



Subject: Safe Weapons Handling Procedures

- 1. Accidental weapon discharges have increased at an alarming rate. These accidental discharges are both preventable and unacceptable. Commanders and leaders will enforce the standards for weapons safety, clearing procedures, and clearing barrels contained in this memorandum.**
- 2. The premise that the U.S. Army is basing this standard on holds that there is no difference between unloading and clearing a weapon. Unloading a weapon is simply one step in the process of clearing. At no time should a weapon be unloaded and not cleared.**
- 3. A significant number of accidents resulting in injuries and loss of life have been associated with accidental discharges during weapons cleaning or subsequent functional tests of the weapon with ammunition present. Leaders at all levels should not consider these activities low risk when ammunition is present.**
- 4. Safe practices.**
 - Safe muzzle orientation is critical to weapons safety. Soldiers will always keep their weapon pointed in a safe direction. At no time should any part of the human body be in the likely path of a bullet. This requires constant awareness of the muzzle orientation and frequent repositioning and adjusting of the weapon. Muzzle

orientation will be enforced at all times, not just when the weapon is considered loaded. It is critical that Soldiers learn muzzle orientation as a life skill that becomes second nature and a personal responsibility.

• Weapons will be kept on safe at all times when not engaging a target or when enemy contact is not imminent.

• Fingers will be kept off of the trigger until firing the weapon is intended. There have been numerous accidental discharges resulting from Soldiers being bumped while the weapon safety selector was placed on FIRE and the finger on the trigger.

• Commanders will ensure that controls are in place to prevent Soldiers from mishandling weapons in living and sleeping areas.

• Leaders will supervise weapons clearing at all times whether ammunition is present or not. Leaders will remain involved to ensure ammunition has not inadvertently been left in the weapon or placed in the weapon in a manner that can result in an accidental discharge. Leader enforcement of muzzle orientation is particularly important in these weapons handling activities.

• When clearing weapons on too ranges, the weapon will be oriented downrange during the clearing process. When a clearing barrel is required by local installation SOPs, use the requirements as outlined in this memorandum.

• Commanders at all levels will ensure that a range safety

- The placement of clearing barrels.
- Emplacement of clearing pits or designation of clearing lanes for mounted and crew-served weapons that account for the surface danger area of the system to be cleared.
- The frequency in which weapons are cleared.
- Types of situations in which an officer or NCO is permitted to allow soldiers to place their weapons in a firing posture.
- While on contingency deployments, commanders will establish and publish standards that ensure weapons are cleared in a safe manner and in a safe location until clearing barrels constructed to standard are provided.
- Integrate clearing procedures into pre-deployment training at mobilization stations and combat readiness centers.
- Test firing of weapons will be strictly controlled by the chain of command under controlled conditions. A test-fire range will be set up during deployments, and controls placed and enforced by the forward operating base (FOB) or life support area (LSA) commander.

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program is in place. The range safety program should cover RSO and OIC duties as outlined in AR 385-63 and DA Pam 385-63. The commander will ensure the RSO is qualified on the weapons systems to be fired.

• Leaders or vehicle commanders will ensure weapon systems mounted for any reason are clear prior to installing or removing weapons from the mount.

• Leaders or vehicle commanders will insure a weapon fired from a vehicle mount is coordinated with dismount elements in the area and the firing sector is clear. (An example would be a Bradley Commander maintaining a visual on his sector of fire from the Track Commander (TC) hatch, not through the weapons scope; ensuring dismount elements remain clear of the range fan of the weapon system used.)

5. Weapon issue and turn-in procedures.

• During the issue and turn-in of weapons, both the armorer and the Soldier will visually verify that the weapon does not contain any ammunition. This procedure will be conducted whether ammunition was issued or not.

• Each weapon system will be cleared before turn-in and upon direction of the supervisor, individuals will proceed directly to the turn-in point. Clearing will be supervised at all times.

- Steps are posted, in a large format, adjacent to the clearing barrel. Each type of weapon will require its own description of the appropriate clearing procedures. Handheld laminated cards or checklists may be used in less permanent locations, such as in field sites.
- Arms Room Issue and Turn-in Clearing Barrel. Commanders will place, at a minimum, a 5-gallon container filled with pea gravel or dry sand inside the arms room. The 5-gallon barrel is not to be used for initial clearing, but rather as an additional safety step during issuing and turn-in of weapons.
- GSA-approved commercial containment systems (clearing barrels) for the type weapon system may be used in lieu of the constructed clearing barrels listed above. They will be utilized and maintained IAW the manufacturers' instructions. The requirement for annual inspection and clearing area standards will remain the same.
- Contingency deployments. While on contingency deployment theater commanders will establish strict guidance that addresses the following:
 - Supervised weapons clearing.
 - When ammunition is to be issued to Soldiers.
 - When weapons are to be loaded.

6. Armorer responsibilities include

• Verifying each individual's authority to bear arms before issuing any weapons, ammunition, or both.

• Ensuring that each weapon is cleared and visually inspected prior to issue or turn-in.

• Issuing all weapons shoulder gun stock assembly (butt) first, muzzle elevated, slide or bolt locked to the rear, and on SAFE.

• Allowing only one person at a time to approach the issue and turn-in area.

• The armorer or other authorized person must visually inspect all weapons, ensuring that all ammunition has been removed prior to storage.

7. Clearing barrels. The unloading and clearing of small arms 7.62mm and below that are not mounted to a vehicle will be accomplished in conjunction with a clearing barrel, when appropriate and available. The commander must provide clearing barrels at designated clearing locations when required by local SOPs. Further guidance concerning construction, maintenance, and location of clearing barrels can be found in Air Force Manual 31-229. Clearing barrels will meet the following minimum standards:

- Construction. A 30-gallon container (drum) filled with pea gravel. Clearing barrels must be at least 14-inches wide and 24-inches deep. If dry sand is used (although pea gravel provides the greatest stopping ability) units will ensure the sand is kept dry and free of any debris. If the barrel is placed outdoors, place dry sand in a plastic bag and tie it off prior to placing it into the clearing barrel. Clearing barrels will have a 3/4-inch plywood or thick rubber matting covering the diameter of the container and fitted directly behind the lid to reinforce it against muzzle blast. The barrel opening will have an aiming point in the center of the front lid at least 4-inches in diameter and 1 inch deep. The barrel will also have a tray with rubber matting affixed under the aiming point to prevent dropped rounds from falling to the ground.
- Maintenance. All clearing barrels must be checked annually to ensure maintenance of the construction standard. Document the annual check as part of a self-inspection program or in your safety book. Visually check barrels filled with pea gravel for settling, and refill as necessary.
- Location and size. Units will assess each location and determine what size barrel best suits their needs. The clearing barrel will be mounted at a height and angle that permits safe and smooth firearms clearing. A 36-inch safety zone immediately surrounding the barrel will be marked on the ground or floor area with a red 4-inch line. Paint, colored tape, or colored tiles may be used to mark the 4-inch line.
- Instructions. Commanders will ensure that clearing

APPENDIX A - M2 (.50 CAL) MACHINE GUN

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

WARNING: DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (Clearing lane).
- 2.) Place safety on "S" (SAFE) (M48 turret type and fixed type).
- 3.) Unlock the bolt latch release (1).
- 4.) Raise the cover (2).
- 5.) Lift the cartridge extractor (3) and remove the ammunition belt (4) from the feed way
- 6.) Place cartridge extractor down and close the cover **WARNING: Round may fall to surface and possibly explode.**
- 7.) Pull and lock the bolt to the rear, leaving the retracting slide handle to the rear. Open the cover. NOTE: Step 7 is for the M48 turret type and fixed type.
- 8.) Move M10 lock selector to the rear. Charge the weapon
WARNING: Chamber may be hot. Use caution while inspecting T-slot.
- 9.) Visually inspect the chamber (5) and T-slot (6) for rounds (in darkness the gunner must feel the chamber and T-slot to ensure they are clear).
- 10.) Press the bolt latch release (1) and ease the bolt forward with retracting slide handle. NOTE: **Steps 10 and 12 are for M48 turret type and fixed type.**
- 11.) Move the M10 lock selector forward and pull back on the charging handle until a click is heard, then ease the bolt forward.
- 12.) Close the cover.
- 13.) Place the safety on "F" (FIRE).
- 14.) Press the trigger.
- 15.) Perform "after operation" PMCS (WP 0023 00).

APPENDIX E - M240B MACHINE GUN

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

WARNING: DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (Clearing lane).
- 2.) Ensure weapon is on SAFE. NOTE: If the bolt is in the forward position place the weapon on FIRE. Pull the cocking handle to the rear, locking the bolt to the rear. Place the weapon on SAFE.
- 3.) Push in latches to open cover assembly.
- 4.) Remove ammunition belt.
- 5.) Check the feed tray.
 - A. Lift the feed tray and inspect the chamber.
 - B. Check the space between the face of the bolt and the chamber, to include the space under the bolt and operating rod assembly.
- 6.) Close feed tray and feed tray cover.
- 7.) Place safety on FIRE.
- 8.) Pull and hold charger cable (or cocking handle assembly) to rear, pull trigger and ease bolt forward to close and lock.

APPENDIX F - M4 RIFLE (5.56MM)

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (Clearing container if available).
- 2.) Remove the magazine from the weapon.
- 3.) Attempt to place weapon selector lever on SAFE.
- 4.) Lock bolt to rear (ensure weapon is on SAFE).
- 5.) Inspect the receiver and chamber to ensure no ammunition is present.
- 6.) With NO ammunition in chamber or receiver, allow the bolt to go forward
- 7.) Aim weapon into clearing container, rotate selector lever to SEMI, and squeeze the trigger.
- 8.) Charge weapon once.
- 9.) Place selector lever on SAFE.

APPENDIX B - MK19 MACHINE GUN

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

WARNING: DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (Clearing lane).
- 2.) Move the safety switch to SAFE.
- 3.) Open top cover assembly.
- 4.) If the bolt is locked to rear already, observe bolt face for ammunition.
- 5.) If the bolt is not locked to the rear, pull charging handle locking bolt to the rear and observe for any ammunition attached to the face of the bolt. Return charging handles to the forward position and rotate only one charging handle up.
- 6.) Remove any ammunition from the feed tray by reaching beneath the feed tray and pressing the primary and secondary positioning pawls. While pressing the pawls, slide the linked rounds out of the MK19 through the feed throat.
- 7.) Remove any ammunition from the bolt face by inserting a section of a cleaning rod through either side of the receiver rail. Place it on top of the live round or cartridge case, as close to the bolt face as possible and push down. This action will force the round or cartridge out of the bottom of the MK-19.
WARNING: Ensure you position a hand to catch the ejected round.
- 8.) Inspect the chamber and bolt face to ensure that no live rounds are in the weapon.
- 9.) Lower and pull both charging handles to the rear.
- 10.) Move the safety switch to FIRE.
- 11.) Grasp charging handles and establish rearward pressure, press the trigger, and ease the bolt forward.
- 12.) Move the safety switch to SAFE.
- 13.) Return charging handles to the locked position.
CAUTION: You should never re-link or fire ammunition that has been cycled through the weapon. Turn in live rounds as required by current directives.

APPENDIX G - M16 RIFLE (5.56MM)

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (Clearing container if available).
- 2.) Remove the magazine from the weapon.
- 3.) Attempt to place weapon selector lever on SAFE.
- 4.) Lock bolt to rear (ensure weapon is on SAFE).
- 5.) Inspect the receiver and chamber to ensure no ammunition is present.
- 6.) With NO ammunition in chamber or receiver, allow the bolt to go forward.
- 7.) Aim weapon into clearing container, rotate selector lever to SEMI, squeeze the trigger.
- 8.) Charge weapon once.
- 9.) Place selector lever on SAFE.

APPENDIX H - M9 (9MM) SEMIAUTOMATIC PISTOL

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (clearing container, if available).
- 2.) Place decocking/safety on SAFE.
- 3.) Depress the magazine release button and remove the magazine.
- 4.) Grasp the slide narrations and fully retract the slide to remove the chambered cartridge.
- 5.) Lock the slide to the rear, using the slide stop, and visually inspect chamber to ensure it is empty.
- 6.) Release the slide STOP to allow the slide to return fully to the forward position.
- 7.) Place weapon on FIRE.
- 8.) Squeeze trigger.
- 9.) Place weapon on SAFE.

APPENDIX C - M60 MACHINE GUN

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

WARNING: DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.

- 1.) Orient weapon in safe direction (Clearing lane).
- 2.) Ensure weapon is on SAFE. NOTE: If the bolt is in the forward position, place the weapon on FIRE and pull the cocking handle to the rear, locking the bolt to the rear Place the weapon on safe.
- 3.) Push in latches to open cover assembly.
- 4.) Remove ammunition belt.
- 5.) Check the feed tray.
 - A. Lift the feed tray and inspect the chamber.
 - B. Check the space between the face of the bolt and the chamber to include the space under the bolt and operating rod assembly.
- 6.) Close feed tray and feed tray cover.
- 7.) Place safety to FIRE.
- 8.) Pull and hold charger cable (or cocking handle assembly) to rear, pull trigger and ease bolt forward to close and lock.

APPENDIX D - M203 GRENADE LAUNCHER

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- 1.) Prior to clearing the M203, the M16 or M4 must be cleared first.
- 2.) Point in a SAFE DIRECTION! (Clearing lane)
- 3.) Push in the release button and pull the barrel forward.
- 4.) Watch to see if a round extracts.
- 5.) Place selector lever on SAFE.
- 6.) Inspect the breech to ensure a round is not present.
- 7.) The clearing barrel attendant will visually verify that ammunition is not present.
- 8.) Pull the barrel to the rear until it clicks.

APPENDIX I - M249 SQUAD AUTOMATIC WEAPON

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

WARNING: DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.

- 1.) Orient weapon in a safe direction (clearing container if available).
- 2.) Remove magazine
- 3.) Ensure the weapon is on SAFE. If weapon is not on SAFE, with right hand palm up, pull cocking handle to the rear, locking the bolt in place.
- 4.) While holding cocking handle, move selector lever to the SAFE position by pushing it to the right until the red ring is not visible.
- 5.) Return and lock the cocking handle to the forward position.
 - A. Squeeze latches to open cover assembly.
 - B. Remove ammunition belt and any loose rounds present on the feed tray.
- 6.) Conduct a 5-point safety check:
 - 1) Check the feeder pawl assembly under the cover.
 - 2) Check the feed tray assembly.
 - 3) Lift the feed tray assembly and inspect chamber.
 - 4) Check the space between bolt assembly and chamber.
 - 5) Insert two fingers into the magazine well to extract any brass, links, or ammunition.
- 7.) Close the feed tray cover.
- 8.) With the right hand palm up, pull the cocking handle to the rear. While holding the cocking handle, place the weapon on FIRE. Squeeze the trigger and ride the bolt forward.



WARNING! DO NOT INSTALL OR REMOVE A LOADED WEAPON FROM A MOUNTING BRACKET.