



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF POLICE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM  
TRAINING BULLETIN 015



SAFE FIREARMS HANDLING  
JUNE 6, 2016  
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## I. Purpose

The purpose of this training bulletin is to provide guidance to all commissioned officers on the need to ensure that proper safety protocols are followed when manipulating firearms. Officers must follow the four cardinal rules of gun safety which are:

1. Every firearm is always loaded until proven otherwise (**always know status of your weapon**).
2. Never point a firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy (**Laser rule**).
3. Keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until ready to fire (**not only ready to fire but have made conscious decision to engage**).
4. Be sure of your target and what is beyond it (**also what's between and flanking target**).

## II. Discharges Defined

The unintentional discharge of a firearm occurs when the firearm fires when the officer is not expecting or ready for the firearm to fire. Unintentional discharges are generally categorized into two distinct categories. The first and most common is a negligent discharge which is when a firearm is fired due to the failure on the part of the officer to follow the four cardinal rules of gun safety. The second type of unintentional discharge is the accidental discharge which is when a firearm fires without any physical input from the officer. Accidental discharges are rare but can occur and are often related to mechanical failures of the firearm.

## III. Proper Protocols

The most common circumstances under which our experience suggests that unintentional discharges are likely to occur include when an officer is either unloading or loading the firearm. During the unloading process, general errors include failure to utilize clearing barrels, failure to follow the four cardinal rules of safety, and failure to follow the proper mechanical sequence in unloading a previously loaded weapon. If there is an unintentional discharge, typical things to determine for an investigation:

- What are the basic facts surrounding the incident? Where did it occur? Who was present or involved? What happened?
- Was someone injured and, if so, what are the extent of those injuries?
- Which policies, if any, may have been violated?
- What was the cause of the incident?
- Were any training or equipment issues contributing factors to the incident?
- Have the involved firearm inspected by an armorer/gunsmith to verify it is functioning correctly.

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During a 2016 ODOP investigation of an officer involved negligent discharge, that investigation revealed that the firearms training profession acknowledges the use of certain Blackhawk Serpa holsters (as described in the link below) may require an additional degree of training on the mechanics of the draw and a higher level of officer proficiency in its use to be operated with complete assurance of safety. Neither the ODOP negligent discharge investigation nor the firearms training profession suggest that this holster design is inherently flawed or the product of faulty engineering, but specifically, the auto-lock trigger finger retention device requires focused and repetitive training to minimize any potential safety risk.

ODOP/UTSP Policy 604, Firearms, Less Lethal Weapons and Ammunition, will continue to offer alternative holster systems as an option for institution police chiefs or individual officers.

[https://www.fletc.gov/sites/default/files/imported\\_files/reference/public-information/freedom-of-information-act-foia/reading-room/training-information/holisterStudy.pdf](https://www.fletc.gov/sites/default/files/imported_files/reference/public-information/freedom-of-information-act-foia/reading-room/training-information/holisterStudy.pdf)

A clearing barrel is a safety device designed to capture a discharged round. Officers loading and unloading their shotgun, pistol or rifle simply point or place the muzzle of the weapon into the port on the clearing barrel. If a round is discharged during their loading/unloading mechanical sequence, it enters the clearing barrel through the port and is captured by material inside the barrel designed for that specific purpose.

The proper mechanical sequence in **unloading** the pistol is:

1. Point the muzzle of the pistol into the port of a clearing barrel or a safe direction.
2. Remove magazine or source of ammunition.
3. Eject the round that is in the chamber,
  - a. This is accomplished by pulling the pistol slide to the rear. A training standard is to manipulate the slide at least three times to ensure a round is not present.
4. Lock the slide to the rear, then
5. Physically and visually inspect the chamber is empty.

At this point in the sequence the pistol is now empty, and the slide can go forward on an empty chamber. Once the slide is forward on an empty chamber, the muzzle can be pointed into the clearing barrel port or other safe direction and the trigger can be safely pulled to release spring pressure on the striker.

The proper mechanical sequence in **loading** the pistol is:

1. Verify the pistol is unloaded by locking the slide to the rear and physically and visually ensuring the chamber is empty,
2. Point the muzzle of the pistol into the port of the clearing barrel or safe direction if no clearing barrel is available, insert a magazine into the pistol, then

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3. Allow the slide to go forward chambering a live round from the magazine. The pistol would now be placed in a holster.

The proper mechanical sequence in **unloading** the rifle is:

1. Place the selector lever on safe, if possible, point rifle in port of clearing barrel or safe direction if no clearing barrel available.
2. Remove the magazine,
3. Eject the round that is in the chamber,
  - a. This is accomplished by pulling the bolt to the rear of the rifle. A training standard is to manipulate the bolt at least three times to ensure a round is not present.
4. Lock the bolt to rear then,
5. Physically and visually inspect the chamber is empty.

At this point in the sequence the rifle is now empty, and the bolt can go forward on an empty chamber. Once the bolt is forward on an empty chamber, the muzzle can be pointed into the clearing barrel port or other safe direction and the trigger can be safely pulled to release spring pressure on the hammer.

The proper mechanical sequence in **loading** the rifle is:

1. Point the muzzle of the rifle into the port of the clearing barrel or safe direction if no clearing barrel is available,
2. Verify the rifle is unloaded by locking the bolt to the rear and physically and visually ensuring the chamber is empty,
3. Allow the bolt to go forward and place the rifle on safe or press the trigger as per your institution policy,
4. Close the dust cover, and
5. Insert a magazine into the rifle.

The rifle would now be placed in a case or vehicle rack.

The proper mechanical sequence in **unloading** the shotgun:

1. Engage the safety, point muzzle of shotgun into port of clearing barrel or safe direction if no clearing barrel available.
2. Unload the shotgun magazine tube by removing the shotgun shells through the loading port (NOT THE EJECTION PORT). This is accomplished by manipulating the shell latches. When you can see the magazine follower, the magazine tube is empty,

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3. Using the action bar lock, release the bolt, open the chamber area and remove any shell that may be in the chamber,
4. Physically and visually inspect that the chamber is empty.

The proper mechanical sequence in **loading** the shotgun:

1. Point the muzzle of the shotgun into the port of the clearing barrel or safe direction if no clearing barrel is available,
2. Verify the shotgun is unloaded by opening the bolt to the rear and physically and visually ensuring the chamber is empty,
3. Move the bolt forward and engage the safety as per your institution policy, and
4. Load the shotgun through the loading port with the proper number of shells.

The shotgun would now be placed in a case or vehicle rack.

- IV. Rangemasters will cover the Range Safety Briefing at the start of any range session or when new shooters have arrived for a session.
- V. Officers will ensure that they have complete focus at all times when handling firearms. As noted above, mistakes usually occur when loading or unloading firearms and at least one of the four cardinal firearms safety rules were violated. Firearms instructors shall also ensure that officers are cognizant of safety protocols anytime firearms training is occurring.



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