



# SAFE TRANSPORT OF FIREARMS

Goal: To promote safe participation in hunting activities by introducing basic firearm and hunting safety principles and practices.

## Lesson 1: Placement and Removal of Firearms from Vehicles

In this lesson you will:

- Explain how to make a firearm safe for transportation in a vehicle, ATV or boat.

### Safe Placement and Removal of Firearms from Vehicles

Hunters use vehicles to travel to and from the place where they hunt, retrieve the game they shot and transport the game home. Vehicles can greatly improve a hunter's access to hunting areas and help with game recovery.



- Although a vehicle is secondary to the hunt, hunters who use a vehicle to transport firearms, hunting equipment or game should follow the basic firearm safety rules and also know how

to use the vehicle.

- Hunters use a variety of vehicles for traveling to hunting areas including passenger cars, vans, pickup trucks, ATVs, snowmobiles and several different kinds of boats.
- Hunting-related shooting incidents have occurred when hunters were either placing their firearm into a vehicle or removing the firearm from a vehicle.
- Sometimes these incidents involved one hunter who unintentionally discharged a firearm into the vehicle, or much worse, suffered a personal injury from discharging the firearm.
- In other instances, two or more hunters were involved and one of them unintentionally discharged their firearm while placing or removing a firearm from the vehicle—and shot a hunting buddy.

### Loading Guns into a Vehicle

- Hunters typically store their firearms at home in a cabinet, safe or vault for safe keeping. When removing a firearm from storage, the first thing to do—while keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and your finger out of the trigger guard—is open the action and see there is no ammunition in the chamber.
- Handle firearms and ammunition with care for safety.

### Always follow the four basic rules for safe handling of firearms (ACTT):

- **Assume** every gun is loaded.
- **Control the muzzle**—point guns in a safe direction.
- **Trigger finger**—keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.
- **Target**—be sure of your target and what lies beyond.

- o Place the firearm in a case (hard or soft) and place it in the vehicle where it will be safe and secure in case of a bumpy ride.
- o Pack ammunition (in its original factory box) separate from the firearm.
- o Pack other equipment for the hunting trip.
- When traveling with other hunters, coordinate packing the vehicle with a concern for safe and legal storage of firearms and ammunition. In addition, when packing a vehicle, pay close attention to where all hunting partners, including dogs, are located.



*Always keep an eye on your hunting partners, including your canine companions, while packing your vehicle.*

- The hunting equipment you pack for a hunting trip will likely include more than just the firearm and ammunition. For example, you might also pack items such as boots, cold weather gear, tree stand or ground blind, calling devices, decoys, coolers, camping gear, food and water, etc. Make sure you plan to have sufficient space for safe placement of firearms and ammunition.

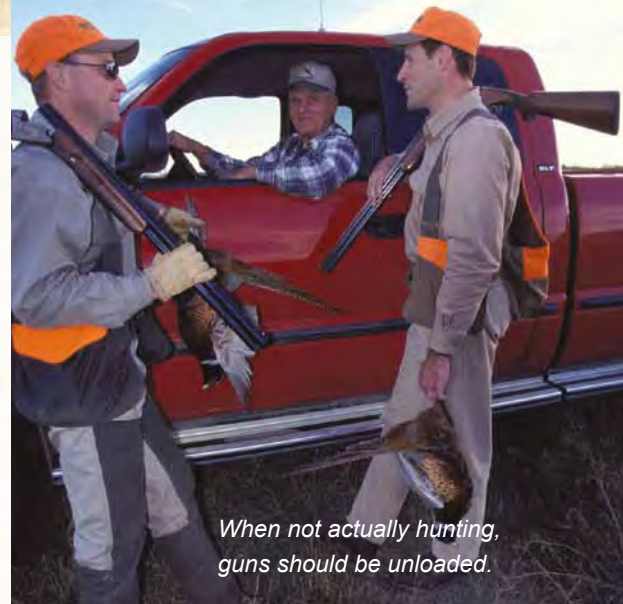


**NEVER** stand a firearm next to a vehicle with the barrel leaning against it. Because the vehicle's side or tailgate edge is smooth, the gun could easily slide off and strike the ground. In this leaning position, the gun is not stable and is not under control. If the gun is loaded, it could discharge when it falls and damage the vehicle or nearby buildings. It could also cause personal injury or death.

## Taking Guns out of a Vehicle

- Exercise the same care when removing firearms from the vehicle that was used when placing them into the vehicle—when in the field and arriving back home.

- Carefully remove the firearm from its case—while keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and fingers outside the trigger guard, open the action, and check for ammunition. While getting ready to go hunting, rest the gun on top of the open tailgate or seat, locate the ammunition, and gear up.
- At times hunters may frequently use their vehicle throughout the day. They may travel to one field or woodlot to look for game, return to the vehicle, travel to another place to hunt, and so on for several hours. When engaged in this kind of hunting— frequently getting in and out of the vehicle—always unload the gun before casing and returning it to storage in the vehicle.
  - When hunting with others insist and also observe that they complete the same unloading procedure— every time they return to the vehicle. When people are gathered together but not actually hunting, guns should be unloaded.
- o There have been hunting incidents where one hunter



*When not actually hunting, guns should be unloaded.*

pulled a gun out of the case, the gun discharged and injured or killed a fellow hunter sitting in the vehicle or standing nearby. This happened because someone placed a loaded gun in the vehicle.

- Never pull a gun toward you with the muzzle pointing in your direction. Never touch the trigger with your finger or allow anything to touch the trigger when removing a firearm from a case or the vehicle seat, tailgate or other resting place.
- Insist on safety checks whenever placing guns into a vehicle or when removing them from a vehicle.
- When taking the gun out of the vehicle after returning

home, conduct the same safety check—control the muzzle, open the action and check for ammunition—before bringing it to storage or to the workbench for cleaning.



*Place your firearm in a case (hard or soft) when transporting it in a vehicle.*



Before loading the gun at the vehicle parking area, make sure it is legal AND sensible to do so. It might be legal to load a gun at the parking area, but if nonhunters are nearby, it might be better to load the gun away from the area.

## Concerning ATVs and Snowmobiles

- When using an ATV or a snowmobile on a hunting trip, consult the appropriate laws



Take the time to learn how to operate a snowmobile or ATV before heading afield.



Know the laws in your state or province regarding transporting firearms via off-road vehicles.

snowmobile, the firearm must be securely stored on the off-road vehicle, freeing both hands for driving. A gun rack designed for safe and secure transport of the firearm should be firmly attached to the vehicle. To protect the firearm from bad weather and debris, store the gun in a case or scabbard and secure the case to the gun rack.

- Conduct the firearm safety check—control the muzzle, open the action, and check for ammunition—whenever placing a firearm onto or removing it from the off-road vehicle.

## Concerning Horses and Pack Animals

- When hunting on horseback and using pack animals, all of the concerns for safe and secure storage of the firearm using off-road vehicles apply, but there are also special concerns.
- Before hunting on horseback, take riding lessons to master the basic skills of mounting and dismounting, reins, leg cues, and balance and position in the saddle.
- Rely on the hunting guide for saddling, unsaddling and tying up the horse. Doing so will spare the rider the embarrassment of having tangled tack or an injury from falling off the horse because of a loose cinch.
- Select a firearm that fits snugly into the scabbard.
- Always conduct the firearm safety check—control the muzzle, open the action, and check for ammunition—before placing the gun in the scabbard and when retrieving it to ensure it is NOT loaded.

## Concerning Boats

- When hunting with a boat, follow the boating safety principles and the firearm safety rules—control the muzzle, open the action, check for ammunition.

and regulations for that state or province concerning transporting firearms via off-road vehicles. It is the hunter's responsibility to know and follow the laws and regulations.

- Before driving the ATV or snowmobile, know all of the controls, how it operates, and its limitations on various surfaces.
- Before storing a firearm on an

off-road vehicle, make certain the firearm is NOT loaded. With the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and your finger outside the trigger guard, open the action and inspect the chamber and magazine to see there is no ammunition present.

- For safe transport of a rifle or shotgun on an ATV or



Take riding lessons before your hunt to master basic skills.

Take a boater safety course and also get boating lessons on the water from an experienced boater before hunting with a boat.

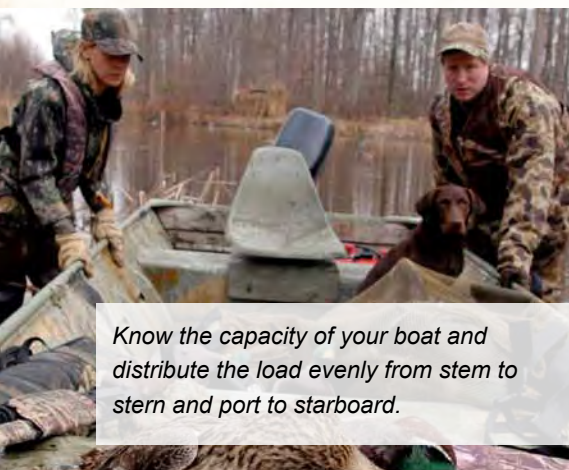
### Boating Safety Principles

- Every person on the boat should wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD).



If someone falls overboard, especially in cold water, their first reflex will be to gasp. The PFD will keep their head above the surface so they take in a lungful of air, not water.

- The boat should have at least one throw-able flotation device (Type IV) to toss to someone who falls overboard.
- The boat should be equipped with visual distress signals consistent with U.S. Coast Guard regulations. For information, contact the U.S. Coast Guard directly or visit this website: <http://www.boatingsafety.com/boats/cgvisuals.htm>
- Know the capacity of the boat. This information appears on the boat's capacity plate, which usually can be found on the inside of the transom or near the helm station. In boating, the terms "loading" and "capacity" refer specifically to the weight of people, fuel and gear that can be safely carried on the boat.
- To determine if the boat has a safe load, take these things into account.



*Know the capacity of your boat and distribute the load evenly from stern to stern and port to starboard.*



*Always wear your PFD when hunting or traveling in a boat.*

- o People: How many? How much do they weigh? How tall or short are they? How big are they?
- o Engine: How much does the engine weigh? How is the engine mounted to the boat? Is the engine in good operating condition?
- o Fuel: What is the capacity of the fuel tank? How much fuel is in the tank?
- o Seats: How many seats? Where will different passengers sit so the load is balanced? The number of seats in a boat does not indicate how many passengers the boat can carry safely.
- o Weather conditions: What is the present weather condition? What is the forecast? In rough waters, keep the weight of fuel, gear and people well below the capacity limit.
- To ensure a safe trip in a boat, distribute the load evenly from stem to stern and port to starboard, keep the gear low in the boat, and avoid sudden

Follow the following fuel plan: One third of the fuel is for the outbound trip. One third is for the inbound trip. And one third is a reserve or backup supply.



*Make a float plan of your trip and leave it with someone who can contact emergency personnel if help is needed.*

changes in placement of gear and people.

- Concerning fuel, follow the plan of  $\frac{1}{3}$  -  $\frac{1}{3}$  -  $\frac{1}{3}$ . One third of the fuel is for the outbound trip. One third is for the inbound trip. And one third is a reserve or backup supply in case there is rough weather, which may require more time, or a detour is necessary to return safely to the dock.
- At the first sign of approaching bad weather, return to shore.

### Firearm Safety Rules for Hunting with a Boat

- These safety rules apply when hunting from a boat (for example, when duck hunting) or when using a boat to get to a hunting area, such as an island or the other side of a river or lake.
- Make a float plan of the trip to include the following information:
  - o route to and from the docking place
  - o time of departure
  - o expected time of return
  - o names of hunting partners included on the hunting trip
  - o Leave this plan with someone who can contact emergency personnel in case the hunting party does not return within a reasonable period of time.
- Conduct a firearm safety check before placing a gun in the boat—control the muzzle, open the action, and check for ammunition.
- Keep the gun unloaded, with the safety on and stored in a case until arriving at the hunting area.

- Wear a PFD and insist that all passengers in the boat wear a PFD.
- Secure the boat to the dock with a rope.
- When hunting alone, assemble all gear on the dock and then place the gear into the boat from the dock so it is evenly distributed and easily accessible before entering the boat.
- When placing a gun in a boat, keep the muzzle pointed outboard in a safe direction. Store the gun so it is secure in case of rough waters, and accessible.
- When hunting with one or more partners, have the partners take their places in the boat and

*When placing a gun in a boat, keep the muzzle pointed outboard in a safe direction. Store the gun so it is secure in case of rough waters and accessible.*



then hand them the gear and the guns from the dock.

- Upon returning to the dock after hunting, repeat the procedure for unloading—one person gets out of the boat onto the dock and the other passengers hand the gear and firearms to the person on the dock. When all of the gear has been removed, the other passengers can exit the boat.
- During shooting times, stow a loaded firearm securely with the safety on and the muzzle pointed outboard.
- Set up zones of fire before the shooting begins and avoid shooting into another hunting partner's zone of fire.
- The safest setup for two hunters in a boat is the back-to-back position where the shooters face in opposite directions and each has a zone of fire approximately 180 degrees. Whenever there are one or more additional hunters in the boat, everyone must help keep the boat balanced and stable to prevent capsizing.
- The smaller the boat the more easily it responds to changes in the positions of passengers or gear.
- When the hunting has ended, unload all firearms, place the safeties in the "ON" position and store the guns in the cases with the muzzles pointed outboard.
- At dark, firearms should be unloaded and cased.

## Lesson 2: Storage of Firearms

In this lesson you will:

- Explain how to store firearms safely for transport.



*Determine zones of fire before hunting from a boat.*

## Safe Storage in a Vehicle

- Each state or province has laws that regulate the transportation of firearms in motor vehicles. Additionally, the various states and provinces have different firearm laws. Federal laws also regulate the transportation of firearms across state lines.
- Firearm laws change over time.
- Every firearm owner must stay up to date on laws that apply to firearm ownership and transport within and across state lines.
- A reliable source for firearm laws is: [www.nraila.org](http://www.nraila.org). Click on "Gun Laws."

## General Rules for Safe Transport in Motor Vehicle

The firearm should be:

- Unloaded
- Locked
- Enclosed in a case
- Stored in the trunk of the vehicle
- Not accessible by anyone in the passenger compartment

NOTE: store ammunition in a separate container

## General Rules for Safe Transport of Firearms on ATV (All Terrain Vehicle), snowmobile, and horseback

The firearm should be:

- Unloaded
- Secured to the equipment in a scabbard or cased and strapped on

## Transportation of Firearms by Plane, Train or Bus

- Whenever using public transportation to carry firearms, contact the ticket agent for specific guidelines for transportation of firearms and ammunition.

## Varieties of Gun Cases

Gun cases are available in the following forms:

- Gun sock
- Padded soft-sided case, zippered
- Waterproof neoprene “dry” cases
- Scabbard for use on an ATV or horse
- Hard-sided case
  - o Polymer (plastic)
  - o Metal (aluminum)



*Gun sock*



*Soft-sided gun case*



*Waterproof Neoprene case*



*Scabbard*



*Hard-sided case*



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