

The CIRCUIT RIDER'S Handbook

March 2026



JUDGE ROY BEAN NOTARY PUBLIC

LAW WEST OF THE PECOS

**A Quick Reference Guide
to NCOWS Safety Rules, Regulations and Recommendations
for Judges and Members**

-- Compiled by NCOWS Senators Dave Scott, Bryan Buck and Mike Tatham --

Range Rules and Regulations

1. Firing ranges shall be “cold;” i.e., there shall be no loaded firearms allowed anywhere but the firing line.
2. No fast draw competition.
3. Eye and ear protection are mandatory in “hot” areas—the firing line and immediate surroundings.
4. Ear muff-style hearing protectors are allowed, as are modern-designed shooting glasses.
5. No alcohol allowed on the range during shooting hours, either for use or possession. No illegal controlled substances at any time. No smoking in the shooting area.
6. No fingers in the trigger guards unless the shooter is on the firing line and preparing to fire at the command of the range officer, or in the act of shooting. Shooters failing to observe this rule may be disqualified from competition.
7. All participants, hearing the command “cease fire,” or being made aware of other danger signals, will immediately cease firing and keep their firearms pointed down range with the muzzle in a downward position.
8. Shooters are responsible for the safe condition of their firearms.
9. Individuals making a formal protest to the Judge or Deputy Judge of questionable acts or violation of the rules by an individual shall accompany such protest by a \$10.00 protest fee. If the protest is upheld the fee will be returned. If the protest is denied, the fee is forfeited to the individual against whom the protest was made. The Judge or Deputy Judge's decision shall be final.
10. The Timer Operator shall not hold the timing clock device any farther forward than the shooter’s elbow of the arm operating the trigger to prevent injury to the timer operator in the event a mishap occurs. For a shooter that is hard of hearing and cannot hear the sound of the timing device starting, the Timer Operator shall provide tactile alert by tapping the shooter on the shoulder at the time the timing device sounds the audio alert. (Added March 2023) (Amended March 2024)

Safety and Procedure Rules For All National, Regional and NCOWS Posse Shoots

1. Treat and respect every firearm as if it were loaded.
2. Eye and ear protection is required for all competitors and spectators. Safety glasses with side shields recommended.
3. No loaded firearms except at the firing line or loading table.
4. No quick-draw at any time.
5. Revolvers are to always have the hammer down on an empty chamber or between chambers when loaded.
6. No breaking a 170 degrees plane with any firearm at any time during the stage. Draws from a cross draw must be done with the body turned to the firing line so the muzzle of the revolver is not breaking the 170 degree rule. Stage disqualification for first offense, match disqualification for second offense in same day. Penalties for having the finger in the trigger guard or the revolver cocked before it is pointed down-range: 1st infraction - disqualification from the stage; 2nd infraction - disqualification from the match.
7. All long guns will have actions open at all times except at the loading table, on the firing line or when they are in cases. (Amended March 2024)
8. When carrying firearms to loading or unloading tables, muzzles must be in vertical position, pointed straight up.
9. A dropped unloaded firearm ends the stage for a shooter. A dropped loaded firearm will result in a match disqualification. The firearm will be retrieved and cleared by Posse Leader or Timer.
10. A dropped round is a dead round and must be picked up at the end of the stage. (Judges option: shooter may acquire another round from person.)
11. Everyone will load, stage, and unload his/her own firearms, except for those physically challenged or inexperienced, needing assistance.
12. No running under time with a charged firearm in hand.
13. No fanning or twirling a firearm at any time.
14. Shotguns are staged with magazines and chambers open and empty and are loaded under the clock. (Pistoleer class, arms charged but not capped.) All empty shells must be ejected before grounding or moving throughout a stage when carrying the firearm.
15. Initially load rifles and revolvers at loading table only and only when the loading table is manned.
16. Shooter is to retrieve his/her own firearms and go directly to manned unload table after stage is completed.
17. No squib or magnum velocity loads. No jacketed bullets, only cast lead alloy only bullets. Shot is to be lead only, and no larger than #7 1/2's. Only cartridges and velocities approved in The Tally Book are allowed. Shooters may be held responsible for damage caused to a target by too “hot” a load.

17a. Cartridge Firearms: When it is suspected a squib load has been fired, the timer operator will stop the shooter immediately. "Suspected" is when the round is too quiet, and no projectile exits the barrel and hits the target or the ground. The firearm shall be taken by the timer operator or designee, muzzle up, to the unloading table where the firearm will be made safe. The shooter may continue the stage with the other firearms. Rounds left in the firearm with the squib load will be counted as misses unless a reshoot has been offered. (Added March 2021).

17b. Percussion Firearms: When a percussion squib occurs (i.e. the percussion cap fires, but it does not fire the charge of black powder), the timer operator will stop the shooter immediately. The shooter will keep the firearms pointed down range for a minimum of 5 seconds to be sure the round is not a delay fire. Then, the firearm shall be taken by the timer operator or designee, muzzle up, to the unloading table where the firearm will be made safe. The shooter may continue the stage with the other firearms. Rounds left in the firearm with the squib load will be counted as misses unless a reshoot has been offered. (Added March 2021).

18. All participants must attend a safety meeting before shooting in any event.

19. Poses should have no fewer than eight persons: one timer, one shooter, one watching the loading area, one watching the unloading, three watching hits and picking up brass, one loading

20. Refusal to follow the Stage Marshal or Judge's direction regarding safety or procedural rules will be grounds for match disqualification. Remember to think safety first and always! Don't be afraid to speak up if you see anyone handling a firearm improperly, but also remember to be courteous. If someone points out that you're handling a firearm carelessly, be grateful, not upset. It's better to be corrected than have someone get hurt.

21. It is permissible if Poses allow for mule-eared shotguns to be cocked at the beginning of a scenario whether staged or in the shooter's hands.

22. No cocked firearm with a live round under the hammer may ever leave the shooter's hand except for a malfunction. This also means from one hand to the other.

23. Penalty for a missed target is 10 seconds. If the majority of the counters are unsure if the shooter missed, it is not a miss.

24. Penalty for a procedural (shooting targets out of order, or otherwise not shooting the scenario as written) is 20 seconds.

25. A willful violation of the stage instructions to gain a better score will result in the shooter being assessed a 30 second penalty for violating the "Cowboy Code". This "Cowboy Code" penalty will be added to the shooter's score in addition to any penalties for misses and procedurals. Two "Cowboy Code" penalties within a match will result in a Match Disqualification.

The "Cowboy Code" penalty will be awarded if all stage spotters and the time keeper come to a unanimous conclusion that a violation as stated above has been committed.

26. A dropped unloaded firearm will result in that person's stage time being indicated in scoring with an additional time of 500 seconds. (Added March 2026)

NCOWS Rules for Air Horns and Flags

If something should occur down range that will need someone to cross over the firing line to fix it is the responsibility of the Timekeeper to use the air horn to notify his/her posse and all other posses that there is a problem. If the problem is not a matter that would endanger anyone two short blasts on the air horn after the shooter has finished the stage lets the posse leader on that posse know that a yellow flag is required. When two short blasts are heard and a yellow flag is raised on another posse, the Timekeeper should allow his/her shooter to finish his/her stage, proceed to the unloading table, lay all guns on the table and step back from the unloading table. Once the Timekeeper has determined that all firearms are either lying on the loading or unloading tables, then he/she will tell his/her Posse Leader to raise the yellow flag for that posse. When all posses' yellow flags are raised, it is then safe for someone to cross the firing line to set targets, retrieve hats, etc. Once the problem has been rectified, the initiating posse's Timekeeper will tell his Posse Leader to raise the green flag. Only when all green flags have been raised, can any firearm be picked up or moved and shooting resume. If something should occur down range that presents eminent danger to person or persons, a long blast on the air horn by a timekeeper signifies an immediate cease fire. The long blast should be relayed by all Timekeepers to ensure everyone up and down the line hears it. The person on that and all stages are to stop firing immediately, lay down his/her firearm on the ground in front of him/her with the barrel facing down range, stand, step back from the firearm, and raise open and empty hands to signify he/she is clear. At that time the Timekeeper tells the Posse Leader to raise the red flag. Once the danger has been remedied, the initiating Timekeeper will let his/her Posse Leader know to raise the green flag. Shooters in the middle of stages on a red flag will be allowed to reshoot that stage. Firearms will be picked up and carried to the unloading table where they will be unloaded and cleared. The shooter will then need to proceed to loading table, reload and get ready to shoot through the stage again. While the interrupted shooter is unloading and reloading, the next shooters in line may proceed through the stage. Once the interrupted shooter is ready, he/she will shoot where ever in the shooting order that occurs.

ADDENDUM I BEST PRACTICES

As in all cases where firearms are involved -- and especially as it relates to sporting events in which live-fire firearms are involved -- NCOWS recognizes that safety of the participants and spectators is of the absolute highest priority and requires constant vigilance by our organization's members and its officers at all levels.

That being said, NCOWS also recognizes that all club ranges will have variations, that one size does not necessarily fit all and that it is impractical, if not impossible, to attempt to establish a hard and fast rule for every situation that could occur in the course of our activities. NCOWS also permits club-level officials reasonable leeway to assess penalties for severe and/or repeated safety violations, including time penalties, and stage or match disqualifications. In such cases, club-level penalties should be made clear to all participants no later than the required safety meeting that occurs before every competition begins. Club-level penalties, should in all cases, be clear, fair, equitable and used primarily only when absolutely necessary to maintain participant and spectator safety.

Based on those observations and principles, we offer here a guideline that NCOWS considers "best practices" for some of those unforeseen circumstances that our members, clubs and especially our elected Judges at all levels might encounter. It is intended to provide recommendations and guidance on what might be the best ways to safely handle a potentially rare - or perhaps not-yet-encountered issues that could possibly occur. It is NCOWS' position that this Addendum is not all-inclusive and may be added to from time to time as the potential for unusual safety situations may arise. At this point, however, we offer this guidance on situations/circumstances that already have been submitted to NCOWS for consideration.

- There should be no loaded firearms except at the firing line or loading table. Loaded long guns and pistols should remain on the loading table until the shooter is called forward to the firing line. Holstering a pistol, then stepping away from the loading table when not called to the firing line may result in safety penalty. A second offense may result in a match disqualification.
- There should be no running under time with a charged firearm in hand. Nor should shooters walk to the stage with a loaded pistol drawn from the holster and in hand. If a pistol has not been cocked, the pistol may be re-holstered to allow movement.
- Squib, excessively light loads, magnum velocity loads or jacketed bullets should not be permitted. Only cast lead alloy bullets. Shot should be lead only, and no larger than #7 1/2's. Only cartridges and velocities approved in The Tally Book should be allowed. Shooters may be held responsible for damage caused to a target by too "hot" a load. Definitions: "Squibs" should be defined as an inadvertent load too light for the bullet to clear the muzzle of the firearm it was fired in. "Excessively Light Loads" should be considered to be a load that the timer device cannot pick up all the shots fired in a stage with the timer held at proper NCOWS-approved distances and positions. "Magnum Loads" should be considered to be a heavy load that exceeds that of a standard black powder load equivalent and may damage targets or target stands.

When it is suspected a squib load has been fired in a cartridge firearm, the timer operator should stop the shooter immediately. "Suspected" is when the round is too quiet, and no projectile exits the barrel and hits the target or the ground. The firearm should be taken by the timer operator or designee, muzzle up, to the unloading table where the firearm will be made safe. The shooter may continue the stage with the other firearms. Rounds left in the firearm with the squib load will be counted as misses unless a reshoot has been offered.

When a percussion squib misfire occurs (i.e. the percussion cap fires, but it does not fire the charge of black powder), the timer operator should stop the shooter immediately. The shooter should keep the firearms pointed down range for a minimum of 5 seconds to be sure the round is not a delay fire. Then: (Option 1) -- Once the margin of safety time (5 seconds) has been met and it has been visually verified that the ball in the misfire chamber is still present, the shooter may continue until the firearm is empty. In the event that it is only a misfire, the shooter may, while still on the clock recap the chamber(s) that did not fire and finish the course of fire. Alternatively, (Option 2) -- the shooter may simply hand off the revolver after the 5 second period and take misses for all the chambers not fired. In any case, if the ball is no longer in the misfire chamber, it is a squib and the firearm should be handed off to make safe.

If a shooter is determined to have Excessively Light Loads that the timer device cannot pick up when held no farther forward than NCOWS-approved distances/positions, a reshoot may or may not be offered at the discretion/announced practices of the local club. If not offered, raw time should be that actually captured on the timer plus five (5) seconds for each shot not registered by the timer device. In the event that the failure for the timer device to pick up all the shots is the fault of the Timer Operator a reshoot should be offered. If a shooter is determined to have Magnum Loads that damage targets and/or target stands, the shooter should immediately switch to standard load ammunition to prevent further damage and may be held responsible for the damage to targets and/or stands. If the shooter does not have standard load ammunition, the shooter should not be allowed to continue the match.

- A cocked firearm with a live round under the hammer should never ever leave a shooter's hand except for a malfunction -- to include from one hand to the other. Once a firearm is cocked with a live round under the hammer, it should be fired from the position the shooter is in without moving, regardless of whether it will result in a procedural penalty.
- In many cases, it will be the responsibility of the timer operator to determine, in consultation with counters and others at the stage, to determine if a safety violation has occurred. Should three or more posse members have witnessed a violation, the timer operator should then report such violation to the scorekeeper before the final score is recorded.
- At the unloading table, it is recommended that the unloading table officer should report any of the following infractions to the timer operator before the final score for the stage is recorded if at all possible: An empty case left in a long gun would be a 20 second penalty for each offense. There should be no disqualification as there is no danger from an empty case, but it is a rules infraction. A live round in a long gun with the action closed or pistol when firearm has not been grounded for a malfunction, should result in a stage disqualification with a second offense resulting in a match disqualification. A live round found in a long gun with action open, should be considered a 20 second penalty on first offense and a match disqualification for a second infraction.

A Closing Note:

The items included in the Addendum Best Practices section are RECOMMENDATIONS and should not be construed to replace -- or as alternatives to -- items already approved by the Congress and officially a part of The Tally Book. As with all items in The Tally Book, including safety issues, The Tally Book is the authority when it comes to the rules and regulations governing NCOWS activities. We hope this Addendum, however, will help provide guidance in areas that do not appear as hard-and-fast Tally Book regulations.