

SPORTSMEN'S CLUB OF CLIFTON PARK

RIFLE RANGE RULES FOR BLACK POWDER/MUZZLELOADERS

1. INTRODUCTION

Black powder and muzzle loading firearms require attention to safety issues that may differ from those applicable to modern smokeless powder arms. If new to this discipline you should obtain appropriate instruction from those experienced with black powder and muzzle loading arms.

Shooting black powder arms or "Muzzle Loaders" is exciting, fun and can be enjoyed by the whole family. It is an inexpensive and rewarding recreation, with a few basic components one can make smoke with the best of them. We have some of the best shooters in the region and they are eager to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with you.

2. CAUTIONS AND WARNINGS

Black powder is classed as an explosive and can be ignited by static discharge. Black powder should be stored in its original container. Plastic and other static prone container should not be used. Always ground yourself to dissipate any static charge before handling gun powders, especially black powder.

If you are new to muzzle loaders and black powder, get instruction from someone experienced before setting out on your own.

There are many safety practices that are unique to shooting muzzle loading arms.

A basic rule at ranges is no handling of firearms behind the firing line. You may find muzzle loaders being handled for loading behind the firing line. This practice is based on the need to remove the handling of black powder from the flame and sparks generated on the firing line. These arms are however not primed (powder or percussion cap) until on the firearm line and at all times muzzle control is practiced.

3. Range Safety Rules for Black Powder Firearms

A. Definitions

"Powder" includes black powder and all substitutes.

"Closed" means tight fitting, spark-tight.

"Powder measure" is a small device holding about one shot worth of powder and not an attached part of a powder container. Usually not closed.

"Powder container" usually holds more than one shot worth of powder.

"Prime" means to charge the pan or install a cap.

"Pre-measures" are small, closed containers holding a measure of powder, and

sometimes other components, for one shot.

B. General

No smoking on or near the line. Smoke only in designated areas.

A loaded arm must be pointed down range and closely attended at all times. Once primed, it must be held by the shooter until discharged.

When moving around with an unloaded arm, arm must be carried muzzle up.

Do not carry black powder, or its substitutes, into any club buildings. When leaving the line, put powder in your range box or bag.

C. Powder

Powder must always be in a closed container except when filling the powder measure or, for pre-measures, charging the arm.

Powder should be kept in the original factory containers until put in horn, flask, powder measure, charger or cartridge. No breakable containers such as glass.

No more than one, one pound, container of powder per shooter allowed on the firing line. All other powder containers must be in a closed range box or bag kept behind the firing line.

Filling of horns, flasks, multiple pre-measure devices, etc., must not be done on the firing line. Move well back from the line.

D. Caps

Percussion caps must always be in a closed container except when priming the arm. No loose caps allowed; keep them covered.

Caps should be kept in the original factory containers until put in a capping device. No breakable containers such as glass.

No more than one tin of caps per shooter allowed on the firing line. All other cap containers must be in a closed range box or bag kept behind the firing line.

E. Paper cartridges

Paper cartridges must be kept in closed containers until one is removed for use.

Powder or cap containers are not permitted off ranges or in smoking areas unless kept in a securely closed range box or bag.

F. Loading

Never load from a horn or flask or factory container.

A powder measure must always be used to charge the arm. Pre-measured, individual chargers/cartridges meet this requirement. Ramrods should be clearly marked for "empty" and "loaded".

Never load while distracted; think about what you are doing.

Keep body parts well away from the muzzle while loading.

Be aware of your surroundings. Never expose powder if the adjacent shooter is ready to fire.

Clean firing bench of all spilled powder before continuing. Powder spilled on the ground must be well scattered before continuing.

G. Firing

Never prime until on the line, pointed downrange and ready to fire.

Cap & ball cylinders must be capped while in the firearm, at the firing line, pointed downrange. Do not carry capped cylinders around!

Flintlock shooters must notify shooters on the touchhole side well before firing. Calling out 'flint' a few seconds before firing is encouraged. Give the other person a chance!

Be aware of your surroundings. Never fire if adjacent shooters have powder exposed or are otherwise unprepared. Again, calling out "flint" a few seconds before firing is encouraged.

Flints must never be knapped in the cock when the arm is charged.

H. Problems

Keep misfires pointed down range until the arm is made safe.

Loads that must be unloaded

will be taken off-line for that purpose. Keep misfires pointed in a safe direction!

CO2 dischargers may be used to remove loads on the firing line.

I. Some typical Q&As:

- Why do people load their firearm behind the line when others are firing?
To avoid exposure to sparks that could ignite the powder your handling while loading.

- Why do they use those brass measuring tubes rather than loading from a classic powder horn?

There are two reasons for the tubes. One is to get the correct amount of powder and the other is to minimize the amount of powder you have exposed during loading. Should a charge of powder be ignited during loading you want only a limited amount to go off. Brass is typically used as it is less likely to cause a spark than other materials. If you see classic powder horns being used, look closely. You will find an automatic cutoff that isolates the main bulk powder while the measured charge is being added to the barrel.

- Why do I see people blowing down the barrel of a muzzle loading rifle?
This is to extinguish any remaining sparks so you don't get ignition of the new charge when you pour it down the barrel. Keep your face away from the muzzle just in case.

- When is a muzzle loader considered loaded?

When there is anything in the barrel. How do I tell? Use the ram rod to measure the distance from the back of the breach to the end of the barrel. Mark the rod, then insert it into the barrel. If the mark isn't at the end of the barrel then there is something in the barrel and it should be considered loaded.

- How do you unload a muzzle loader?

The common procedure to unload a known good load is to shoot it. If the load is suspect, the first choice should be a CO2 discharger. If you have to pull the ball. The older way was to use a brass reverse cork screw to dig into the ball and then pull it. A safer approach is to use the CO2 powdered gadgets that blow the charge out from the flash hole.

- Why is it important to assure the projectile is full seated onto the powder

charge?

Black powder arms can essentially push out of the barrel a reasonable number of charges as long as everything is tightly packed. Any space or gap between the powder charge and the projectile can result in a barrel rupture. AKA it blew up.

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