



STATE SAFETY OFFICE
HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
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SAFETY MESSAGE 21-06

June is Small Arms and Explosives Safety

Small Arms Safety

Topping the list of small arms safety issues are improper handling and malfunctions due to improper headspace and timing or maintenance, which are often a result of complacency, indiscipline and inadequate training. The constant exposure to weapons in a deployed environment versus garrison increases the potential for Soldiers to become complacent and provides greater opportunities for unintentional discharges to occur.

Unintentional discharges most commonly occur when:

- Cleaning, clearing or performing a functions check.
- Entering or exiting vehicles.
- Retrieving, unloading, or emplacing weapons
- Following a change of mission, duty, or weapon's status.
- Joking or playing around pointing a weapon at themselves or someone else.
- Handling a foreign weapon they are unfamiliar with.
- Becoming distracted and fiddling with a weapon and unmindfully pulling the trigger.

While not as prevalent, improper headspace and timing and accidental ricochet/shrapnel incidents are also a concern. As with unintentional discharges, these mishaps are often a result of inadequate training, overconfidence, complacency, and indiscipline.

Steps to reduce weapons handling risk:

- Assist Leaders in ensuring personnel have adequate training for their assigned weapons. Do not allow personnel to use weapons they have not been trained on or that have not been inspected for serviceability.
- As one of the first steps in clearing a weapon, ensure personnel remove the source of ammunition (magazine, belt, etc.). Do not allow personnel to clean weapons with a magazine in the weapon.
- Ensure there is adequate command policy in place regarding authorized holsters. Avoid holsters that orient muzzles towards personnel.
- Ensure there is adequate policy regarding handling and use of foreign weapons and ammunition.
- Ensure Soldiers use the proper gauge. The M2 and M3 are not interchangeable.
- Remind Soldiers when firing an individual weapon from the gunner's station to ensure the muzzle has cleared the turret. A good way to do this is to have them put the barrel over the turret.

- Partner with unit leaders to aggressively change the way Soldiers THINK about weapons safety!

Treat every weapon as if it is loaded.

Handle every weapon with care.

Identify the target before you fire.

Never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot.

Keep the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire.

References and Links

- AR 385-63: Range Safety
<http://www.apd.army.mil/>
- DA PAM 385-63 Range Safety
<http://www.apd.army.mil/>

Ammunition and Explosives Storage and Handling

Some Leaders and Soldiers tend to think ammunition and explosives safety is for peacetime and is a low priority during theater operations. Actually, just the opposite is true. Ammunition assets and Soldiers are even more critical to mission accomplishment during combat.

Ammunition and explosives accidents most commonly occur when:

- Dropping or inadvertently firing pyrotechnic flares while riding in vehicles.
- Using .50 cal rounds as a hammer to seat the mounting pin on a M2.
- Handling UXO.
- Playing around and/or trying to modify or disassemble ammo or explosives.
- Failure to release grenades or simulators prior to detonation.
- Ammunition is stored in inappropriate/unauthorized areas.
- Improper techniques are used such as the taping of grenades.

Most ammunition and explosives accidents are preventable. Failure to follow proper handling procedures and Soldiers not wearing the proper PPE are common mistakes. Inadequate training, lack of Leader involvement, and overconfidence are often cited as contributing factors in mishaps.

Steps to reduce the risk:

- Get to know the QASAS (Quality Assurance Specialist, Ammunition Surveillance), they can assist with ammunition and explosive issues.
- Create an awareness and incentives campaign.
- Collaborate with unit leaders to aggressively enforce discipline and proper handling of ammunition and explosives.
- Assist Leaders in ensuring personnel have adequate training for the ammunition and explosive devices they are using. Do not allow personnel to use devices they are not trained to handle or that have not been inspected for serviceability.
- When possible, all AMMO should be stored in its original packaging in a designated AMMO storage area (ammo holding area (AHA), ammo supply point (ASP), basic load storage area (BLSA), etc.).
- Ensure there is adequate command policy in place regarding storage procedures. Remember the cardinal principle of explosives safety: expose the MINIMUM amount of personnel, to the MINIMUM amount of explosives, for the MINIMUM amount of time.

- Make every effort should to comply with explosives safety requirements. If the *Deployment Guide for BCT Safety Professionals* 32 minimum explosives safety quantity distances, internally or externally, cannot be obtained then the situation calls for a Certificate of Risk Acceptance (CoRA). A CoRA replaces a waiver or exemption. You can also use a CoRA for other explosives safety deficiencies such as lack of lightning protection for ammunition storage or risk to mission capability (i.e. less than asset preservation distance).
- Engage Leaders in frequent risk assessments and inspections.
- Ensure Soldiers understand the 3 Rs of unexploded ordnance (UXO) – Recognize, Retreat and Report.

References and Links

- **USACRC's Explosives Safety Web page** contains publications, posters, videos, bulletins, related links and other information pertaining to ammunition and explosives safety.

[Ammunition and Explosives](#) AKO login required

USACRC's Range and Weapons Safety Toolbox is a collection of resources used to establish and maintain an effective range and weapons safety-training program. The toolbox includes materials such as regulations, videos, posters, messages/alerts and links to other related sites.

[Range and Weapons Safety Toolbox](#)

- **Defense Ammunition Center's Explosives Safety Toolbox** contains tools, adaptable templates and documents, explosive safety site criteria and techniques, and other helpful information to improve the Army's overall explosives safety posture and unit readiness

<https://acc.dau.mil/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=282919&eid=259077&lang=en-US>

- **Ammo HELP (Defense Ammunition Center)** is a Web based system that allows users enter technical ammunition questions and in return, ammunition professionals answers the queries.

<https://mhp.redstone.army.mil>

- [DA PAM 385-64 Ammunition and Explosives Safety Standards](#)
- [DA PAM 385-65 Explosive and Chemical Site Plan Development and Submission](#)
- [ATP 4-35.1 Ammunition and Explosives Handler Safety Techniques](#)
- [TB 43-0250 Ammunition Handling, Storage and Safety](#)
- [EM 385-1-97 Explosives - Safety and Health Requirements Manual](#)

To find previously published Safety Messages go to our NYARNG Safety Website:

<http://dmna.ny.gov/safety/>

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