and they do not invite others to join the group unexpectedly.

In the field, their consideration extends to other hunters as well. They realize that hunting satisfaction does not depend on competing with others for game.

Responsible hunters avoid doing anything that will interfere with another's hunt or enjoyment of it. They do not shoot along fence lines adjacent to fields where others are hunting, nor do they try to intercept the game others have flushed. If disputes arise with other hunters, they try to work out a compromise—perhaps a cooperative hunt—which everyone can enjoy.

Responsible hunters do not hog shots—they do the opposite. They give friends a good shot whenever possible. They show special consideration for the inexperienced or hunters with disabilities by allowing them to hunt from the most advantageous position.

Each hunting season, responsible hunters invite novice hunters to accompany them in the field. They take the time to share their hunting knowledge with their companions and introduce them to the enjoyment of hunting.

They do not shoot over their limit to fill the bag of others; this includes shooting a deer and having a young hunter tag it. They realize that young hunters want to harvest their own game. Responsible hunters do not take their limit unless they plan to use all they have taken.

They observe the rules of safe gun handling at all times and firmly insist that their companions do the same. They politely tell others when they think their behavior is out of line.

Self-respect

Responsible hunters realize it is their responsibility to know how to take care of themselves in the outdoors. They respect their limitations.

They never place their lives or the lives of others in jeopardy by failing to notify someone where they intend to hunt and how long they expect to be gone. If their plans change, they leave notes on their vehicles designating their destination, time of departure, and expected time of return.

They respect the limitations of their health and physical fitness. They consult with their doctors regularly to be sure they are capable of strenuous hunting activity. If unfit, they condition themselves before going hunting. They have their vision checked and, if necessary, wear glasses or contact lenses to correct any visual impairments.

To cope with unexpected outdoor emergencies, responsible hunters learn and practice first aid and survival skills. They know how to recognize and cope with hypothermia.

Respect of wildlife

Responsible hunters are naturalists. Their interest in wildlife extends beyond game animals to all living things. They're thrilled by the sight of a bald eagle as well as a white-tailed deer. They know and study nature's ways, and realize that wildlife can be enjoyed year-round—not just during the hunting season.

When hunting, their pursuit of game is always governed by the "fair chase" principle. Simply stated, this principle demands that hunters always give their quarry a "fair" chance to escape.

When hunting big game, responsible hunters will always attempt to get close enough to their quarry to ensure a quick, clean kill. They realize that in doing so, their quarry may notice them and escape, but they always give their quarry this sporting chance.

Responsible hunters never shoot indiscriminately at a flock of game birds or a herd of big game in the hope of hitting one. They will always attempt to kill their quarry quickly.

Through considerable practice before a hunt, they will learn the distance at which they can be most confident of killing game cleanly. They will ensure their rifles are accurately sighted in and determine the most effective shot size for their shotguns.

Once afield, they will expend an extraordinary effort to retrieve all game—even if it means interrupting their hunting to help another hunter locate a wounded animal. When possible, they will use a trained hunting dog to retrieve game birds.

If it appears they have missed their shot, responsible hunters will always carefully inspect the spot where their quarry stood to ensure the animal was not hit.

Responsible hunters show respect for their game after it is taken, as before. They never allow the meat or other usable parts of the animal to be wasted. Even though they may not want the antlers or hide, they recover them to give to others who will use them. For example, the fur and feathers of many game birds and mammals are used to make flies for fishing.

Respect for the environment

Responsible hunters are caretakers of the environment. While hunting they are aware of the damage they may do to the plant life and to the soil. They try to minimize their impact. They avoid needless destruction of vegetation. They down living trees or trim branches only if it is legal or with permission. They avoid actions that may cause erosion. They use only what is necessary, remove their garbage, and minimize any evidence of their presence.

Respect for laws and enforcement officers

Responsible hunters obey all laws governing their hunting activities, even those with which they disagree. Instead, they work through their elected representatives to change laws which they feel are unjust.

Responsible hunters will not ignore illegal acts of others. They insist that all members of their hunting party obey the law and they report law violations to the appropriate law enforcement agencies. If asked to serve as witnesses, they accept this responsibility.

When they meet a state or federal wildlife officer, wildlife biologist or technician checking hunters, they are cooperative and provide the information requested. If they do not understand the need for certain information, they ask for an explanation.

Hunters realize the officer's responsibility is to protect wildlife and their hunting rights.

In summary, ethical hunters should have **respect for**, and be **responsible to**:

1. landowners,
2. non-hunters,
3. other hunters,
4. themselves,
5. wildlife,
6. the environment, and
7. the laws and the officers whose duty it is to enforce them.

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