

Safety Guidelines for Hunt Test Gunners

1. **Keep the shotgun chamber free of shells until the bird is ready to be thrown or launched.** In no case are you to keep a shell in the chamber unless you are at the firing line and ready to shoot a live flyer. If using a break shotgun, keep the gun broken until approaching the line. When using a semi-automatic or a pump, keep the breech open and empty until approaching the line. **It is never acceptable to lean a shotgun against any object like a blind or a bird crate when the shotgun has shells in the chamber or magazine or both.**
2. **Under no circumstances are you to shoot at an escaped bird – one that escapes from the thrower, launcher or from the coop/holding container.** Let the bird go without firing a shot.
3. **If live birds capable of running or flying are in the area where working dogs are being tested, flush the birds from the area but do not shoot.** If a judge wishes to override this behavior and asks you to shoot the bird, you have the prerogative of saying no.
4. **Safety zones.** The gunning team is responsible for establishing safety zone(s) and no shooting boundaries before shooting begins and getting confirmation from the judges on the advisability of these areas. Both judges and gunners need to agree on the no shooting boundaries of the safety zones. There will be no shooting outside of the safety zones for any reason.
 - a. *Consider the following when establishing the zone(s)*
 - i. **Location of vehicles/facilities/roads/pedestrians/workers/participants.** It is the gunners' responsibility to refuse to shoot until the sponsoring club has provided a safe environment in which the gunners can safely carry out their shooting duties.
 - ii. **Consider the type of load.** Hosting clubs will have specific regulations about what loads are permitted for use by the gunners. Make sure your safety zones take into consideration the type of loads you are using.
 - iii. **Consider the type of shot.** Lead carries much farther down range than steel so the safety zone(s) must be corresponding deeper when using lead shot.
 - iv. **Consider powder or dram equivalent loads.** Heavier shot and higher dram equivalent loads deliver higher down range energy. Consider this factor when establishing safety zones especially the fringes of the zones which might be in proximity to vehicles/facilities/roads/pedestrians/workers/participant.
 - v. **Consider what is at the end of the zone especially when shooting towards thick cover or trees.**

1) Trees and riparian growth often occur along rivers/streams.

Consider that rivers and streams frequently have recreational users (boaters, fishermen, hikers, bird watchers etc.) and facilities such as launch sites or fishing sites. The safety zones must take these possibilities into consideration.

Emergency situations. *You as a gunner have the absolute authority to unload your gun and notify the judges that an unsafe condition exists. You have the authority to remain inactive as a gunner until the unsafe condition is corrected to your satisfaction or until you have notified the gun captain and received his advice.*

5. Sluicing a bird on the ground or on the water.

a. Be aware that sluicing a bird on water requires a much wider safety zone than shooting a bird in the air or sluicing a bird on the ground. Pellets can bounce at severe (even 90 degree angles) from where they strike the water.

b. One and only one gunner should be designated to sluice birds. It will be that gunner's responsibility to set up a safety zone for sluicing considering the effect of pellet bounce on water. The gunner in charge of sluicing will always respect a "do not shoot" call. An example would be a "do not shoot" call from the gunner designated to watch for a potential break from the working and/or honor dog.

c. One member of the gunning squad/team (other than the gunner designated to sluice birds) will be designated to watch both the working dog and the honor dog.

This gunner will be responsible to:

- i. Know when a series requires a dog to honor and make the other gunner(s) aware that there will be an honor dog in the series.
- ii. Watch both the working and honor dog for the possibility of a break.
- iii. Call off any sluicing shot on land or water if the working or honor dog breaks.

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