

# Wildlife Services Directive

2.615  
April 19, 2016

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## WS FIREARM USE AND SAFETY

### 1. PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for the use of firearms in the conduct of official duties and to prescribe standard training requirements.

### 2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This directive revises WS Directive 2.615 dated 11/04/2009.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

**Accident:** An event which results in an injury or property damage.

**Firearm:** Any handgun, rifle or shotgun, regardless of ownership, which is used for official Government business or is transported or stored in a vehicle (defined below). This directive also covers pyrotechnics pistols, net guns, paint ball guns, dart guns, air rifles, arrow guns, and crossbows.

**Incident:** An event where no injury or property damage occurs.

**Loaded Firearm:** As defined by WS, a loaded firearm has a cartridge in the chamber.

**Personnel:** All persons employed by Wildlife Services (WS) or under the supervision of WS including State employees and official volunteers.

**Shooting "Out of a Vehicle":** Any shooting position in which the muzzle of the firearm is outside of and pointed in a safe direction away from the shooter's vehicle. The shooter may be inside the vehicle or in the cargo bed of trucks.

**Suppressed firearms:** Those firearms fitted with a removable or integral suppressor.

**Suppressor:** Those sound dampening devices requiring a permit from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) (ATFF5 (5320.5)).

Vehicle: Any Government-owned, leased, or privately-owned vehicles leased or used for official Government business. This includes off highway vehicles and watercraft.

#### 4. POLICY

##### Use of Firearms

Use and possession of firearms must be in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations (see WS Directive 2.210).

WS personnel are authorized to store, transport, carry, and use firearms necessary to perform official WS duties.

In accordance with Section 5F Departmental Regulation 4200-00 (“Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program”), while on official duty, employees are only authorized to carry firearms to be used for official WS operations.

WS personnel will adhere to all safety standards of firearm operation as described in the WS Firearms Safety Training Manual.

Shooting a firearm, projectile, or pyrotechnic out of a vehicle is permitted as long as the firearm or device is not loaded (a cartridge in the chamber) until the muzzle is safely out the window of the vehicle and a clear line of fire has been established. The muzzle of the firearm or device may not be retrieved back into the vehicle until the device has no live round in the chamber.

WS personnel who use firearms are subject to new applicant drug testing, random drug testing, reasonable suspicion testing, and post accident testing (accidents resulting in death, personal injury, or property damage over \$10,000) as administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (MRP Drug Free Workplace Program Handbook).

All persons acting on behalf of WS who are required or requested to use firearms are subject to the Lautenburg Domestic Confiscation Law and are required to immediately inform their supervisor if they can no longer comply with the Lautenburg Domestic Confiscation Law.

Firearm security must be a top priority. Whether a firearm is being stored in an office, vehicle, home, camp, or any other location, the maximum level of security available should be employed. Security devices may range from gun safes, vaults, locking gun racks, to cables through the receiver or frame opening locked to an immovable object. Combinations or extra keys will not be stored in a way that gives unauthorized personnel access to firearms.

Firearms will not be left unattended unless stored in accordance with this Directive.

Firearms will not be stored in a vehicle overnight unless approved as follows: If it is determined that leaving firearms in a vehicle overnight is the most secure location, the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader shall determine if additional measures are needed to best match the

security level to the local risk. Additional measures may include ignition kill switches, vehicle alarms, or GPS tracking devices. Requests for authorization to leave firearms unattended in a vehicle at night must be submitted in writing by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader to the appropriate Regional Director or the Director of the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) for approval

Although not as sensitive as firearms, pyrotechnic pistols, net guns, paint ball guns, dart guns, air rifles, arrow guns, and crossbows will be stored unloaded in a locked, secured location as deemed appropriate by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader. Ammunition will be stored in a dry, locked, secure location as deemed appropriate by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader.

#### Transportation and Storage of Firearms in Vehicles

When firearms are needed for immediate use, vehicles will be equipped with a firearm rack or other device which securely holds the firearm and has been approved by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader. Window racks or open hard sided cases on the rear seat are not considered appropriate for use.

When firearms are not needed for immediate use or are left unattended at any time, they will be stored in locking gun racks, gun vaults, locking metal cabinets or boxes, or with a locking cable through the receiver or frame opening and locked to the seat frame or other immovable object. Gun vaults or other metal boxes should be bolted to the floor or otherwise securely attached to the vehicle. Combinations or extra keys will not be stored in a way that gives unauthorized personnel access to firearms. It should be noted that the potential for theft at any given location may vary greatly. State Directors and NWRC Project/Unit Leaders are in the best position to determine this potential and to determine the appropriate security measures required.

Firearms will not have a cartridge in the chamber while being transported in a motor vehicle except where standardized procedures and guidelines have been established by the WS program and the specific procedures and guidelines concerning such practices are fully implemented (e.g., Sharpshooting Procedures/Guidelines for White-Tailed Deer Damage Management). Semi-automatic rifles and shotguns will be carried in vehicles in one of two ways: 1) with the chamber and magazine empty and the bolt locked to the rear or 2) with ammunition stored in the magazine, but with a chamber safety flag or similar device used to prevent the bolt from closing completely and to serve as a visual aid to ensure the firearm does not have a live round in the chamber.

#### Storage of Firearms in Government Facilities

Firearms will be stored unloaded (no cartridges, shells, propellants, or projectiles in the chamber or magazine) and in a gun safe or vault. Personal firearms must be maintained in the same manner when stored in a government office or facility. Access to firearms stored in gun safes or vaults will be limited to the State Director, NWRC Project/Unit Leader, and/or their designee(s). Gun safes should be bolted to the floor or wall as deemed necessary by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader.

### Storage of Firearms in the Home

Government-owned firearms are to be stored unloaded (no cartridge, shells, propellants, or projectiles in the chamber or magazine) in a gun safe, vault, or locking metal cabinet. A locking cable through the receiver or frame opening secured to immovable object thereby preventing theft and rendering the firearm inoperable may substitute for a gun safe, vault, or locking metal cabinet. Storing firearms inside a locked hard-sided gun case secured to an immovable object would also suffice. It is recommended that personal firearms be maintained in this manner when stored in the employee's residence.

### Storage of Firearms while in Travel Status

Firearms will not be stored in a vehicle overnight unless approved as follows: Requests for authorization to leave firearms unattended in a vehicle overnight must be submitted in writing by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader to the appropriate Regional Director or the Director of the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) for approval. Firearms will be placed in a hard or soft sided gun case, removed from the vehicle, and locked in the employee's hotel room. If the firearm is left unattended at any time, a locking cable will be placed through the receiver or frame opening and secured to an immovable object (e.g., bed frame or plumbing fixture) thereby preventing theft and rendering the firearm inoperable. Firearms inside a locked hard-sided gun case secured to an immovable object would also suffice.

### Firearm Inspection and Repairs

All firearms used by WS employees on the job will be inspected at least annually by the appropriate supervisor or designee to ensure serviceability and proper functioning of actions and safeties. All documentation of inspections will be retained in the appropriate State or NWRC office. It is recommended to document annual inspections using WS Form 82 (Field Inspection Report); however any documentation will suffice. Any repair work on government owned firearms will be conducted by a qualified gunsmith or other qualified individual as designated and approved by the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader.

### Reporting Incidents and Accidents

Incidents, accidents, or property damage resulting from the use of a firearm must be immediately reported to the appropriate supervisor who will report the incident to the WS Firearms Committee. The WS Firearms Committee is responsible for investigating and/or coordinating the investigation of any incident, accident, or property damage related to the use of a firearm, and reporting any findings and/or recommendations to the WS Management Team. It shall be the responsibility of the State Director or NWRC Project/Unit Leader, and/or appropriate Regional Director or Director of the National Wildlife Research Center to recommend any personnel actions as a result of the accident/incident.

### Safety Information

Firearm safety posters or other visual safety information will be displayed on workplace bulletin boards, near storage areas, and in vehicles to reinforce safety awareness and to maintain a focus on safe practices. It shall be the responsibility of the State Directors and NWRC Project/Unit Leaders to disseminate Firearm Safety Bulletins to employees under their supervision.

## 5. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

All WS personnel, regardless of employment status, and official volunteers who are required or requested to use firearms in the conduct of official duties, must adhere to all basic rules of firearms safety, and will be provided firearm safety and handling training as prescribed by the WS Firearms Safety Training Manual. To ensure WS employees receive uniform firearms safety training, National Rifle Association (NRA) certified instructors and the NRA's curriculum for the basic pistol, rifle, and shotgun certification is the only officially recognized program for initial WS firearms safety training. New WS employees will not use government or personal firearms in an official capacity until they have completed an NRA Firearm Safety Training course pursuant to the firearm(s) the employee will use on the job. Current WS employees may continue to use firearms and will receive updated training as per the WS Firearms Safety Training Manual.

State Directors and NWRC Project/Unit Leaders are responsible for ensuring that employees receive firearms safety and handling instruction as prescribed in the WS Firearms Safety Training Manual. Initial training must be documented using the NRA's Certification of Training or similar training form. Certificates will be maintained in the employee's personnel file. Subsequent training as outlined in the WS Firearms Safety Training Manual will also be documented by State Directors and NWRC Project/Unit Leaders.

Aerial crewmember training will consist of instruction from the WS Firearm Safety Training Manual as well as other additional specialized instruction that may be contained in the WS Aviation Operations Manual, the WS Aviation Safety Program Manual, and the WS Aerial Operation Crew Member Training Manual.

## 6. REFERENCES

MRP Drug Free Workplace Program Handbook, MRP 4792.1 (March 2009).

Lautenberg Domestic Confiscation Law (18 U.S.C. 922).

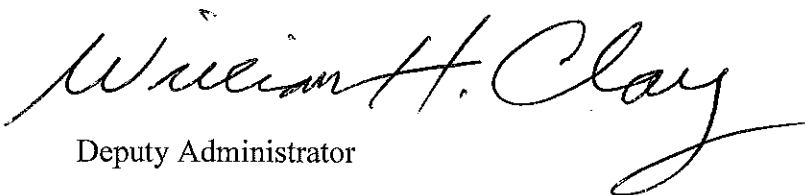
WS Firearms Safety Training Manual.

WS Aviation Operations Manual (04/09/01).

WS Aerial Operations Crew Member Training Manual.

WS Aviation Safety Program Manual.

<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departamental-regulation-4200-001>



Deputy Administrator