

The **Circuit**

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For Security And Protection Specialists



JOURNALIST SAFETY

In Hostile Environments

PRECIOUS PRINCIPALS

Challenges of
Protecting Children

TACTICAL FORMATIONS

Body Cover &
Professional Distance

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BASIC RANGE CONSIDERATIONS

I have been dealing personally with firearms in a professional capacity for over 30 years.

My professional experience with firearms started when I was 17 years old, and I joined an Infantry Regiment in the British Army. After leaving the British Army five years later, I worked in an armed capacity in numerous countries while providing security services.

I've also been organizing firearms training events internationally since the late 1990s. Over the past 30 years, some firearms courses and training events have been on some very high-end and formal ranges and some in purely improvised locations with no formal infrastructure. I've also worked with students of all skill levels, from the

scared novice to the established expert, all while using a wide array of firearms.

My conclusion from 30 years in this space is that firearms are safe if handled properly. And gun ranges are safe if managed properly. Whether you're shooting a .22 air rifle in your back garden or a light anti-armor weapon on a military range, as long as the basic principles of firearms/weapons safety and range management are followed, you shouldn't have any problems.

In light of that, my aim with this article is to give you some ►

foundational points you need to consider to run a safe shooting range and shooting events. And if you are attending a training course, this will give you the knowledge and key insights into proper course setup.

Basic Considerations Backstops - Formal Shooting Ranges:

Wherever you are shooting, and with whatever firearm or weapon system, you must ensure you have a good and sufficient backstop that can stop the ammunition that is being fired. From the outset,

backstops need to be inspected before any live fire commences to ensure they are not faulty. For example, in the case of indoor ranges, I know of several where the backstop had failed due to steel plates slipping and rounds passing through the backstop and going through the exterior wall of the range. In addition to the initial quality control check, backstops also need to be inspected regularly. And when possible, a second backstop should be employed in case of a failure in the first. On outdoor ranges, the dirt or sand should be inspected for anything



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that could cause ricochets, such as steel targets, debris left by the previous shooters or a buildup of lead in overused areas of the backstop. If you are running events, it's your responsibility to inspect the backstops of the ranges that you use. If there are any problems, you're the one that will have to deal with possible lawsuits if anyone is injured.

Backstops- Improvised Ranges:

Personally, I prefer to use improvised ranges, whether it's the side of a hill, a gully, or a disused building, as these locations can give us a wider selection of training scenarios than your standard target shooting range. When selecting an area for your improvised range, you must ensure there is a good backstop that will stop the rounds being fired. And, if the backstop fails, make sure that any rounds that pass through will go into a safe area. Additionally, you have to ensure there are no people in the area and especially behind the backstop. If you are using a shoot house or a derelict building, ensure the place is searched and secured before any live fire commences. Always make sure everyone is accounted for before starting any live-fire drills, and no one could be in the building or shoot house. For example, if you are using the side of a hill as a backstop, ensure any wooded or scrub areas have been checked for anyone who could be wandering through the site, camping, >



or even homeless people living rough. I was on one range in South Africa many years ago, which had a problem with squatters setting up camp in the empty areas behind the backstop. Responsible shooters would check the site and at least

shout a warning before starting shooting. Remember, if you or your students shoot anyone, it will be your responsibility. It's far better to ensure there is no one in any potential lines of fire than have to deal with the legal consequences

of someone being shot or killed due to negligence. And remember, in today's world where lawsuits take priority, any accidents will be due to your negligence, and you will be deemed guilty until proven innocent.

Training Novice Shooters:

Now everyone has to start somewhere, and I have had plenty of novices come through my courses. Initially, they were nervous around firearms but went on to become very competent in handling them. That said, there are some primary considerations to take into account when training a novice shooter. At the very least, novice shooters need one-on-one instruction for their first shots. When training a novice, initially, I am not worried if they are hitting the target or not. My concern is that they are handling the firearm safely, have good muzzle discipline, and are hitting the backstop when they shoot. Once they are comfortable with the firearm and shooting, then I start to refine their targeting skills. Keep in mind that over-critiquing and criticizing first-time shooters can make them more nervous and impede their will for future training. At this early stage for a novice, it's the instructor's job to safely build the shooter's confidence. The main problem with beginners is muzzle

discipline. As long as the weapon is pointed toward the backstop, there can be little harm done. But after their first shot, if they drop the gun or panic with their finger still in the trigger guard, there can be issues. This needs to be considered, especially where fully automatic weapons are being used around those that are not used to shooting them. When training novices, the instructor should be close enough to the student to take control of the firearm from the rear and top to prevent muzzle climb that could send rounds over the backstop. If you are training novices, keep in mind that their safety is your responsibility, and you will be liable for any mistake they make.

Training Scared Shooters:

If you think that only novice shooters are scared of guns, you would be very wrong. In fact, many of those who carry firearms for work, such as security guards, police officers, and military personnel, are not that well-trained. They only shoot when required and only carry a gun because it's part of their uniform. If someone is fumbling, getting agitated, or stressed when handling firearms, you need to supervise them closely. Help them to relax and reassure them. Scared shooters are just as much a danger to themselves as they are to others, especially when

practicing live fire holster drills.

Shooters Lacking Common Sense: People lacking common sense or idiots, as I like to call them, are a fact of life in all environments and workplaces. But in the firearms industry, we need to be ever vigilant for them. Not only can they hurt themselves and others, but their lack of common sense can also disrupt training courses and legal ramifications.

The gun business attracts more than its fair share of wackos, usually emasculated males trying to make up for some deficit in their lives. These people are more than a liability. They give responsible people in the firearms business a bad name. I expect most experienced firearms instructors have plenty of stories of stupid things done while on live-fire ranges. I will give you one example. While at an indoor public range in South Florida with a private client who was practicing their grouping with a pistol at 25 yards, it became clear that someone else was firing on their target. I quickly located the culprit dressed in his shooting team hat, shirt, competition gun belt with mag pouches and holster for his race gun. He was shooting at side-by-side targets at about 10 yards, and the rounds from his left-hand target were hitting my client's target at 25 yards. When I asked him if he could stop

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shooting my client's target, he had an attitude. Of course, he would; he was an "expert" after all. I had to get a member of the range staff to point out to him that his rounds were going through his target and hitting my client's. One of the first rules of firearms safety is always knowing what's behind your target, right? Whether this "expert" competition shooter was that stupid or just that arrogant not to be concerned about where his rounds were going... who knows? But his arrogance, combined with ignorance and incompetence, puts him in the category of major liability in my books. Many who perceive and sell themselves as firearms "experts" and "instructors" only take a few one-day classes and need to be viewed with as much caution, if not more, than novices.

Firearms Malfunctions:

Guns are just bits of machinery, and as such, do break and malfunction. Everyone on your range must know what to do if their firearm malfunctions. For novices, this can be putting the firearm down and calling for assistance from the range officer. For experienced shooters, clearing their own stoppages and signalling to the range officer if they have a complicated stoppage or firearm malfunction. Again, the key is that

the firearm remains pointing at the backstop or towards a safe area, so there is no chance anyone can be harmed. One cause of malfunction that can be an issue, especially on outdoor ranges, is a semi-auto pistol or rifle that starts to shoot in fully-auto. This tends to happen with firearms that have been modified. I had one student who spent a lot of money on a custom 1911. This weapon had just been taken out of its box, and after a few rounds, it started to shoot fully-auto. The safety issue, in this case, is that if the shooter does not have control of the weapon. Rounds can go over the backstop. If a semi-auto firearm starts to shoot full-auto, it needs to be unloaded, boxed for safety and legal reasons, and returned to the manufacturer or fixed by a professional gunsmith.

The Range Safety Brief:

Before anyone commences firing, they need to receive a range brief on the safety rules and regulations for that specific range. It should be very clear to the students the safe arcs of fire, where they can point firearms when shooting, loading or unloading, and the areas where they cannot point firearms. Also, the rules for moving firearms behind the firing line or entry to the shooting lane, where they can load and unload, emergency ►

procedures, the course of fire should be emphasized. The range brief is extremely important and must be understood by all of your students. Remember, if anything goes wrong, it is you who will ultimately be held responsible.

General Range Principles:

All shooting ranges differ in some ways, but common principles of how they run and are managed will always apply. In addition to ensuring the range is in good order, you must ensure the shooters also have the required eye and ear protection, are dressed adequately, have the required ammunition that is safe for that range, and their firearms are in a serviceable condition.

Always be helpful and courteous to all shooters while, at the same time, assessing their body language to see if they are overly nervous or under the influence

of drugs or alcohol. If a student is problematic or unsafe, they will need to be removed from the range. Always remain calm, cautious, and explain why the student is being asked to leave.

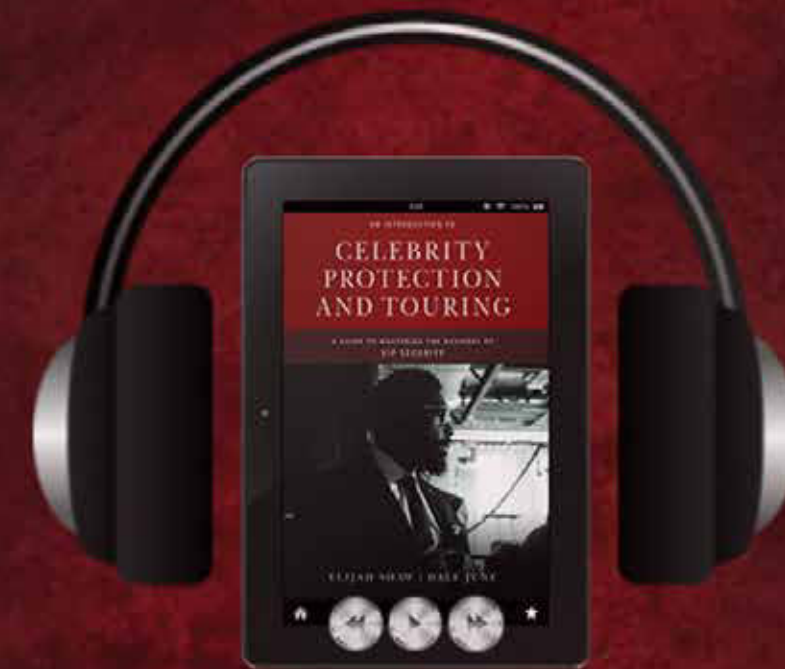
There is a lot more to range management, firearms instruction and running firearms courses and events than just doing a few one-day courses and getting a few instructor or range safety officer certificates. You need to be able to assess your ranges, plan and prepare your range safety briefs and courses of fire. Understand the firearms and ammunition that your students will be using and communicate confidently and effectively with your students, members of your training team, and range staff. But as a starting point, these basic considerations will go a long way in ensuring you start off on the right foot in range safety for your next training course.

Orlando Wilson has worked in the security industry internationally for over 25 years. He has become accustomed to the types of complications that can occur, when dealing with international law enforcement agencies, organized criminal and Mafia groups. He is the chief consultant for Risks Inc. and based in Miami but spends much of his time traveling and providing a wide range of kidnapping prevention and tactical training services to private and government clients.

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