

## SAFE STORAGE

As mentioned above, it is now an offence for a person in possession of an air weapon to fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent a person under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. There have been several deaths as a result of children getting hold of air weapons. These tragedies might have been prevented had the air weapons been stored safely. Below are some simple steps to follow to reduce the risk of any such incident:

- **In many cases**, it will be sufficient to store your air weapon in an existing, suitably robust, lockable cupboard – keeping the keys separate and secure.
- **Alternatively**, you could use a lock or locking device by which your air weapon can be attached to the fabric of a building, or to a fixed feature. Or you could use a security cord, lockable chain or similar device attached to a point of anchorage within the building.
- Even where children are very young, or **are not normally present**, it is preferable to use some form of security cord or similar device rather than simply storing your air weapon up high and out of reach.
- Anyone who already holds other firearms could use their **existing** gun cabinet for their air weapon, provided this does not compromise security.
- Air weapons should be stored within the **occupied part** of a building and not in an outbuilding, such as a garage or shed.
- If you keep a number of air weapons, you might find it useful to consider some of the **security measures** suggested for licensed firearms. This information can be found in the *Firearms Security Handbook 2005*, available on the Home Office website.
- When **using** your air weapon, the best advice is to keep it under close supervision at all times and to never leave it unattended.

- Where you have **no option** but to put your air weapon down for short periods, unload it and gather up all the ammunition. Steps should then be taken to prevent anyone under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. Where practicable, this could include attaching it to a fixed object using a security cord or similar device, or locking it out of sight in a car.

## TYPES OF AIR WEAPONS

The power of an air weapon is measured in muzzle energy (or kinetic energy). This is the energy at which the projectile leaves the muzzle of the air weapon.

Air pistols with muzzle energies greater than 6 foot-pounds, as well as air weapons which use a self-contained gas cartridge system, are prohibited weapons which may only be acquired with the authority of the Secretary of State. Air rifles with a muzzle energy greater than 12 foot-pounds may only be held on a firearms certificate issued by your local police force's firearms licensing department.

If you are in any doubt, seek advice from your local police force's firearms licensing department.

## WHAT CAN I USE MY AIR WEAPON FOR?

Having bought your air weapon, you can use it for a number of purposes including target shooting, vermin control and hunting small ground game. However, if you have never shot before, you would be well advised to go to a shooting club with an air weapons section and learn from a qualified instructor how to handle your air weapon safely and responsibly and become an accurate shot.

The National Small-bore Rifle Association should be able to give you details of clubs in your area. You will find their address at the end of this leaflet.

You might find that target shooting provides all the challenge you need or you might want to move on

to shooting live quarry. If you intend to shoot live quarry, you must be careful only to do so on private property on which you have permission to shoot.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

The following is a list of organisations which can provide you with further information on using your air weapon:

The National Small-bore Rifle Association (NSRA)  
Lord Roberts Centre  
Bisley Camp  
Brookwood  
Woking  
Surrey GU24 0NP

[www.nsra.co.uk](http://www.nsra.co.uk)

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)  
Marford Mill  
Rossett  
Wrexham  
Clwyd LL12 0HL

[www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)

The British Shooting Sports Council (BSSC)  
PO Box 53608  
London SE24 9YN

[www.bssc.org.uk](http://www.bssc.org.uk)

The Gun Trade Association Ltd (GTA)  
PO Box 43  
Tewkesbury  
Gloucestershire GL20 5ZE

[www.gtald.co.uk](http://www.gtald.co.uk)

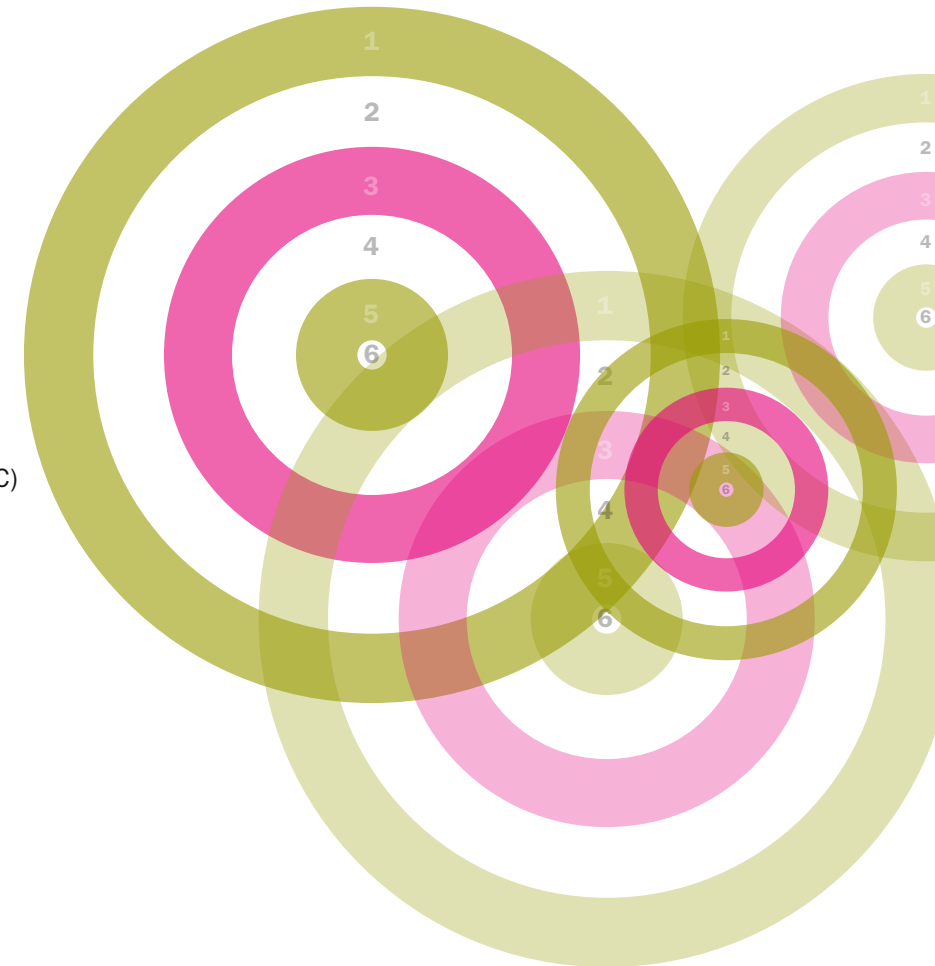
Published by Home Office  
Communications Directorate

January 2011



Home Office

# AIR WEAPONS: A brief guide to safety



This leaflet is a guide to using and storing your air weapon safely and responsibly.

It outlines the current law on air weapons and explains what you can do to be a responsible air weapon user. Before you start using your air weapon, you should read this leaflet and familiarise yourself with its contents.

For the purposes of this leaflet, references to 'air weapons' include air pistols, air guns and air rifles.

## SAFE HANDLING

In the wrong hands, an air weapon can cause serious injury or even kill. Some irresponsible users have given air weapon shooters a bad name by damaging property, shooting pets and protected wild birds, and even sniping at people. You can help to change this perception by using your weapon in a way that demonstrates that air weapon shooters are, in the main, responsible people who pose no threat to anyone. By following the common sense rules set out below, you can significantly reduce the risk of an accident.

There are some simple steps that people can take to ensure that their air weapon is kept secure and used safely. For example:

- **Always** treat an air weapon as though it were loaded.
- **Always** point an air weapon in a safe direction, preferably at the ground, and never at another person.

- **Never** load an air weapon until you are ready to fire it.
  - **Never** fire an air weapon unless you are certain that the shot will be safe. This means checking that there is nothing and no one nearby who might be endangered by the shot and ensuring that there is a suitable backstop or pellet catcher to prevent ricochets.
  - **Never** rely on a safety catch to make an air weapon safe. Such devices can fail.
  - **Never** put a loaded air weapon down. Always safely discharge or unload and uncock it first.
  - **Never** store a loaded air weapon.
  - Air weapons should be **stored out of sight** and separately from pellets.
  - Air weapons should be covered, for example in a gun slip, when being transported.
  - Air weapons **must not** be stored where unauthorised people, particularly young people under the age of 18, might gain access to them. For example, use a lockable cupboard and keep the keys secure. Air weapons should be stored inside a house rather than in an outbuilding, such as a garden shed.
  - **Consider** ways of rendering a stored air weapon incapable of being fired.
- ## AIR WEAPONS AND THE LAW
- Apart from the exceptions mentioned later, you do not need a certificate to have an air weapon. However, **all** air weapons are still classed as firearms and fall under the control of firearms legislation. As an air weapon user, you must make sure that you know the law and keep within it. If you don't, you could find yourself in court facing penalties ranging from heavy fines right up to life imprisonment.
- The following is a list of the laws by which you must abide and you might be surprised at just how long it is:
- It is an offence for a person in possession of an air weapon to fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent someone under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. A defence is provided where a person can show that they had reasonable grounds for believing the other person to be aged 18 or over. The maximum penalty for someone convicted of this new offence is £1,000.
  - It is an offence for a person under the age of 18 to purchase or hire an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon.
  - It is an offence to sell, let on hire or make a gift of an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon to a person under the age of 18.
  - It is an offence for anyone under the age of 18 to have with them an air weapon or ammunition for an air weapon **unless**:
    - they are under the supervision of a person aged 21 or over; or
    - they are shooting as a member of an approved target shooting club; or
    - they are shooting at a shooting gallery and the only firearms being used are either air weapons or miniature rifles not exceeding .23 inch calibre; or
    - the person is 14 years old or above and is on private premises with the consent of the occupier.
  - It is an offence to part with possession of an air weapon, or ammunition for an air weapon, to a person under the age of 18 except under the special circumstances mentioned immediately above.
  - It is an offence for any person shooting on private land, regardless of age, to use an air weapon for firing a pellet beyond the boundaries of the premises.
  - It is an offence for a supervising adult to allow a person under the age of 18 to use an air

weapon for firing a pellet beyond the boundaries of premises.

- It is an offence for any person to have an air weapon in a public place without a reasonable excuse. While there is no statutory definition of a reasonable excuse, it might include carrying a weapon to and from a shooting club, or taking a new weapon home from a dealer. However, it is ultimately for the courts to decide what a reasonable excuse is.
- It is an offence to trespass with an air weapon, whether in a building or on land.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon if you are prohibited from possessing a firearm. Anyone who has been sentenced to a custodial sentence of between three months and three years is prohibited from possessing an air weapon or other firearm or ammunition for five years from the date of their release. Anyone who has been sentenced to three years or more is prohibited for life.
- It is an offence to fire an air weapon without lawful authority or excuse within 50 feet (15 metres) of the centre of a public road in such a way as to cause a road user to be injured, interrupted or endangered.
- It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill certain wild animals and birds. When shooting live quarry, it is your responsibility to make sure that you only do so legally.
- It is an offence to knowingly cause a pet animal to suffer unnecessarily, which could be committed by shooting at a pet animal.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon with intent to damage or to destroy property. It is also an offence to have air weapons and be reckless as to whether property would be damaged or destroyed.
- It is an offence to have an air weapon with intent to endanger life.