

# Safe Weapons Handling Procedures

# THINK 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.**

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## Safe Weapons Handling Procedures

**1.** Unintentional discharges are preventable however; they continue to occur at an alarming rate. Commanders and leaders must ensure Soldiers are trained on appropriate standards and enforce standards for weapons safety and clearing procedures.

**2.** There is no difference between unloading and clearing a weapon. Unloading a weapon is simply one step in the process of clearing. At no time should a weapon be unloaded and not cleared.

**3.** A significant number of mishaps resulting in injuries and loss of life have been associated with unintentional discharges during weapons cleaning and subsequent function checks with ammunition present.

**4.** Soldiers should always remember the basics of safe weapons handling. Following these guidelines will reduce mishaps:

- a. Safe muzzle orientation is critical to weapons safety. Always keep weapons pointed in a safe direction. At no time should any part of the human body be in the likely path of a bullet. This requires constant awareness of the muzzle orientation and frequent repositioning and adjusting of the weapon. Muzzle orientation needs to be enforced at all times, and weapons should always be treated as if they are loaded. It is critical that Soldiers learn muzzle orientation as a life skill that becomes second nature and a personal responsibility. Soldiers also have a responsibility to avoid placing themselves in the path of another Soldier's muzzle.
- b. Keep weapons on safe at all times when not engaging a target or when enemy contact is not imminent.
- c. Keep fingers off of the trigger until firing the weapon is intended. There have been numerous unintentional discharges resulting from Soldiers being bumped while the weapon safety selector was placed on FIRE and their finger was on the trigger.
- d. Commanders need to ensure controls are in place to prevent Soldiers from mishandling weapons in living and sleeping areas. Distractions such as TVs, phones, digital music players and computers should be avoided while handling weapons.
- e. Integrate clearing procedures into pre-deployment training at mobilization stations and combat training centers.

**8** Contingency deployments. While on a contingency deployment, theater commanders will establish strict guidance that addresses the following:

- a. Supervised weapons clearing.
- b. When ammunition is to be issued to Soldiers.
- c. When weapons are to be loaded.
- d. The placement of clearing barrels if required.
- e. Emplacement of clearing pits or designation of clearing lanes for mounted and crew-served weapons that account for the surface danger area of the system to be cleared.
- f. The frequency in which weapons are cleared.
- g. Types of situations in which an officer or NCO is permitted to allow Soldiers to place their weapons in a firing posture.
- h. Test firing of weapons will be strictly controlled by the chain of command under controlled conditions. A test-fire range will be set up during deployments, and controls placed and enforced by the forward operating base or life support area commander.

**INFO ON INDIVIDUAL WEAPONS IS LOCATED INSIDE**

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- f. Leaders should supervise weapons clearing at all times whether ammunition is present or not. Leaders need to remain involved to ensure ammunition has not inadvertently been left in the weapon or placed in the weapon in a manner that can result in an unintentional discharge. Leader enforcement of muzzle orientation is particularly important during weapons clearing procedures.
- g. When clearing weapons on ranges, orientate the weapon downrange during the clearing process. When a clearing barrel is required by local installation SOPs, use the requirements outlined in this pamphlet.
- h. Commanders at all levels are mandated to ensure a range safety program is in place. The range safety program will cover OIC and RSO duties as outlined in AR 385-63 and DA Pam 385-63. The commander will ensure the RSO is qualified on the weapons systems to be fired.
- i. Leaders or vehicle commanders will ensure weapons systems are clear before moving off the range and before installing or removing weapons from the mount.
- j. Leaders or vehicle commanders will ensure a weapon fired from a vehicle mount is coordinated with dismounted elements in the area and the firing sector is clear. (An example would be a Bradley commander maintaining a visual on their sector of fire from the vehicle commander's hatch, not through the weapon's scope, ensuring dismounted elements remain clear of the surface danger zone of the weapon system used).

- b. Maintenance. All clearing barrels must be checked annually to ensure maintenance and upkeep of the construction standard.
- c. Location and size: Units will assess each location and determine what size barrel best suits their needs. The clearing barrel will be mounted at a height and angle that permits safe and smooth weapons clearing. A 36-inch safety zone immediately surrounding the barrel will be marked on the ground or floor area with a red 4-inch line. Paint, colored tape or colored tiles may be used to mark the 4-inch line.
- d. Instructions. Commanders will ensure clearing procedures are posted, in a large format, adjacent to the clearing barrel. Each type of weapon will require its own description of the appropriate clearing procedures. Handheld laminated cards or checklists may be used in less permanent locations, such as field sites.
- e. GSA-approved commercial containment systems (clearing barrels) for the type of weapon system may be used in lieu of the constructed clearing barrels listed above. They will be utilized and maintained IAW the manufacturers' instructions. The requirement for annual inspection and clearing area standards remains the same.

- 6.** Armorer responsibilities include:
- a. Verify each individual's authority to bear arms before issuing weapons or ammunition.
  - b. Ensure each weapon is cleared and visually inspected prior to issue or turn-in to verify all ammunition has been removed.
  - c. Issue all weapons shoulder gunstock assembly (butt) first, muzzle elevated, slide or bolt locked to the rear and on SAFE.
  - d. Allow only one person at a time to approach the issue and turn-in area.

- 5.** Weapons issue and turn-in procedures:
- a. During the issue and turn-in of weapons, both the armorer and the Soldier will visually verify that the weapon does not contain any ammunition. This procedure will be conducted whether ammunition was issued or not.
  - b. Each weapon system will be cleared before turn-in and upon direction of the supervisor, individuals will proceed directly to the turn-in point. Clearing should be supervised at all times.

**7.** 7.62mm and below, that are not mounted to a vehicle may be accomplished in conjunction with a clearing barrel when appropriate and available. The commander must provide clearing barrels at designated clearing locations when required by local SOPs. Further guidance concerning construction, maintenance and location of clearing barrels can be found in Air Force Manual 31-129. Clearing barrels will meet the following minimum standards:

- a. Construction. A 30-gallon container (drum) filled with pea gravel. Clearing barrels must be at least 14 inches wide and 24 inches deep. If dry sand is used (although pea gravel provides the greatest stopping ability), units will ensure the sand is kept dry and free of debris. If the barrel is placed outdoors, place dry sand in a plastic bag and tie it off prior to placing it into the clearing barrel. Clearing barrels will have a 3/4-inch plywood or thick rubber matting covering the diameter of the container and fitted directly behind the lid to reinforce it against muzzle blast. The barrel opening will have an aiming point in the center of the front lid at least 4 inches in diameter and 1 inch deep. The barrel will also have a tray with rubber matting affixed under the aiming point to prevent dropped rounds from falling to the ground.



## M16 SERIES RIFLE/ M4 SERIES CARBINE

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.
2. Place the weapon selector lever on SAFE. (NOTE: If the weapon is not cocked, the lever cannot be pointed toward SAFE.) Remove magazine by depressing magazine catch button and pulling the magazine down.
3. Lock the bolt open.

(1) Pull the charging handle to the rear.

(2) Press and hold the bottom of the bolt catch.

(3) Allow the bolt to move forward until it engages the bolt catch.

(4) Return the charging handle to the forward position.

(5) Ensure the selector is on SAFE.

4. Visually inspect the chamber to ensure it contains no ammunition.
5. Allow the bolt to move forward by pressing the upper portion of the bolt catch.
6. Close the ejection port cover.



## M9 SEMIAUTOMATIC PISTOL

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Place decocking/safety lever in the SAFE position.

3. Remove the magazine by pressing the magazine catch button and pulling the magazine down.

4. Grasp the slide serrations and fully retract the slide to remove the chambered cartridge. Lock the slide to the rear by pushing the slide stop up. Check the receiver and chamber to ensure these areas contain no ammunition.

5. Release the slide by pushing the slide stop down. Ensure the decocking/safety lever is in the SAFE position.



## M11 SEMIAUTOMATIC PISTOL

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Thumb down the decocking lever.

3. Remove the magazine by pressing the magazine catch button and pulling the magazine down.

4. Grasp the slide serrations and fully retract the slide to remove the chambered cartridge. Lock the slide to the rear by pushing up the slide stop. Check the receiver and chamber to ensure these areas contain no ammunition.

5. Release the slide by pushing the slide catch lever. Thumb down the decocking lever.



## M2/M2A1 (.50 CAL) MACHINE GUN

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Place the safety or trigger block on S (SAFE).

3. Place the weapon in the single-shot mode. Unlock the bolt latch release.

4. Look in a safe direction then raise the cover.

5. Lift the cartridge extractor and remove the ammunition belt from the feedway.

**WARNING:** Round may fall to surface and possibly explode.

6. Pull and lock the bolt to the rear, leaving the retracting slide handle to the rear.

7. (NOTE: Step 7 is for the fixed M48 turret type and fixed type.)

Move the M10 charger lock selector to the rear. Charge the weapon.

**WARNING:** Chamber may be hot. Use caution while inspecting T-slot.

8. Visually inspect the chamber and T-slot for rounds (in darkness, the gunner must feel the chamber and T-slot to ensure they are clear).

9. Press the bolt latch release and ease the bolt forward with the retracting slide handle.

10. (NOTE: Step 10 is for fixed M48 turret type and fixed type.)

Move the M10 charger lock selector forward and pull back on the retracting slide handle until a click is heard, and then ease the bolt forward.

11. Close the cover.

12. If the weapon is to be stored, press the trigger.



## M240 SERIES MACHINE GUNS

### Unloading and clearing procedures

**WARNING:** Under no circumstances should the safety be engaged with the bolt in the forward position. Always ensure the safety is in the FIRE (F) position before charging the weapon; otherwise, the weapon will become jammed when charged with the safety in the SAFE (S) position.

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Place the safety to FIRE (F) before moving the bolt/operating rod assembly. Pull the charger cable (or, with palm up, the cocking handle assembly) with the right hand fully to the rear and ensure the bolt locks completely to the rear. While holding the charger cable or cocking handle, place the safety to SAFE (S). Release the charger cable or return the cocking handle assembly to the fully forward and locked position.

3. Push in the feed cover latches, look in a safe direction, raise the feed cover and conduct a four-point safety check for brass, links or ammunition.

(1) Check the feed pawl assembly under the cover.

(2) Check the feed tray.

(3) Lift the feed tray and inspect the chamber.

(4) Check the space between the face of the bolt and the chamber as well as the space under the bolt/operating rod assembly.

4. Lower the feed tray and close the feed cover, making sure it locks shut. Place the safety to FIRE (F). Pull and hold the charger cable (or, with palm up, the cocking handle assembly) with the right hand to the rear while fully depressing the trigger and ease the bolt forward to close and lock. Release the trigger. The safety must not be able to be moved to SAFE (S).

(NOTE: Be sure the bolt is forward with the safety on FIRE (F) when the weapon is not in use.)

**WARNING! DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.**



## M249 MACHINE GUN

### Unloading and clearing procedures

**WARNING:** Under no circumstances should the safety be engaged with the bolt in the forward position. Always ensure the safety is in the FIRE position before charging the weapon; otherwise, the weapon may malfunction when charged with the safety in the SAFE position.

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Move the safety to FIRE position (red ring showing) by pushing it to the left. With the right palm up, pull the cocking handle completely to the rear, ensuring the bolt locks to the rear. While still holding the cocking handle, move the safety to the SAFE position (red ring hidden) by pushing it to the right. Return the cocking handle assembly to the fully forward and locked position.

3. Prior to raising the feed tray cover, look in a safe direction.

a. Belt-fed. Raise the feed tray cover and remove any ammunition or links from the feed tray.

b. Magazine-fed. Push down on the magazine release tab and pull the magazine out. Then, raise the cover.

c. Conduct a five-point safety check for brass, links or ammunition.

(1) Check the feed pawl assembly under the cover.

(2) Check the feed tray.

(3) Lift the feed tray and inspect the chamber.

(4) Check magazine well.

(5) Check the space between the face of the bolt and the chamber, as well as the space under the bolt and operating rod assembly.

4. Lower the feed tray and close the feed cover, making sure it locks shut. Move the safety to the FIRE position (red ring showing) by pushing it to the left. With the right palm up, pull the cocking handle to the rear. While fully depressing the trigger with the left hand, ease the bolt forward to close and lock. Release the trigger. The safety must not be able to be moved to SAFE.

(NOTE: Be sure the bolt is forward with the safety on FIRE when the weapon is not in use.)



## MK19 GRENADE MACHINE GUN

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

2. Ensure the safety switch is to the left, showing S (SAFE).

3. Open the cover assembly. If opening the cover after firing, look away for 3-5 seconds while opening the cover assembly.

4. If the bolt is locked to the rear, lower one charging handle and pull it to the rear. Observe the bolt face for ammunition or cartridges, then proceed to step 6.

5. If the bolt is not locked to the rear, pull both charging handles to the rear, locking the bolt. Return only one of the charging handles to the forward, upright and locked position, leaving the other charging handle to the rear. Observe for any ammunition or spent cartridges that are still

attached to the face of the bolt or chamber.

6. Remove any ammunition from the feed tray by reaching beneath the feed tray and pressing up on the primary and secondary positioning pawls. While depressing the pawls, slide the linked rounds out of the feed tray and feed throat.

7. Remove any ammunition from the bolt face by inserting a section of a cleaning rod through the left side of the receiver rail. Place it on top of the live round or cartridge case, as close to the bolt face as possible, and push up on the cleaning rod. This action will force the round or cartridge down and out of the bottom of the MK19. (NOTE: Ensure you position a hand to catch the ejected round.)

**WARNING:** Do not use a bayonet to remove a cartridge case or live ammo from the bolt face. Damage could be caused to the vertical cam and the bolt face.

8. Visually observe the face of the bolt and chamber to ensure the weapon is clear of ammunition and cartridges.

9. Move the safety switch to the right, showing F (FIRE).

10. Maintain rearward pressure on the rear charging handle and depress the trigger, riding the bolt forward. Return the charging handle to the upright and locked position.

11. Move the safety switch back to the left, showing S (SAFE).

12. Close the cover assembly, ensuring the secondary drive lever is to the right. DO NOT SLAM THE COVER!



## M203 GRENADE LAUNCHER

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction. (NOTE: Prior to clearing the M203, the M16 or M4 must be cleared first.)

2. Push in the barrel release lever and slide the barrel forward. Watch to see if a round extracts.

3. Move the safety lever to SAFE position. Inspect the barrel to ensure ammunition is not present.

If ammunition is present, grasp the rim of the cartridge and pull it rearward out of the barrel.

4. Pull the barrel rearward until it locks in the closed position. Visually ensure the safety lever is in the SAFE position.



## M320 GRENADE LAUNCHER

### Unloading and clearing procedures

1. Point the weapon in a safe direction.

(NOTE: Prior to clearing the M320, the M16 or M4 must be cleared first.)

2. Move the safety lever to the SAFE (S) position.

3. Press the barrel release and allow the barrel to swing out to the left side of the receiver.

4. Inspect the barrel to ensure ammunition is not present. If ammunition is present, grasp the rim of the cartridge and pull it rearward out of the barrel.

5. Pivot the barrel into the receiver until it locks in the closed position. Visually ensure the safety is in the SAFE (S) position.