

or get hurt with ammunition that has the wrong powder, too much powder or the wrong load. Be very careful!

*Commandment 6:* If your ammunition doesn't fire when you pull the trigger, handle with care. Go back to the first commandment and make sure your muzzle is pointing in a safe direction – that gun could go off at any time – and treat it as such. Keep your face out of the breach, put the safety on, and carefully open the action, unload and dispose of the cartridge safely. Anytime there is a shell in the chamber, your gun is loaded and ready to use. Take care and understand that your gun could fire without warning.

*Commandment 7:* Always wear eye and ear protection when shooting. Wear shooting glasses to protect from falling shot or clay target chips, even twigs and branches in the field. Always protect your eyes when you clean your gun, so that parts under pressure like springs or cleaning solvents stay clear of your eyes. Your hearing can be permanently damaged from shooting noise – so be sure to wear a headset on the range and use earplugs in the field, especially in small spaces like duck blinds.

*Commandment 8:* Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before shooting. Look closely and make sure there's no mud, snow or even excess lubricant or grease in the bore, and no ammunition in the chamber before you load your gun. Even the smallest obstruction could cause your barrel to bulge or burst when you fire. And when you fire, trust your gut: if you think the noise or recoil from your gun seems weak or different than usual, stop firing and check for debris or obstructions. Always be sure your barrel is clear and that you're using the right shells for your gun.

*Commandment 9:* Don't alter or modify your gun and have it serviced regularly. Your shotgun has certain factory specs to be followed in order to make sure it operates safely. Don't try to alter the trigger, the safety or other mechanisms. Your gun wears as you use it – so make sure you bring it to a gunsmith periodically for service, and learn to clean and lubricate it between hunts. Of course, make sure your gun is completely unloaded before you clean it. Always clean your barrel from the chamber end to the muzzle. Make it a habit to clean your bore every time you shoot. Clean your gun completely before and after storing it for any length of time – at least once a year. Examine the inner workings of your gun and make sure they don't have rust or dirt and debris on them. Use the recommended lubricant for your gun and don't overdo it.

*Commandment 10:* Learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the firearm you are using. Know your gun. Know how it behaves when shooting, know its mechanics and how to carry it and handle it. Be totally familiar with everything about your gun before you try to use it. Different types of guns have different characteristics that may dictate how you handle them.

There is one other rule of centerfire rifle safety – and that is: always shoot sober. Even one beer can affect your judgment and coordination. You need a clear head at all times where guns are involved...no alcohol or drugs!

That's pretty much it – if you follow these commandments, you'll be safe, and you can show other hunters the right way to shoot safely.