

## Guide to Airgun Safety & Laws

This brochure is a guide to using and storing your airgun safely and responsibly. It outlines the current law on airguns and explains what you can do to be a responsible airgun user. Before you start using your airgun, you should read this brochure and familiarise yourself with its contents.

For the purposes of this brochure, references to 'airguns' include air pistols, air rifles, air bows and BB guns whether powered by gas ram, spring or compressed gasses.

For the purposes of this brochure any references to the Firearms Control Act shall be shortened to "FCA"

### Definition of an Airgun In Terms of the Law (Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000) (as amended up to 31/01/2015)

An airgun is any airgun with a calibre of below 5.6mm regardless of power/energy at the muzzle.

An airgun is any airgun with a calibre of 5.6mm and above but is manufactured to be incapable of shooting at powers/energy of no more than 8 joules / 6 foot pounds at the muzzle.

Any airgun that exceeds **both** the 5.6mm calibre and muzzle energy of 8 joules / 6 foot pounds is classified as a firearm in South Africa and in terms of the FCA a firearms licence is required to own and operate such. Hereinafter referred to as a "LCA - Large Calibre Airgun" class airgun.

### Offences in Terms of the Law

Although airguns do not require a firearms licence in South Africa there are provisions in the FCA that treat the use and ownership of airguns in the same manner as firearms. This can be from the moment you squeeze the trigger or your behaviour whilst in possession of your airgun. Below are some of the offences listed in the FCA which apply to airguns and firearms.

#### It is an offence to:

- Cause bodily injury to any person or cause damage to property of any person by negligently using a firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun.
- Discharge or otherwise handle a firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun in a manner likely to injure or endanger the safety or property of any person or with reckless disregard for the safety or property of any person.
- Have control of a loaded firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun in circumstances where it creates a risk to the safety or property of any person and not to take reasonable precautions to avoid the danger.
- Handle a firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun while under the influence of a substance which has an intoxicating or a narcotic effect.
- A person is guilty of an offence if he or she gives control of a firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun to a person whom he or she knows, or ought reasonably to have known to be mentally ill or to be under the influence of a substance which has an intoxicating or a narcotic effect.
- Point any firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun, whether or not it is loaded or capable of being discharged, at any other person, without good reason to do so.\*
- Discharge a firearm, an antique firearm or an airgun in a built up area or any public place, without good reason to do so.\*\*
- \*/\*\* It is generally understood that the only "good reason" a court would find acceptable is self defence.
- \*\*\* Please note that your local municipality may have by-laws that deal with firearms and shooting in general. It is your responsibility to find out from them what those might be.

## Airgun Safety

**"RULE" NUMBER ONE:  
AIRGUNS ARE NOT TOYS. TREAT AIRGUNS WITH THE SAME  
RESPECT AS YOU WOULD ANY DANGEROUS WEAPON OR  
FIREARM.**

In the wrong hands, an airgun can cause serious injury or even kill. Some irresponsible users have given airgun shooters a bad name by damaging property, shooting pets and protected wildlife, and even sniping at people for "fun".

You can help to change this perception by using your airgun in a way that demonstrates that airgun 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 airgun is kept secure and used safely. For example:

- Never handle or operate an airgun which operation and features you are unfamiliar with. Read the manual first or ask the owner of the airgun if it is not yours to instruct you as to how to operate it safely.
- Never let a child under the age of 18 handle or operate an airgun without direct adult supervision.
- Always treat an airgun as though it were loaded.
- Do not take anyone's word that an airgun is unloaded and safe before handling it. Check every airgun you handle yourself.
- Always point an airgun in a safe direction, preferably at the ground, and never at another person.
- Never load an airgun until you are ready to fire it.
- Never rely on a safety mechanism to make an airgun safe. Such devices can fail.
- If you are at a shooting range always pay attention to the range rules and the range officer's (RO) commands.
- Never fire an airgun unless you are certain that the shot will be safe. This means checking that there is nothing and no person nearby who might be endangered by the shot and ensuring that there is a suitable backstop or pellet catcher to prevent ricochets. Consider that the extreme range for a standard 4.5mm airgun pellet shot at 16 joules / 12 foot pounds energy can be out to 400m.
- Consider wearing ballistic rated / shooting eyewear to protect your eyes from ricocheting pellet fragments.
- Never put a loaded airgun down. Always safely discharge or unload and uncock it first.
- Never store a loaded airgun.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs prior to and while handling airguns.
- Avoid climbing over fences or other obstacles with a loaded airgun.
- Airguns should be stored out of sight and separately from pellets.
- Airguns should be covered, for example in a gun case, when being transported.
- Airguns 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. Airguns should be stored inside a house rather than in an outbuilding, such as a garage, shed or Wendy house.
- Consider ways of rendering a stored airgun incapable of being fired. For example a trigger lock.



## Dealing With High Pressure Air

- Respect the energy contained in a dive cylinder.
- Check the dive cylinder test dates.
- Regularly inspect all visible o-rings on your airgun cylinder, quick fill probes and fill station.
- Inspect the fill station manometer for damage before each use.
- Use the airgun manometer as a double check for pressure.
- Fill your airgun cylinder slowly.
- Never fill beyond the recommended fill pressure of your airgun cylinder.
- Never face a manometer directly. Observe at an angle facing away from body parts.
- Ensure fill equipment is grime free. Dirt in airgun cylinders cause slow leaks of valves.
- Caution children about dangers of compressed air and keep your dive cylinder out of their reach.
- Store dive cylinders upright. If a valve pops in case of fire the propulsion will be downward and upwards, hopefully not sideways through a bedroom wall. Store your cylinder out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources.
- When transporting a dive cylinder in car, store it sideways/horizontal and secure it in place.
- Your cylinder should only be filled with clean, dry, compressed air at an accredited supplier.
- Do not use any oil or grease near compressed air. Oil and grease can combust when pressurised. Use only pure silicone grease sparingly on o-rings as supplied by dive shops.
- Never hold a body part close to a compressed air exit. Air released under such great pressure can penetrate the skin and cause severe air embolism, which is air penetrating flesh and the cardiovascular system.
- Should you wish to de-pressurise a dive cylinder for air transportation or some other reason, do it very slowly, preferably overnight, by opening the pillar valve slightly. Decompressing it too fast will result in water condensation in the cylinder which could lead to premature rusting.
- Avoid using 'home made' parts, components and fittings on your fill station and cylinders.

### What Can I Use My Airgun For?

If you have never shot before, you would be well advised to go to a shooting club with an airgun division and learn from a club officer how to handle your airgun safely, responsibly and become an accurate shot. You can find information about where to find such clubs under the "Useful Links" heading in this brochure.

Having bought your airgun, you can use it for a number of purposes including target shooting, plinking, pest control and hunting small game.

You might find that target shooting provides all the challenge you need or you might want to move on to hunting. If you intend to hunt, you must be careful only to do so on private property for which you have written permission to shoot, a valid hunting permit and/or licence issued by a relevant provincial authority including a permit authorising the use of an air rifle for hunting (some provinces restrict their use for that purpose). You must also adhere to the legislated game species lists, their open hunting seasons and bag limits as published annually.

Plinking at targets such as old tin cans or spinner targets can be useful to teach children marksmanship and safety in a fun way. It should be remembered though that it is illegal to shoot airguns in your yard if you live in a built up suburb. You may shoot your airgun on your property if you live in a rural area with no close neighbours. However, all safety procedures must be adhered to and all the offences listed in the FCA still apply.

### Useful Links to Airgun Information

Air Rifle SA Forums  
<https://www.airrifle.co.za/>

Airgun Sports South Africa  
<https://airgunsports.org.za/>

South African Air Rifle Association  
<http://www.saara.org.za/>

South African Field Target Airgun Association  
<http://www.saftaa.co.za/>

South African Hunter Field Target Association  
<http://sahfta.org.za/>

South African National School Shooters Union  
<http://www.sanssu.co.za/>

South African Precision Sport Shooting Federation  
<https://www.sapsf.com/>

South African Veld / Field Sports  
<http://safieldsport.org/>