



# CANADIAN FIREARMS PROGRAM

## COWBOY MOUNTED SHOOTING ASSOCIATIONS

### SUGGESTED OPERATING CONDITIONS/REQUIREMENTS/GUIDELINES

1. **Background.** Over the past several years there have been an increasing number of new activities/sports that involve the use of firearms (mainly the restricted class) discharging blank ammunition/rounds (Blk Rds). When the Firearms Act (FA) came into force most of these new activities were not considered and as such there are no specific authorizations in the FA nor its Regulations (Regs) to fully support these activities/sports.
2. **Aim.** The aim of these guidelines is to establish a set of conditions/requirements to be considered for implementation by the various groups in order to ensure that the intent of the FA is met with respect to the safe use, storage, transportation and public safety for the firearms in use.
3. **THE FIREARMS ACT & REGULATIONS**
  - a. **CLUB APPLICATIONS & APPROVALS.** The Shooting Clubs and Shooting Regulations (SOR/98-212) are applicable to the Mounted Shooters Associations. Given that only blank ammunition (no projectile fired) is used, the regulations governing ranges is not applicable. However, in order to acquire restricted firearms there must be a confirmation of purpose (target shooting competitions or target practice at an approved shooting range or approved club by providing proof of membership or Collecting) and as such there is a requirement for a club approval in accordance with the regulations. Applications are to be made utilizing the form CAFC 741EW (dated 2007-01-01). Completed applications with all of the supporting documentation are to be submitted to the CFO for processing. Please include a letter from your Municipality/County/etc that indicates that you are authorized to discharge blank ammunition on the intended training location(s) for mounted shooting.
  - b. **FIREARMS LICENCES.** Every member of the approved club must be in possession of a valid Possession Only Licence (POL) or Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL) with the appropriate privileges. There may be situations where potential new members, that are not in possession of a POL/PAL, may want to try firing the restricted handguns with blank ammunition to see if it is an activity they will enjoy before making the investment in training and purchasing a firearm. Those perspective members that do not have a valid POL/PAL can fire a restricted firearm under the direct and immediate supervision/control of a holder of a valid POL/PAL (with restricted privileges) while on the ground only. During training clinics, at no time will an individual without a valid POL/PAL fire or handle firearms while mounted

on a horse outside the direct and immediate supervision/control of a valid POL/PAL holder (with the appropriate privileges for the firearms in use). This last condition is necessary since an un-licensed individual will not have the benefit of any firearm safety training and the instructor will not be in a position to take direct and immediate action should a safety situation develop while the un-licensed person is mounted. If the club is conducting Introductory sessions on the sport for prospective members and they want to try the sport before committing to the training then the club may conduct a mounted introductory session under the following conditions:

- i. The rider shall be mounted on a horse that has been desensitized to the noise from a fired blank (at least 3 hrs of training is suggested or until the horse is not startled by the noise). Although not a firearm regulated activity it does fall into the category of safe firearm handling;
  - ii. The rider shall only walk the horse;
  - iii. The rider shall receive basic firearms safety training prior to mounting the horse (ie) Muzzle control, holding, aiming, firing, trigger finger safety, etc
  - iv. There are no timing pressures on the rider;
  - v. A club member/trainer shall ride immediately beside the person trying the sport so that they can influence or take direct and immediate control;
  - vi. The rider shall only fire single action – no “slip hammering” or “fanning”; and
  - vii. The rider will be handed the firearm once mounted – no holster use; and
  - viii. The rider shall only attend an introductory session once.
- c. **AUTHORIZATIONS TO TRANSPORT (ATTs).** There are two types of ATTs, Short Term (S-ATT) and Long Term (L-ATT). ATTs are required to move restricted firearms. The ATTs contain specific locations and timings for training or competition venues. Initially, a new club member will have to submit requests for L-ATTs to the CFO. A L-ATT issued for the live fire ranges does not cover the movement of firearms for mounted shooting training or competition venues since there is no shooting range approval associated with these locations. However, ATTs can be issued for certain locations. ATTs are obtained through the CFO office of the area you reside.
- d. **LENDING/BORROWING OF FIREARMS.** Club members (valid POL/PAL holders) are authorized to lend or borrow firearms from another holder of a valid POL/PAL that are to be used at a training/competition venue if that person has the appropriate privileges for the firearms being borrowed. If the firearm(s) to be borrowed or loaned are registered restricted firearms then the lender provides the borrower with the valid Registration Certificate(s) (Reg Certs) for each borrowed restricted firearm. Although not a requirement of the FA, the lender could provide the borrower with a letter indicating that they have lent the firearms (each firearm loaned indicated in the letter) to the person in possession (by name and POL/PAL number) of the firearms. Firearms may be loaned or borrowed at a training/competition venue (on site) without the need for letters or providing the Reg Certs.

Some CFO offices list the specific firearms on the ATT. Check with the CFO office for the area that you plan to attend an event outside of your province.

- e. **STORAGE, DISPLAY, TRANSPORTATION AND SAFE HANDLING.** Storage, Display, Transportation and Safe Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations (SOR/98-209) are applicable to Mounted Shooters Associations. Club members are responsible for the overall security and safe use of their firearms at all times. Club policies, rules, bylaws and procedures must be designed to provide members with the optimum conditions for complying with the storage, display, transportation and safe handling Regulations. Given the uniqueness of the mounted shooting training/activities, additional guidance is provided as follows:
  - i. **Mounted shooters.** See the conceptual/generic layout (Annex A) of a training/competition venue. The complexity of combining horse, rider and firearm activities requires an enhanced level of coordination. Set up of training locations or competition venues must facilitate the safe transition from tacking up the horses, uncasing firearms, the movement of horse, rider and firearms to the waiting/staging areas, the actual training or competition and the return to the tack area post training/competition. The intent of this layout is to outline what components are necessary. Actual positioning will vary depending on the venue being utilized. During unstructured training sessions (ie) individual practice, a minimum of one person is required to be in attendance in addition to the rider.
  - ii. **Tack-up area.** Club members are clearly responsible for uncasing their unloaded firearms and holstering them in the tack up area of the training/competition venue. The unloaded firearms are to never leave the control of the valid POL/PAL holder at any time (unless being loaned to another valid POL/PAL holder). The practice of handing over the firearms to a wrangler at a central location is strongly discouraged. Once the horse and rider are ready to train or compete, they then proceed to the Safe Handling or Loading Area by the most direct route without any stops. At no time are the firearms to be unholstered or handled along the route to the Safe Handling or Loading area.
  - iii. **Safe Handling Area.** There should be a safe handling area established at the training/competition venue. It is here and only here that firearms may be handled prior to training/competition. This area must be free from any type of ammunition. All firearms can be drawn and pointed in a safe direction away from the public or other participants. Participants shall holster and secure their firearms (Holster) prior to departing this area and moving to the training area (if no ammunition is to be utilized) or they move to the Loading Area.

- iv. **Ammunition Point/Area.** This point/area should be established in order to provide a central area for all blank ammunition (black powder propellant only, no wax bullets, no fillers [crushed nuts] of any kind and certainly no projectiles – this includes any form of pyrotechnic fillers [ie] fire crackers, flares, etc). The control of this area must be the responsibility of one person (the ammunition officer) holding a valid POL/PAL that has significant experience with ammunition. All blank ammunition to be utilized for the training event or competition must be placed in this area. All blank ammunition shall be visually inspected in order to verify that it is blank ammunition only. Random weight samplings from each manufacturing brand being used should be completed (see paragraph on blank ammunition below). All blank ammunition must be checked for cleanliness, free from defects and segregated by caliber. Ammunition being issued to competitors shall take place in the loading area only. The ammunition handler(s) issue the required number of rounds of blank ammunition to each person undergoing training and or competing. It is the responsibility of the rider to load their own firearm(s). If members are supplying their own ammunition, it must be placed in the ammunition point/area, marked for them and still inspected by the ammunition officer. Reloaded ammunition is covered in the paragraph on blank ammunition below. During unstructured/individual training sessions the responsibility for care and control of all blank ammunition is the responsibility of the rider utilizing firearms. Security of ammunition is particularly important if the training session is in a shared use location with non-mounted shooters. Regardless of the situation, every effort shall be made to ensure that no live ammunition (ie) a cartridge case containing a fixed projectile, is not brought onto the property where the training or competition is being held.
- v. **Loading Area.** It is here that the competitors receive their ammunition, inspect their ammunition for cleanliness, correct caliber, free from visible defects and ensuring that it is actually Blank Ammunition. Once the competitor or person undergoing training/competition is satisfied that the correct ammunition has been supplied they may then unholster, point their firearms in a safe direction and load their firearms, reholster and move to the waiting area or start line. The firearm must not be handled any further until the rider has crossed the start line. During unstructured/individual training sessions the loading of firearms should take place as close to the arena/corral as possible.
- vi. **Event/Training Master.** This person is designated and responsible to control all of the activities of any training event or competition. All event support staff (ammunition officer, safety officer, judges, timers, target setters, etc) movements are controlled by this person. Members attending training clinics must be sufficiently trained/experienced to undertake the new training (ie) a “green rider”

should not be taking advanced training without having completed novice, beginner or intermediate type training.

- vii. **Safety Officer.** This person is specifically designated to perform firearm safety related activities **ONLY**. The Safety Officer must have a PAL with the privileges associated with the classes of firearms being used at the training or competition venue. The Safety Officer must be familiar with all of the firearms in use so that they can clear them if required. This person is responsible to ensure that the danger area is clear of all people prior to a horse and rider entering the arena. The Safety Officer is also responsible to ensure that the target line(s) are established so that the spectator and support staff are outside of the danger area. The Safety officer reports directly to the Event Master. A system should be developed between the Event Master and the Safety Officer to indicate that the training/competition area is clear of people ready for a rider. The Safety Officer should have the authority to stop any unsafe firearm related activity and as such should have a means of sounding an alarm to stop all activities (ie) whistle, air horn, hand held Public Address (PA – loud haler) system, etc. Should an incident take place whereby the rider is not capable of possessing their firearm(s) the Safety Officer shall take possession, clear the firearm(s) and securely store the firearm(s) until such point that the owner can take possession or give instructions for an authorized person to take responsibility for the firearm(s).
- viii. **Danger Area.** See Annex B. A danger area has been established based on the information available concerning commercially manufactured blank ammunition from the suppliers. Generally, all of the commercially produced blanks perform the same in accordance with the regulations established by the governing body for the sport. Given the number of different firearms (ie) handguns, rifles and shotguns being utilized as well as the different calibers that could be fired it is complicated to create different danger areas. Therefore, one standard danger area for blank ammunition has been developed. Riding arenas vary in size from 20m x 40m, 20m x 60m and 30m x 60m. The danger area template affords a large area for the rider to engage the targets. Therefore, this single danger area approach will support blank firing ranging from .22 calibre blanks through .38/40, .357magnum, .44/40, .44, .45 Long Colt, 410 bore, 20 gauge and 12 gauge (with or without gauge mates or similar tubes/inserts that reduce the bore (ie) 12 gauge inserts that reduce the chamber to fire .410 hulls or .45LC blanks. The danger area is measured from the target location out to a radius distance of 34 feet or 11 yards or 10 meters in a 180 degree semi circle. This approach will provide maximum flexibility to event organizers while also ensuring the safety of any spectators or combustible infrastructure. More information concerning reloaded ammunition is contained in the blank ammunition paragraph below.

- ix. **Start/Finish line/area.** This is a line established by the Event Master where the horse and rider crosses in order to start and stop the time or enter and leave the arena/coral. Once the rider is in the area immediately near the start line they can draw their firearm(s) but not cock them. At the completion of the run all firearms must be holstered or in a scabbard immediately after crossing the finish line. This line or area shall be free from any other competitor/person under training or an event worker until cleared by the current rider. The area shall be large enough so that any negligent discharges do not affect those in the immediate area.
  
- x. **Training or Competition arena/area.** It is recognized that the failure rate on blank ammunition is extremely low. However, it is necessary to have a thorough plan to deal with misfires or unauthorized “slip hammer or fanning” maneuvers that could appear as a misfire. This area is the designated area that riders discharge their blank ammunition. Should a misfire (the blank round of ammunition fails to fire) take place the rider must stop training or competing, remain mounted and stop firing. The rider points their firearm in a safe direction. A mandatory 60 second waiting period is required to ensure that the blank ammunition does not fire. The rider may still walk their horse during the wait period. After the 60 seconds has elapsed, the rider is to unload and hand over the misfired round of blank ammunition to the Safety Officer or Event Master. The misfired round of blank ammunition shall be inspected to determine if the primer was or was not fairly struck. If the primer was not struck or not fairly struck it may be re-introduced into the event. If the primer has been struck then the misfired round of blank ammunition shall be placed in an appropriate container filled with a fluid that will render the black powder immediately inert pending disposal action. This container shall be constructed to contain the effects of the blank firing late. Upon completion of the training or competition misfired blank ammunition shall be disposed of in a safe manner. If repeated misfires take place from one firearm then the affected firearm should be inspected for cleanliness or unsafe modifications. If there are many different firearms affected then the LOT or BATCH of blank ammunition should be determined and if the misfired rounds are from one lot or batch of blank ammunition that lot or batch should be no longer used and it should be quarantined. Disposal of this ammunition should be in accordance with Association rules. “Slip Hammering” - CMSA does not sanction “slip hammering or Fanning” during competition. If slip hammer manoeuvres are allowed at the local levels the triggers shall only be held back by muscle power. Under no circumstances shall any form of “aid” be used to depress the trigger (ie) no tape, wire, leather, cord, rope, etc.
  
- xi. **Misfire storage area.** This is an area designated to hold misfired blank ammunition. This area should be located away from any occupied area. See Annex A for a suggested location. The important aspect of this area is the container. The

designated container that will hold misfired blank ammunition shall be sufficiently strong enough to contain a late firing round of blank ammunition. See paragraph above for additional details.

- xii. **Unloading Area.** This area is controlled by one person that is a holder of a valid PAL with the privileges corresponding to the firearms in use. The intent is that a rider shall attend this location, unholster their firearm, pointing the firearm in a safe direction and unload the firearm. Spent/fired casing are handed over to the support staff who shall dispose of them in accordance with the Association rules. Once all firearms are unloaded and proved safe utilizing ACTS and PROVE they are holstered and the rider moves to secure their firearms. Should the rider experience difficulties in unloading their firearms the assistance of the staff member in the unloading area may be sought.
- xiii. **Securing firearms.** Once the rider has completed training or competing, they are to move back to the storage site for their firearms in the most direct route without any stops. Once in location they shall secure their firearms in accordance with the Storage, Display, Transportation and Safe Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations (SOR/98-209).

#### **4. THE TRAINING & COMPETITION SEASON**

- a. **BEFORE you attend the training or competition event.** It is important to ensure that you are in possession of your POL/PAL, Registration Certificates, Authorization To Transport and proper storage containers for the firearms being transported. The Storage, Display, Transportation and Safe Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations (SOR/98-209) should be reviewed in order to refresh members on the requirements.
- b. **ONCE at the training or competition site.** Proper security of firearms and ammunition is mandatory at all times. The preceding paragraphs and Regulations outline the conditions that must be adhered to while at the training or competition venue/site. Paragraph 3, e, outlines the requirements for mounted shooters to follow in addition to the FA and Regulations.
- c. **COMPETITIONS/TRAINING**
  - i. **EVENT AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS** (Municipal, Provincial, Federal). It is incumbent upon the event organizers to ensure that any and all additional requirements for hosting the event are complied with prior to the event taking place. The CFO must be kept informed of and approve the training/competition venue if different from one that has been previously approved. If the event is large and many people will be attending it may be prudent to advise the local law enforcement agency of the event. Periodic spot checks on members possession of valid POL/PALs, Registration Certificates and Authorization To Transport is strongly encouraged. Club executives are to inform the CFO of any member that is no longer in good standing and/or no longer a member

within 30 days of the effective date of ceasing to be a member. Annex C contains information for International attendees wishing to participate. It is very important for event organizers to share this information with any prospective international competitor(s).

- ii. **EVENT LAYOUT & OPERATION** (Single use or shared arena/corral). In addition to the requirements of paragraph 3 E, mounted shooting should have exclusive use (ideally) of the arena or corral. However, there may be times when the space may have to be shared. Every effort to keep non-mounted shooting groups separate must be made (different entrances/exits, etc. Signage must be posted to alert the public of the activity and that hearing protection is strongly recommended. Discussions must be held with all users to ensure that they understand that the blanks will likely adversely affect untrained horses sharing the space with the trained mounted shooter horses.
  
- iii. **BLANK AMMUNITION** (Commercial Production or Privately Reloaded). Almost all sanctioned competitions require the use of commercially (factory) loaded blank ammunition. There are many authorized types of blank ammunition and they all meet the prescribed standard as set out by the various regulating organizations for mounted shooting. Like any mechanical process, there is a possibility of non-standard blank ammunition being produced. It is recommended that random checks on the different lots from different manufacturers be conducted prior to firing. A quick method for checking is to weigh a fully loaded or complete round of blank ammunition with a reloading scale that is accurate to within .1 of a grain. The middle range and most common caliber (.45 Long Colt) has been selected to compare measurements. Ideally a complete round of blank ammunition should not weigh more than 146 grains. This standard has been assessed utilizing a .45 Long Colt case that is star crimped, large pistol primer and filled with fg black powder. Checks on privately loaded/reloaded blank ammunition should be done more vigorously in order to ensure that the loads are safe and consistent. This data has been utilized to produce the danger area. Any deviations from this standard will significantly increase the danger to spectators and participants. Re-crimping of previously fired blank ammunition is not authorized. The potential of metal fragments being discharged on re-crimped blank ammunition is increased with every re-load (since the metal is weakened). If any other calibers are being considered for use the club/association should contact the CFO office in their jurisdiction for approval.
  
- iv. **DANGER ZONES FOR BLANK AMMUNITION.** Annex B outlines the danger zones for blank ammunition. To apply the danger template, position the targets in the desired locations and measure out 34 feet (11 yards or 10 meters) in semi circle (as indicated in the Annex) with the base of the semi circle parallel to the direction of travel. The area contained inside the 34 feet represents the danger area and must be kept clear of people, horses and combustible infrastructure (other than the targets). Layout all of the



targets in accordance with the desired course of fire and establish the overall danger area. Risk mitigation can take place to adjust target locations to fit the danger area established. Every effort must be made to ensure that no one person can access this area during the discharging of the blank ammunition. If the space is to be shared with other users, consideration for roping off the danger area should be done. The Safety Officer shall visually verify that the danger area is clear of target setters or other support staff before signaling to the Event Master that the next competitor or training activity can proceed safely.

- v. **INCIDENT/INJURY REPORTING.** All incidents, regardless of severity involving firearms shall be reported to the CFO within two days. Complete details of the situation with names and POL/PAL numbers of all parties involved as well as any witnesses shall be provided to the CFO. If there are injuries or damage to property not owned by the club the local law enforcement agency shall be notified in addition to the CFO (please provide the Police File Number). For any personal injuries resulting from firearm or ammunition use shall complete and submit the CAFC form 864 E-W (dated 2007/01/01) v3 to the CFO within 2 days of the incident/injury. If reporting will take longer than two days the CFO should be contacted by telephone and made aware of the situation. Although this form is specific to shooting ranges it is applicable for mounted shooting situations.
- vi. **MISFIRE PROCEDURES.** Should a misfire take place during a competition run or during a training activity the run or activity shall STOP immediately. The firearm shall be pointed in a safe direction and a mandatory waiting period of 60 seconds shall be observed where there is no activity with the affected firearm. After the mandatory 60 seconds wait period has elapsed, the rider shall immediately unload the firearm, hand over the misfired blank round of ammunition to either the Safety Officer or the Event Master. The blank round of ammunition shall be inspected in accordance with the direction contained in paragraph 3, e, x.
- vii. **SAFETY.** General safety is the responsibility of everyone. Firearm and ammunition safety is the responsibility of the Event Master, Event Safety Officer(s) and the owner of the firearms and ammunition. At all times, the safety of the Public, Event Staff, Horse and Rider shall be paramount over all other activities. The application of the danger area trace (Annex B) is the joint responsibility of the Event Master and the Safety Officer.
  - (a) **SAFETY STAFF.** The Event Master appoints the Safety officer. Paragraph 3, e, vii, outlines the overall responsibilities of the Safety Officer. It must be emphasized that the sole task of the Safety officer is that of SAFETY. If warranted, other members may be assigned to assist the Safety Officer. The prerequisites for the safety officer apply to additional safety staff members.

- (b) **HORSE SAFETY.** Although not governed by the FA, clearly there is a requirement to ensure that the horses are kept as safe as possible. Blank ammunition, when misused, can cause serious injuries. The nature of mounted shooting has the rider cross drawing their firearms. There is great potential for the negligent discharge of a firearm that could severely injure the horse and as such create negative second and third order effects. All Federal, Provincial or Municipal laws/regulations regarding animal safety shall be strictly complied with at all times. As a rule of thumb, fingers shall be off the trigger until the firearm is on/pointed at the target to be engaged. Ideally the firearm should not be discharged near the head, neck, shoulders or flanks of the horse. Obviously, training without blank ammunition in the early development of the rider is the key to reducing the probability of a negligent discharge that could cause injury to the horse and rider. Training and event staff must be very clear with respect to the competency requirements of riders and ensure that riders are adequately trained to participate safely prior to and during each training/competition event.
- (c) **RIDER SAFETY.** Once again, the Firearms Act and Regulations does not govern this portion of the sport. However, as outlined in the preceding paragraph, the rider must be competent. Controlling the horse is complimentary to controlling the firearms that will be fired. Should a rider drop their firearm(s) or fall off of the horse causing them to lose control of their firearm(s) the activity shall stop immediately. The dropped firearm(s) shall be immediately secured by either the Safety Officer or Event Master, Unloaded and ACTS and PROVE be carried out to ensure that the firearm(s) do not have any barrel/cylinder obstructions. If the rider is injured control of the firearm shall remain with the Safety Officer or Event Master until such time as arrangements are made to return the firearm(s) to the registered owner or their authorized delegate. Association rules should indicate the procedures to be followed for returning firearm(s) in this instance.
- (d) **PUBLIC SAFETY.** At all times the safety of the public (spectators) shall be ensured. The preceding paragraphs have outlined the steps necessary for contributing to a safe training or competition activity. Before any event the spectators or public shall be advised that the activity involves the use of firearms and blank ammunition. Warning signs should be considered if the activity is occurring in a multi-use/shared facility.
- d. **BEFORE you depart the event.** A visual inspection of the training/competition area shall take place to ensure that all ammunition (misfires, empty casing, live blank rounds) and firearms have been collected and properly secured. All participants shall ensure that they comply with the Storage, Display, Transportation and Safe Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations for the return trip home.

- e. **ONCE at home.** Properly cleaned and maintained firearms will significantly reduce firing problems normally associated with firing blank ammunition. Empty/fired casings (if collected) should be inspected in order to determine if there is any indication of primer bulging or set back. Once any cleaning or maintenance is completed the firearm and ammunition is secured in accordance with the Storage, Display, Transportation and Safe Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations. Planning for the next training event or competition should start especially if it involves obtaining an Authorization to Transport.

## **CONCLUSION**

These guidelines shall be reviewed periodically. Firearms Officers may occasionally attend training or competition venues unannounced to validate compliance and conduct liaison with your executives and/or members. The guidelines noted in the preceding paragraphs are provided to clubs so that they can manage safe training and or competition events. Should any member of the Club Executive have any questions or require clarification on the contents of these guidelines they are requested to contact their Chief Firearms Officer Office.

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