

'VISIBLE" SHOTGUN SAFETY

After shooting shotguns for a while, you can see that Shooting Safety has some basic principles of organization and it's more than a collection of one-liner thou-shalt-not's.

One of the major principles is one that I call "Visible Safety". This means that the situation is considered safe only when it can be *seen* to be safe by the participants. It's the concept behind those "Open or Out" posters that you see at all the Clubs.

So, to implement this principle, we see such rules as:

- All guns are open and empty unless on the shooting station
- Never load more than two shells (in pumps and autos this would leave the gun closed and loaded after shooting doubles)
- Never walk away from a closed gun

Folks who have a lot of field-shooting experience encounter some problems with this. They would ordinarily load their guns and place the safety in the 'on' position as they moved into the hunting fields, unloading only as they leave the active area or tow cross an unusual boundary, such as a fence or a creek.. Hunters, especially very experienced hunters have developed a reflexive habit of flicking the safety on and off, rather than opening the gun.

Well, In clay target shooting "safety catches" are not used at all. The more expensive guns have provision for locking the safety out, so that it cannot be engaged and if memory serves me right, Browning BT-99/100 trap guns *don't have a safety at all*. Principle at work here: if you trust a "safety catch" to keep the gun from firing unintentionally, you are trusting a device you cannot *see* a (since the sears are inside the gun) and it's not *visibly* safe. Only a *visibly* empty gun can be harmless.

Clay shooters' primary means of not having an accidental discharge is to have the gun open and empty at all times, except when actually shooting at a target.

Another application of the principle is to open and check over/under and single barrel guns when removing them from the case. Here, unless you *see* that the gun is empty, you cannot *know* that it is empty. The late Fred Schuerman told me a story about a trapshooter who took his Remington 870 out of his car's trunk in a Gun Club parking lot, *action closed*, put on the rack, *action closed*, took it to the 16 yard line, *action closed*, and put it barrel down on this foot, *action closed*. When it came time to shoot, this fellow picked up gun, *action closed*, with his finger in the trigger guard and discovered the gun had been loaded all along. It blew a hole through his foot and he was so embarrassed he limped to his car and drove himself to the hospital. He had passed up five or so opportunities to check and *see* if the gun was empty and paid a pretty severe price for not doing that simple thing. I can tell you from my own personal experience, getting shot *really* hurts!

Remember, if you can't *see* that something is visibly safe, it's not.