



## **Firearms Legislation, Safety & Handling**

**WRE recommend that all airgun users have an opportunity to learn how to operate the airgun safely before attempting to shoot with it.**

### ***Law and Legislation***

The law makes no distinction between air weapons (rifles and pistols) and more powerful guns for which you need a licence – they are all classed as firearms. This means that any offence you commit can carry a very heavy penalty.

It is an offence under Section 19 of the Firearms Act 1968 to have with you in a public place an air weapon (whether loaded or not) unless you can show lawful authority or reasonable excuse.

The 1968 Firearms Act defines a 'public place' to include 'any highway and any other premises or place to which at the material time the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise'.

### ***Prohibited Persons***

Persons who have been sentenced to prison (including some youth and other detention) for 3 years or more are prohibited for life from possessing firearms or ammunition.

Persons sentenced to a relevant prison term of 3 months or more (but less than 3 years), or a suspended sentence, may not possess firearms or ammunition until five years have passed since the date of release.

See Appendix 1.

If you have any doubt, or questions seek advice from the BASC website; [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk) or your local Firearms Licensing Department.

## ***Airgun Safe Handling***

The following rules have been published by BASC and can be found in the *Air Rifle Safety in England and Wales Code of Practice (2021)* available to download on the BASC website.

- Always know where the muzzle of your air rifle is pointing and NEVER point it in an unsafe direction or towards anybody whether loaded or not.
- The safe conduct of air rifle shooting must meet the standards described in the BASC Code of Practice, show respect for the countryside, due regard to health and safety and consideration for others.
- Before you shoot, make sure that a safe backstop is present to capture the pellet (for humane dispatch ensure the live capture trap is placed on a soft substrate to reduce possibility of pellet ricochet).
- Consider live quarry; do not shoot beyond the bounds of your ability. Do not take chance shots.
- REMEMBER – ignorance of the law is no excuse. If in doubt, always ask.

### **Some additional safety considerations**

- Understand the airgun's operating system including how to operate the safety catch features (if applicable).
- On picking up or being handed an airgun, check immediately to ensure it is not loaded e.g. that it is un-cocked and that there is no pellet in the breach (Be particularly careful when checking pre-charged pneumatic airguns)
- Never put down or store away a loaded air gun or leave it unattended
- Importantly: a safety catch should not be relied on in any instance. Always assume the airgun is loaded and keep it pointing in a safe direction.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be used, eye protection must be worn when dispatching at close ranges for animals held in traps due to possible pellet ricochet.
- Ensure public and onlooker safety by asking everyone to step away from the dispatch area
- Should you experience a misfire (the loaded air weapon does not discharge the pellet), aim the muzzle of the gun towards the ground (into a soft substrate) and attempt to discharge the weapon again (it is not uncommon for pellets to block the barrels). If after a few moments the air weapon has not successfully discharged, un-cock the weapon remove the magazine if it has one, then put away in its case/slip and seek advice.

**BE AWARE THAT IN THE EVENT OF A MISFIRE THE AIRGUN COULD DISCHARGE UNEXPECTEDLY SO ENSURE IT IS HANDLED WITH EXTREME CARE.**

### ***Transport and Security***

Whenever the airgun is not in use it should be kept unloaded, un-cocked, with the magazine removed if it has one and in a gun case/slip, out of view. The pellets should be kept and transported in a secure, labelled tin with a tight lid.

The Firearms Act (1968) Section 24ZA makes it an offence for a person in possession of an airgun to fail to take “reasonable precautions” to prevent someone under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it.

When travelling with an airgun in a vehicle, ensure that the gun is unloaded and un-cocked in a gun slip. Lay it flat and concealed from view. Never leave the airgun unattended in an unlocked vehicle.

Whenever you are in a public place you should carry the rifle in a gun slip/case and always ensure that it is unloaded and un-cocked with the magazine removed if it has one.

Only load the air weapon when you are ready to carry out a dispatch and be prepared to take a second dispatch shot swiftly if required.

### ***Trespassing***

In England and Wales: Intentionally going on to private land, or water, where you do not have permission is trespassing, and if you are carrying an airgun it becomes armed trespass. Whether the gun is loaded or not, or whether you are carrying pellets, is irrelevant – armed trespass is a serious criminal offence carrying heavy penalties under Section 20 of the Firearms Act 1968.

If you have to walk to the trapping location, ensure you have the permission of the landowner or tenant in order to travel across land with the air gun. You will need to carry a copy of the written permission with you.

It is an offence to fire an air gun pellet beyond the boundary of the land where you have permission to shoot, unless the person holding the shooting rights of the neighbouring land has given you permission.

It is also against the law to discharge any firearm (including air rifles) within 50 feet of the centre of a highway (which consists of or comprises a carriageway). If in consequence a user of the highway is injured, interrupted or endangered (Highways Act 1988).

## ***Airgun Care and Maintenance***

All airguns must be well maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. It is built to precise standards and damage or mistreatment can seriously affect its performance and safety.

Do not attempt to strip an airgun without having the proper tools, facilities and knowledge to do so safely. Many air rifles contain powerful springs and/or compressed gas which can cause serious or fatal injury if released in an uncontrolled manner.

After shooting is finished, ensure your airgun is dry and free from dirt before storing it.

### ***Servicing***

The safe condition of an air rifle is important. Rusted, damaged or blocked barrels and actions will be unsafe, and fouling or corrosion may cause mechanisms to fail with potential serious consequences.

If there is any doubt as to its condition, the air rifle should not be used until it has been properly checked and repaired by a competent gunsmith. Allowing small amounts of fouling to build up in the rifling will reduce the consistency of accuracy. Ensure airguns are serviced annually by a competent gunsmith.

### ***Cleaning frequency***

Modern barrels provide consistent accuracy over many thousands of shots and require little in the way of cleaning. The accuracy of a new gun is likely to stabilise once it has fired about a hundred shots and some lead has coated the barrel.

### ***How often should I and where should I lubricate my airgun?***

Generally, the only lubrication that needs to be applied regularly is oiling the action after cleaning and wiping the whole rifle over with an oily rag after use, particularly if conditions have been wet or damp.

It is recommended to have the air weapon serviced annually to ensure it remains safe to use and will operate effectively. Keep all service records.

If in doubt about maintenance and repair, consult your local gun shop.