

Introduction

This chapter is a formal organization with by-laws, policies, and officers. By performing gunner services to our members, that makes this chapter a host of a live shooting event. Therefore, while acting as a gunner at chapter events, you are an agent of this chapter and no longer a recreational independent hunter enjoying your time in the field. As a chapter gunner, do not take lightly your responsibility to be safe!

To assure a safe experience for everyone attending our chapter's activities, as designated gunners, it is our responsibility to conduct ourselves in the safest manner possible so that no firearm accidents can occur. Because of their inherent danger, handling firearms requires a high degree of care. That degree of care is magnified by the number of chapter members at our events. Therefore, as gunners, we must always guard against becoming relaxed in accepting anything less than top notch safety protocols among us. Bad habits when handling firearms becomes contagious and leads to the expansion of questionable gun handling conduct.

The attention you give when handling firearms must be constant. It takes a fraction of a second for a mistake to occur. Mistakes with firearms are embarrassing at best, but often tragic so anything you do with a firearm is critical. Even the most experienced shooters must work to maintain their focus and not allow themselves to be distracted. Gun safety is essential and non-negotiable. When gunning in the field for any NAVHDA event, GUN SAFETY is more important than taking the shot at the bird! No bird is worth an accident!

Any bad behavior a gunner might exhibit should be pointed out by other gunners. The responsibility to monitor the gunner's conduct also falls on the membership. Therefore, if any chapter member witnesses any questionable gun handling, please bring it to our attention. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that all of us are comfortable and confident that we and our dogs are safe at chapter events. When handling a firearm as a gunner for chapter events, perception is extremely important. Therefore, when someone perceives any questionable gun handling, there is no question that the gun conduct needs to be corrected. When that conduct is brought to your attention, refrain from being defensive or argumentative. You have a duty to show a good attitude and adjust your conduct.

The birds used in training are not a target that needs to be hit or a piece of game that needs to be harvested. When providing gunning services to chapter dog handlers, we are not hunting birds. These birds are a tool used to develop the dog. As a gunner, you are also used to help develop the dog so act accordingly. Not every bird needs to fall from the sky. Make training the dog the priority and put aside your desire to shoot birds!

Be aware of a dog breaking point and giving chase to a flying bird. If you hear a handler shouting corrections to a dog, give pause to shooting the bird. Would you really be helping the handler and the dog's development if you did shoot a bird after a dog has broken point? Such conduct on your part is more ego and self-gratification (i.e. selfishness) rather than consideration for the development of the dog.

If the backdrop of your target is the field and not the sky, it might not be prudent to take the shot. When you shoulder your firearm, if the muzzle is not pointed higher than the stock in your shoulder, perhaps such a shot should not be taken.

Firearm safety is 20% knowledge, 10% physical ability but 70% attitude & commitment!!

Pocono Chapter NAVHDA Firearms Guidelines

These guidelines are to include the required PA Game Commission Rules & Policies, NAVHDA National Aims Program Safety Rules, the Aims Program Test Rules, and the NRA rules for safe gun handling.

I. Game Commission Rules

- All persons must wear at least 250 square inches of fluorescent orange in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Pennsylvania Game Commission.
- Per the PA Game Commission rules, when the chapter submits a request for permits to run a test or if we had to run a training at state game lands, the Game Commission requires us to submit a list of gunners for our activities.
- The list we submit is limited to 10 gunners and includes their dates of birth. However, the Game Commission allows us to substitute with gunners that are not submitted to them.
- The names and birth dates of those substitutions need to be “penciled in” on the list of gunners we have in our possession during the events.
- Adhering to that list for gunning at our events is mandatory.

II. Eligible gunners must meet the following criteria:

- A gunner shall be a voting member in good standing with the Pocono Mountain Chapter & NAVHDA international.
 - **Excerpt from our By-Laws “Members joining at any time during the current year are considered non-voting members until January 1st of the following year. At that point, provided the member renews their membership for the next year, they have full voting privileges and the ability to hold office within the Chapter.”**
- A gunner shall demonstrate safe handling and shooting technique to at least one member of the executive council.
- A gunner shall provide a letter of recommendation from a NAVHDA chapter member.
- A gunner shall be approved by consensus of the executive council members.
- A gunner shall annually attend and participate in a safety discussion conducted by the executive council or other approved representative and be familiar with NAVHDA rules.
- A gunner shall use a BREAK OPEN SHOTGUN ONLY.
- Test gunners will be selected by the executive council from the pool of approved gunners based upon a demonstrated ability to be safe and accurate.
- A test gunner shall have successfully handled a dog in at least one NA-UPT-UT test.

III. Aims Program Test Rules

Aims Program Safety Rules; Page 6. (Required reading before each NAVHDA test.)

- *Hinged frame (break-open) shotguns of conventional gauge will be used in NAVHDA tests. Autoloaders and pump action guns are strictly forbidden, whether loaded with blank ammunition or not. All guns will be carried in the open position until just before the shot.*
- *When blank ammunition is called for, it must be 12-gauge, professional factory.*
- *manufactured, smokeless powder, blank ammunition (field trial poppers).*
- *Field marshals will ensure that the gallery remains at a safe distance in a position away from the line of fire. All persons in the field, while live ammunition is being used, must wear one or a combination of the following blaze orange garments: hat, vest, or jacket.*
- *Individuals may accompany the handler, the gunners, and the Judges in the field during a test with prior permission of the Senior Judge after consultation with the handler.*

“Two experienced gunners are required during the search. Gunners must be International NAVHDA members. Gunners must be at least 18 years of age and all gunners born after 1975 must have successfully completed a state/provincial firearms safety course. The gunners will carry their guns in the open position until just before the shot. They will position themselves one to either side and just behind the handler with a reasonable distance between gunners. When the dog points, the gunners will move up on a general line: gunner-handler-gunner - and ready their guns for firing. No shots will be fired parallel to or behind the line: gunner-handler-gunner. In other words, the gunner on the right confines his shots to the Right Safe Sector and the one on the left to the Left Safe Sector.

Shots at birds that flush and fly behind the above-mentioned line or unsafe area will not be attempted. Gunners must also be alert to the dangerous combination of a low flying bird and a dog that has broken and is chasing. If the bird cannot be shot, the gunner will fire in the air to simulate shooting the bird. The sponsoring organization will require that the gunners read the safety instructions before the start of the test and the Judging Team will verbally review the instructions with the gunners and judging group before the first dog is called to the starting line. The Judging team will ensure that members of the gallery are in a safe position and in case of noncompliance, will suspend all test activities until safety is restored.”

IV. NRA Rules for Safe Gun Handling

- 1. Always keep your gun pointed in a safe direction.**
- 2. Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.**
- 3. Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.**
- 4. Know your target and what is beyond.**

Additional Safety Guidelines

- Shooting over the head of anyone is an UNSAFE ACT and should not be attempted under any circumstance! Shooting behind the gunner-handler-gunner line is an UNSAFE ACT and should not be attempted under any circumstance! Make GUN SAFETY the priority!!!
- When gunners drop shells in the chamber, regardless of the gun not being closed, it entails the gun is in the loaded status! Gunners should not do this anywhere except when in a position to shoot.
- After handling a bird and the dog and handler has finished with the scenario unload the firearm.
- Every time there are firearms present – whether it’s you or someone else handling them – stay serious. This is not the time to be joking around or hold random conversations.
- If there is a mechanical problem you can’t correct, you should leave, moving to a safe area. Firearms are lethal weapons and must be treated accordingly.

Handlers

- We may have new handlers who have never trained in the structured way.
- As a handler, there is some conduct you need to consider.
- Gunners should not be rushed and distracted from their number one priority: SAFETY!
- The handler needs to be sure that gunners are set and ready. The handler needs to consider the dog on point, the position you want the gunners, etc.
- The handler should explain to the gunners the intent to flush the bird in a certain direction, check with the gunners that they are ready, and consider how you will flush the bird.

- The handler needs to be aware that birds have a mind of their own and be willing to accept that the gunners may not be able to shoot or may miss a bird. This will happen in training and test situations.
- Handlers should consider the responsibilities of the gunner and listen to the gunner's suggestions.
- If a handler wants to be assured of having two gunners in a scenario, the handler should not ask either gunner to assist in anything except being a gunner.
- If a handler asks a gunner to be of assistance or a gunner volunteers to assist in anything but being a gunner, the gunner should unload the firearm before doing so.
- If a gunner is acting as a gunner, he is a gunner and nothing more; period!!!
- Gunners & handlers must understand each other's positions, intentions and how they will react to possible scenarios prior to flushing the bird.
- Everyone should have considered and decided in which direction shots will be fired.
- Everyone must know in which direction shots WILL NOT be fired.

Cross Shooting

- When we concentrate on a fast-moving object, our vision narrows, so that we are unable to see what is happening in our larger environment.
- We can see well in a straight line but the vision to both sides is very limited.
- It is estimated that when concentrating on a fast-moving target, our angle of vision is only about 30 degrees, so we can only see clearly what is in front of us.
- Therefore, predetermine your angle limits before the handler flushes the bird!
- Gunners shall refrain from shooting across the middle imaginary line.
- After the flush, when the bird has traveled forward enough, gunners may have a better opportunity to take a safe shot that crosses that imaginary line. The gunner shall determine if they can safely take the shot or not.
- Taking a cross shot on a bird that is very close to the gunner-handler-gunner line of fire is UNSAFE!

Muzzle Discipline

- It is never acceptable to point the muzzle of a loaded firearm in the direction of another person.
- We carry our firearms broke open and without shells in the chambers and load and close the firearm only when we are in a position and ready to handle a flushed bird.
- After each bird scenario, we unload break open the gun.
- It is **UNACCEPTABLE** to point or sweep the muzzle of a firearm in the path of a person or dog.
- SAFETIES SHOULD ALWAYS BE CHECKED TO BE ON THE SAFE POSITION!! Those safeties should remain "on safe" until the bird is "flushed" and the gun is coming to the shoulder. If gun is removed from the shoulder for any reason, safety should be re-engaged.

Gunner Testing Checklist

- Have appropriate blaze orange attire.
- Carry Shot size 7 or smaller.
- Stay with the handler at all times.
- Before starting ask the handler where you should be after the bird is shot i.e. Do you stand still until the dog goes by you and then move to a position behind the judges or move back behind the judges when the handler return to his/her dog?
- Be there to help the handler if needed. i.e. holding their gun so they may water their dog AFTER they have finished the retrieve.
- Use a break open shotgun. Carried in the open unloaded position.
- Load the gun after you are in position as instructed by the handler.
- Check the area around you for unsafe features before the handler flushes the bird.
- Mentally, determine your safe sector.
- Shoot the bird at a distance that is fair to the dog.
- Unload the gun and move out of the way and behind the judges as per the handler's instructions.