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Title 360 – Human Resources

**PART 420 – Safety and Health Management  
Program**

**Subpart D – Firearms**

March 2024

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**420.30 Purpose**

- A. This subpart establishes policy concerning the use of firearms by NRCS employees for protection from dangerous animals while conducting fieldwork as part of their official duties.
- B. The policy in this directive applies to NRCS employees in Alaska only. NRCS employees whose primary duty station is not in Alaska may not carry firearms while on duty.

**420.31 Definitions**

- A. Authorized Employee. An NRCS employee who:
  - 1. Has not violated 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) or (n).
  - 2. Meets the certification and qualification criteria in this policy.
  - 3. Has written authorization from the state conservationist or director of the Soil and Plant Science Division to use a firearm while conducting fieldwork as part of official duties.
- B. Field-Ready Condition. When a firearm is ready to be deployed in the field. The action must be closed and locked (if applicable), the magazine must be fully loaded, and the safety must be on. The firearm must have no ammunition in the chamber.
- C. Loaded Condition. When ammunition is in the chamber.
- D. NRCS-Issued Firearm. A firearm owned by the NRCS.
- E. Personal Firearm. An authorized firearm, owned by an NRCS employee, that meets the minimum standards of a wildlife defense firearm as outlined in this policy.
- F. Range Proficiency Qualification. A series of live firing sequences for assessing the employee's knowledge and skill of the firearm.
- G. Unloaded Condition. The firearm does not have any ammunition in the magazine or chamber.

## 420.32 Responsibilities

- A. The state conservationist and regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division are responsible for:
  - 1. Approving procurement and disposal of government-owned firearms or ammunition in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws.
  - 2. Appointing firearm coordinators to implement minimum training requirements for the safe handling, use, transport, and storage of firearms in addition to other related firearm safety program activities.
  - 3. Promoting and funding advanced instructor training for the types of firearms and conditions employees will be exposed to.
  - 4. Authorizing employees to use firearms for official duty in their defined area of responsibility.
- B. The firearm coordinator (or designee) is responsible for:
  - 1. Training, ongoing maintenance, inspection, coordination, inventory, storage, and advising on technical aspects of all NRCS firearms and related equipment.
  - 2. Developing range proficiency qualifications for the employee to demonstrate safe firearm handling techniques and competent shooting skills.
  - 3. Providing a list of recommended and non-recommended employees to the state conservationist or regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division for firearm authorization.
  - 4. Maintaining an up-to-date list of employees who are authorized to handle firearms.
  - 5. Ensuring all NRCS firearms are inspected annually for proper operation.
  - 6. Initiating any necessary action for NRCS firearm repairs or replacement.
- C. NRCS firearm instructors are responsible for:
  - 1. Maintaining a National Rifle Association instructor certification.
  - 2. Maintaining an authorized employee status.
  - 3. Instructing and training employees on safe firearm handling and shooting techniques using NRCS firearms.
  - 4. Administering the range proficiency qualification.
  - 5. Recommending employees for authorization.
    - a. Recommendation is based on indicators of knowledge, skills, and attitude, such as shooting scores, safe gun handling, situational awareness, and understanding of firearm mechanics.

- b. Firearm instructors must present a list of recommended employees to the firearm coordinator. Firearm instructors must have a written justification to not recommend an employee.
- 6. Verifying personal firearms and ammunition used for range proficiency qualification meet the requirements of this policy.
- D. Authorized employees are responsible for:
  - 1. Safely using a firearm for defense from an aggressive animal attack.
  - 2. Maintaining proficiency through regular firearms handling, which may include practicing loading and unloading with dummy ammunition, dry firing, and live firing range practice.
  - 3. Inspecting firearms for proper condition before using the firearm.
  - 4. Using the procurement process to purchase protective equipment and firearm cleaning supplies.
  - 5. Notifying the firearm coordinator when NRCS firearms need inspection or repairs.
  - 6. Supplying documentation of all repairs to the firearm coordinator.
  - 7. Immediately notifying their supervisor and the firearm coordinator, in writing, if they become noncompliant with 18 U.S.C. § 922 (g) and (n).
  - 8. If using personal firearms, signing a personal firearms release and demonstrating proficiency by passing the range proficiency qualification.

## **420.33 Firearm Authorization**

- A. Every year, authorized employees must:
  - 1. Complete the classroom and range component of the NRCS firearm training course.
  - 2. Compliance with 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) and (n) must be documented before participating in the NRCS firearm training course and range proficiency qualification.
  - 3. Pass a range proficiency qualification with an NRCS shotgun.
  - 4. If applicable, pass a range proficiency qualification with a personal firearm.
- B. The state conservationist or regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division provides written authorization to use a firearm while conducting fieldwork as part of official duties.
  - 1. Firearm authorization includes:
    - a. Employee's name.
    - b. Employee's duty station.
    - c. Beginning and ending dates of authorization.
    - d. Type of firearm.

- e. Authorized personal firearm (if applicable).
  - (1) Make, model, and caliber of firearm.
  - (2) Ammunition specifications.
- f. Authorization signature.
- 2. Authorization may not exceed a 12-month period.
- C. At any time, if a NRCS employee handles a firearm in an unsafe manner or shows a lack of firearm proficiency, the firearms authorization may be revoked.
- D. Subsequent rehire requires new authorization.

## 420.34 Equipment

- A. NRCS Firearms. NRCS provides 12-gauge slide action shotguns to authorized employees.
- B. Personal Firearms
  - 1. Personal firearms must comply with all NRCS firearms policies, including authorization, training, use, transporting, storage, and reporting requirements.
  - 2. Personal firearms and ammunition must be individually authorized for use for official NRCS field activities.
  - 3. Employee must provide trigger or gun cable locks, ammunition, and a case for transportation at no cost to the government.
- C. Shotgun
  - 1. Shotguns must meet the following specifications.
    - a. Twelve-gauge.
    - b. Non-scoped.
  - 2. Shotgun ammunition specifications
    - a. Commercial factory.
    - b. Twelve-gauge rifled slug minimum weight 1 ¼ ounce or 00 buckshot.
    - c. Alternative ammunition may be used during training sessions on the recommendation of the firearm instructor.
- D. Rifle
  - 1. Rifles must meet the following specifications.
    - a. Minimum caliber .30-06
    - b. Repeat action (bolt, lever, or pump-type repeating actions).
    - c. Non-scoped.
  - 2. Rifle ammunition specifications
    - a. Commercial factory.
    - b. Bullet weight 200 grains minimum.
    - c. Bullet designed for use on dangerous game.

E. Handgun

1. Handguns must meet the following specifications.
  - a. Semi-Automatic: .10 mm or greater.
  - b. Revolver: .44-caliber magnum or greater.
2. Handgun ammunition specifications.
  - a. Commercial factory, non-hollow point.
  - b. Bullet weight 200 grains minimum.
  - c. Minimum of 1,000 feet per second of velocity at the muzzle.

#### 420.35 Use of Firearms

- A. Employees must observe all federal, state, and local laws regarding the licensing, use, and transportation of firearms and ammunition as well as reporting and salvaging of animals killed in self-defense.
- B. Employees decide when to carry the firearm field ready or loaded in the field, except as required by this policy.
- C. Firearms may only be discharged during training, in a survival situation, or in the defense of life during confrontation with a dangerous animal. Practice may be approved by NRCS Firearms instructors or supervisors.
- D. Government-owned vehicles and equipment may not be used for hunting game or transporting game or hunters. Employees may not use authorized personal firearms while on official duty or travel status for hunting.
- E. Except for training exercises, the discharge of a firearm while on official duty (including authorized personal firearms during travel status) requires a written report to the state conservationist or the regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division as soon as practicable, not to exceed 7 calendar days. A copy must be provided at the same time to the firearm coordinator.
- F. If an animal is killed or wounded, the appropriate local authorities and employee's supervisor must be contacted as soon as safe and practical. A written report must be provided to the state conservationist or the regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division as soon as practicable, but not to exceed 7 calendar days of the incident. A copy must be provided at the same time to the firearm coordinator.
- G. Employees may not carry concealed firearms while on duty or in government vehicles or buildings.
- H. Employees may not possess or consume any alcohol when firearms, including those in a secure, locked location, are in the field, including field camp.
- I. Misuse, unsafe acts, and other concerns must be reported to the firearm coordinator, who will provide a report to the state conservationist or the regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division for corrective action.

## 420.36 Transportation and Storage of Firearms and Ammunition

- A. When not in active use, all firearms must be stored in a secure, locked location.
  - 1. Firearms may not be left unattended, even temporarily, in unsecure locations.
  - 2. Both the chamber and the magazine of a firearm must be unloaded before storage.
  - 3. The action must be open.
  - 4. Trigger locks or gun cable locks must be placed on the firearm.
  - 5. Keys are to be stored separate from the firearms.
- B. Transportation
  - 1. Transportation to the Field Site
    - a. During transportation, the firearm is not regarded as in active use and must be in an unloaded condition.
    - b. Firearms should be transported in a protective locked hard case.
    - c. Commercial travelers must review the current firearm and ammunition transportation rules and abide by the requirements of the airline, pilot, conductor, boat captain, or other transportation authority.
  - 2. Within-Field Transportation
    - a. The firearm is regarded as in active use.
    - b. Firearms transported in the field must be carried in unloaded condition while in a vehicle, though they may need to be in the field ready or loaded condition while on foot.
    - c. A state conservationist or the regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division may grant an exception based on disability or unique circumstances if preapproved in writing.
- C. NRCS Office Storage
  - 1. Firearms must be in the locked office firearm safe when in the office.
  - 2. Access to the firearm safe must be restricted to authorized employees.
  - 3. Before storage, firearms must be inspected and cleaned.
  - 4. Authorized personal firearms should not be brought into an NRCS facility unless necessary, such as if there is no secure storage location outside the office.
  - 5. If an authorized personal firearm is brought into an NRCS facility, the firearm must be in an unloaded condition and secured in a locked case. The action must be open and a trigger lock must be in place.
  - 6. Authorized personal firearms must immediately be placed into the locked office firearm safe.

## 420.37 Incident Reporting and Investigation

- A. All firearm incidents must be reported and investigated at an approved level determined by the state conservationist or regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division and in accordance with the following guidelines:
  - 1. Incidents that are criminal in nature must be reported to and investigated by the appropriate law enforcement authorities.
  - 2. Incidents that involve human death, personal injury, property damage must be reported and investigated in accordance with 360 GM Part 420, Subpart C.
- B. Lost or stolen firearms must be immediately reported to:
  - 1. Employee's supervisor.
  - 2. State conservationist or the regional director of the Soil and Plant Science Division.
  - 3. Firearm coordinator.
  - 4. Appropriate law enforcement authorities.