

4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety TAB-K ; Series (A)

Do you remember when your mother taught you it was not polite to point your finger at anyone? I'm sure we all remember that. It also applies to firearms safety and etiquette. This is the second in a four-part series on the 4 Basic Rules of Firearms Safety. "A" always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

This is one of those rules that we all violate no matter how safe you might think you are. It is impossible to know your muzzle is pointed in a safe direction all the time. A safe direction is defined as "any direction where the bullet or shot will not harm a person if the firearm is discharged." What you can do is adopt certain styles of carries and specific practices while hunting with or handling firearms to help maximize on safety. We all know that it is never acceptable to point a firearm at another person or at anything you do not wish to destroy. What we don't consciously realize is that sometimes when we are "getting ready" to use or put away our firearms we inadvertently point the muzzle in an unsafe direction. Let's not forget rule number one either: Treat Every Firearm as if it is Loaded...all the time. Examples of safe directions would include straight up in a two-hand ready carry position or downrange when on the firing line at a shooting range. When not actively hunting or shooting you can also increase the safety factor by having the action open. This was a common practice in the days when shotgun hunters mostly hunted with break open action shotguns. When confronted in the field by another person hunters simply opened the actions on their shotguns. This was considered proper etiquette.

Did you know that many unwanted discharges occur when the firearm is being loaded or unloaded? Pointing the muzzle of your firearm in a safe direction when doing either function is critical and necessary to avoid an incident. Remember that if a firearm discharges the bullets or pellets can ricochet. Placing hunters in a circle all facing outward is one way to load and unload firearms in a safe direction. If you are hunting with only one other person you can stand back-to-back.

Self inflicted firearms injuries comprise about 33% of all hunting incidents annually in Wisconsin. The muzzles of those firearms were not pointed in a safe direction when the incidents occurred. Controlling the muzzle of your firearm is your responsibility. You should never be insulted if a person requests you to point your muzzle elsewhere or in a safe direction. Rather you should be thankful because they might have saved you from a tragedy and they were paying attention not only to their safety but to yours as well. In many circles these gentle reminders are viewed as mild "tune-ups" on safety practices. We can all be better as we are none perfect all the time. You are only as safe as your next hunt no matter how safe you have been up until then.

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