

SAFETY AND SECURITY

1. THE NRA SAFE SHOOTING SYSTEM

Target Shooting, like any other type of shooting, is potentially a very dangerous sport. However, it has a much better safety record than many other seemingly 'safe' sports because those involved are so aware of the potential dangers and regard safety as of paramount importance.

The MoD requires all civilian organisations using their ranges to have an auditable training system. The NRA has therefore developed a Safe Shooting System (SSS), which the MoD has approved and which came into use on 1 April 2008. By 1 January 2009 each shooter must have an annual certificate, signed by the Club Chairman. (Some organisations already have MoD approval for their training systems e.g the British Deer Society or the MLAGB, but any of their members who is also a target shooter still has to be trained in the NRA SSS for target shooting.

The Safe Shooting System is based on four elements:

Safe Person

The safe shooter is someone who has received the information, training and supervision to enable them to acquire knowledge and develop skills necessary to demonstrate that they can safely handle firearms and ammunition. The NRA Probationary Course, or one officially approved by them, provides this training and is not confined to Target Rifle.

Safe Equipment

The NRA Rules of Shooting (often known as the 'Bisley Bible'), published annually, defines the types of firearms and ammunition that may be used for Target Shooting. The Individual is responsible to the Club Chairman for ensuring that their firearm is properly maintained, that the ammunition used is in every way safe and within the range parameters for muzzle velocity (MV) and muzzle energy (ME).

Safe Practice

The NRA Rules of Shooting contain detailed regulations concerning the conduct of shooting for all its disciplines. Qualified NRA RCO's are responsible for the safe running of MoD ranges for civilian shooters. Additional qualifications are required if Sporting Rifles (running deer etc), Muzzle Loading firearms, or ammunition with a muzzle energy greater than 4500J are to be used. In the event of an incident on an MoD Range involving a civilian shooter, a joint MoD/NRA investigation will take place and the club will be expected to assist with the investigation.

Safe Place

A safe place is one in which the necessary controls to enable safe shooting have been identified by a sit-specific Risk Assessment and directed through the Range Standing Orders. All MoD Ranges have these and they must be complied with at all times. MoD ranges are maintained by the range authority and are subject to regular inspection. The NRA RCO running the range for a civilian club must sign for the range on the MoD Form 906, thus certifying that they are qualified to conduct the practices and has read the Range Standing Orders. An RCO (HEF) must annotate the MoD 906 if ammunition with ME > 4500J.

2. SOME DEFINITIONS

The following are terms you must understand:

A Northern Ireland Office Approved Club:

This is a Rifle or Pistol Club which has a licence from the Northern Ireland Office. Only Approved Clubs may take probationary members and guests. (In GB they are called Home Office Approved Clubs).

Firearms Certificate:

This is a legal document issued by the PSNI which entitles the holder to be in possession of the firearms and ammunition shown in it (N.B. a probationary or club member may use (i.e. be 'in possession of') club rifles and ammunition on club premises without a FAC but may not take either away).

Range

A Range is an area of land or building which has been approved for shooting and has a valid Range Certificate.

Range Standing Orders:

These are safety regulations that detail the way in which the range may be used.

Range Conducting Officer

The RCO is responsible for the safe running of the range. The RCO controls **all** persons on the range, which includes the butts and the area behind the firing point. (N.B. The individual is still ultimately responsible for the safety of their own equipment and ammunition and for the safety of their own actions).

Probationary Membership.

All new members to a club undergo a probationary period during which they are trained. This should be at least three months but a club may set its own criteria. Probationary membership will be extended if the Probationary Course has not been completed. The exception to this is someone who has been a member of another club and can produce a letter from the club, with proof of training e.g their Annual Certificate.

3. SECURITY OF FIREARMS

Firearms must be securely stored. At home, they are to be stored in a PSNI approved cabinet. Bolts/actions etc must be separately stored. Ammunition is not to be stored in the same cabinet as firearms.

In a vehicle, firearms are to be secured in a locked boot, preferably attached to an anchorage point. Bolts/actions are to be separated from the firearm.

On the range they must remain with you if not secured.

Ferries and airlines may transport firearms but each has different rules and charges. Consult a club member who has travelled with firearms or the web site of the carrier.

4. GENERAL RANGE SAFETY

A Range consists of some or all of the following elements:

The Firing Point

This is the position on the ground from where firing takes place. It may be a single point for one firer or a line for a number of firers. However, each firer must stay within the limits of their own firing point.

The Stop Butt

Outdoors, this is an area of ground, usually a mound, in front of which the targets are positioned and into which the bullets are fired. Indoors it is usually a steel plate or bullet catcher on a wall, behind the target line.

Target

The targets are placed at a point within a fixed area in front of the stop butt. Each target will be numbered in the same way as the firing points and the firer is only to fire at the target which has the same number as their firing point. Targets may be fixed or they may have some moving mechanism. On a gallery range, they are set in frames which can be moved up and down. On other ranges they may have mechanisms which allow them to be electronically raised, lowered or turned.

Markers Gallery

Longer ranges (> 200yds) may have a markers gallery. This is a mound of earth/sand and concrete behind which the markers work. Targets may be lowered into this pit for manual marking. The stop butt is behind the markers gallery.

Range Danger Area and Safety Template

Each range is designed to minimise the possibility of rounds escaping from it. However, the safety template is only designed to stop ricochets; it will not stop rounds deliberately fired over the stop butt, which can travel at least 4km. There are therefore restrictions on where and how rifles may be aimed. The Range Danger Area is determined by drawing a Safety Template and taking into account the surroundings (hills, valleys, beaches, other ranges). The result determines the firearms which can be used and any restrictions required (e.g. in Ballykinler, not using targets 1-8 at 500 and 600 yds on No2 range if No1 is in use).

Range Orders

Every range has a set of Range Orders which set out the details of who may fire, what they may fire, where they may fire and the procedures to be adopted for that particular range. The RCO must read the Range Orders and brief firers on any relevant points.

Flags

The safety flags on ranges are red. MOD Ranges have 'Ranges in Use' Flags at certain points around the perimeter. On some ranges, these are hoisted by Range Staff, on others user units/clubs are responsible. There will also be a 'Range in Use' flag, often at the rear of each individual range and hoisted by the Range Warden. There will be a butt flag, sometimes on a flag pole, sometimes hoisted on a target frame. When this flag is up, no firing is to take place and it is safe to move in/out of the butts. At the beginning of a detail, rifles are not to be moved on to the firing point while the red **butt** flag is still up and they must be removed from the firing point at the end of the detail, before the butt flag is hoisted. This flag is hoisted / lowered on the RCO's instruction, except in an emergency, when the butt officer may hoist it. On MOD Ranges, permission to start firing is given from Range Control usually by radio or telephone. On Bisley Ranges, there is no butt flag and the signal to allow firing or to cease firing is given by a siren. Some ranges also have sentries who may need a flag. (There may also be wind flags on ranges, to help with wind judgement, but these are typically blue and yellow).

Range Roads/Paths/Car Parks etc

The Range Orders will include details of roadways, car parks, toilets, shelters etc and 'out of bounds' areas. In general, shooters are to stay on the roads and park only in designated areas.

Concurrent Firing

Only the largest MOD Ranges allow concurrent firing i.e. different groups firing at different distances on the same range. Concurrent firing can only take place outside and angle of 200 mils (about 11 degrees). As a rough guide, there must be 10 target spaces for every 100 yards of separation. E.g. if targets 1 - 5 are being used at 200 yards, firing at 300 yards can only be on target 15 onwards. Ballykinler does not allow concurrent firing, Altcar does. On some, usually wide ranges, there may be a bank down the middle, effectively turning it into two narrower ranges e.g. Pirbright No 3, A and B ranges

Ear Protection

Good quality ear defenders must be worn within 5m of the firing point and in the butts since exposure to loud noise progressively damages hearing. Ideally plugs and muffs should be used. The ear defenders must be in good condition – no missing deadening material or split seals. Shooting hats must not disrupt the fit of ear muffs.

RASP

The RCO must have the appropriate RASP for the Range Practice and is to bring it to the attention of all participants. If the Course of Fire is the same each day, a Generic Rasp is sufficient, with the dates and RCO's/Safety Staff/First Aider recorded.

5. FIREARM SAFETY

Full details of the NRA Rules can be found in the NRA 'Bisley Bible' under 'Conduct of Shooting' in rules 270 – 277.

The following is a summary of the Safety Rules:

1. When handing over a firearm or receiving one ALWAYS open the breech and check that it is unloaded.
2. NEVER, for any reason, point a firearm at anyone.
3. NEVER load any firearm other than on the firing point under the instruction of the Range Officer.
4. On the Range:
 - a. Obey the instructions of the Range Conducting Officer or his/her assistants.
 - b. Do not load until instructed.
 - c. Always keep a loaded firearm pointed towards the target (this means that generally the bolt should not be closed until the rifle is in the shoulder, though NRA rules permit closing the bolt with the rifle horizontal on the ground, before it is lifted into the shoulder).
 - d. Check that your firearm is unloaded before leaving the firing point and that either a breech flag is inserted or the bolt removed. When firing under NRA conditions in pairs or threes, check that your partner's rifle is also safe. (Your signature on the squadding card confirms that you have done this. If, later, your partner's rifle is found to be unsafe, you (as well as he) will be in trouble).
5. Ensure that the breech of your rifle is open at all times except when it is:
 - a. Loaded before firing.
 - b. Stored in its case or the armoury.
6. Do not move forward to the firing point when firing is in progress without permission from the Range Officer.
7. Pick up all empty cases, check that there are no live rounds and put the empties in the box provided. Live rounds (e.g. converted sighters) are handed to the range officer.
8. NEVER have live rounds and drill cartridges in the same place
9. NEVER 'dry fire' behind the firing point. When adopting an aim position to check sights, sling etc, always do it on the firing point with the rifle pointed towards the butt in the normal way.

Dry Firing

Dry firing / aiming / snapping / position checking MUST NOT take place behind the firing point. It may only take place on the firing point and with the RCO's permission.

Breech Flags

When a rifle is not in use on the firing point, it is to have a breech flag inserted. If no breech flag is available, the bolt is to be removed. (In some places e.g. Channel Islands, both are done - the bolt is removed and a breech flag inserted).

Rifle Inspection

When firing in twos or threes, at the end of the shoot, each firer removes their bolt and allows their firing partner to examine the chamber. Only then may the breech flag and bolt be inserted and the rifle removed from the firing point. If firing alone, the RCO or safety staff are to be requested to check

Misfires

These are thankfully rare with commercial ammunition but any failure to fire must be treated as a misfire. The rifle is to be held in the shoulder, pointed at the target, for at least 30 seconds (in case of a hang-fire). Inform the Range Officer and anyone partnering you. Prepare to open the bolt. Ensure no-one is standing immediately around or behind you. Carefully take the rifle out of the shoulder and tilt it (still pointing at the butts) so that if the case ruptures as you open the bolt, the fragments will go into the ground. Then, using fingertips on the end of the bolt handle (so that if the bolt flies back the fingers are not in the way), open the bolt and extract the misfire. Check that it comes out complete with the bullet. If there is any sign that the primer has been struck, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FIRE IT AGAIN as the weakened primer might be pierced and cause combustion gas to exit around the bolt. Wrap it in something like a towel, for later disposal by an expert, such as a qualified armourer. If it has not been struck, further investigation of the rifle is needed e.g. the firing pin may be broken. REMEMBER, SUCH HAPPENINGS ARE RARE. It is more usually due to a firer not having reloaded or having put in an empty case or not having closed the bolt properly.

Legislation

If you are going to be involved with coaching or administration with civilian firearms, you need to be up-to-date with the Firearms Legislation operating in your area at the time. Likewise with military issue firearms, you need to know the rules for safety and security.