



United States Department of the Interior



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Instruction Memorandum No. AK 2007-041
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To: All Employees

From: State Director

Subject: Firearms Policy for Non-Law Enforcement Personnel

This Instruction Memorandum (IM) is being issued to establish the policies of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – Alaska relating to the possession or use of firearms by non-law enforcement personnel while on official duty.

The words “personnel” or “employee,” as used in this IM, refer to non-law enforcement employees and volunteers of the BLM – Alaska.

An employee may carry a firearm on the job when engaged in field activities in which there is a reasonable possibility of a life threatening encounter with a dangerous wild animal, if trained and authorized to do so. Either a BLM – Alaska issued 12 Gauge shotgun or an approved personal firearm may be carried for this purpose. Employees may not carry firearms for the purpose of protecting themselves from other human beings.

Training and Authorization Requirements: Prior to requisitioning a BLM – Alaska issued firearm, transporting any firearm to a work location, or carrying any firearm in the field while on official business, **employees must request and receive official written authorization.** This applies to both government owned and personally owned firearms. The following personnel will not be authorized to carry a firearm:

1. Convicted felons who have not had their right to carry firearms reinstated
2. Employees and volunteers who have been convicted of domestic abuse or are under a current restraining order or criminal charges related to domestic abuse
3. Employees and volunteers under 18 years of age

In order to obtain authorization to carry a firearm in the field, an employee must first complete classroom training sessions in firearms safety and wild animal behavior, then pass a firearms proficiency test conducted by a Certified BLM Firearms Instructor. [The BLM Safety Manual Handbook H-1112-2](#) specifies requirements for instructor certification (Section 17.4), classroom instruction (Section 17.4.A), and proficiency testing (Section 17.4.B). Firearms safety and wild animal behavior sessions may be conducted separately or combined into one class.

An employee choosing to carry a personally owned firearm in the field must pass the proficiency test using the specific firearm they will carry. Personal firearms must meet the minimum technical standards described in [BLM Safety Manual Handbook H-1112-2](#) (Section 17.3), and must be examined and approved by a BLM Firearms Instructor before being used for training or carried on official duty.

The [BLM Safety Manual H1112-1](#) (Section 26.2), specifies that only State Directors may authorize a non-law enforcement employee to carry a firearm while on official duty. Upon an employee's successful completion of the prescribed training and proficiency testing, a letter of authorization from the State Director's office will be sent to the employee's manager; the manager ensures a copy of the letter is delivered to the employee. The employee will be issued a card certifying that they are approved by BLM – Alaska to carry a firearm for protection against dangerous wild animals. The card will be signed by the test administrator and the field manager, branch chief or supervisor. The employee is then authorized to requisition, transport, and carry a firearm on official business for the purpose of protecting themselves and their fellow crew members from dangerous wild animals. This card must be carried on the person of the employee when they carry or transport a firearm on official travel to, in, or from the field.

Authorizations to carry firearms are effective for one field season, and expire at the end of the calendar year. Proficiency testing must be repeated prior to reauthorization each year. Repeating the classroom training on an annual basis is not required. However, employees who utilize firearms infrequently are advised to repeat the course annually; employees with more extensive experience with firearms should repeat the course every 3 - 4 years. Any BLM Firearms Instructor may be consulted to assist in determining the frequency appropriate for each employee.

Due to the statistically demonstrated high hazard level associated with carrying and handling firearms, a BLM Firearms Instructor shall refuse to authorize an employee to carry a firearm if the employee demonstrates an obvious lack of situational awareness or appropriate level of caution with a firearm, regardless of the employee's otherwise successful completion of the proficiency course of fire.

Restrictions on Public Carry: It is important that members of the public do not mistake a non-law enforcement employee for a Law Enforcement Ranger or Special Agent. Non-law enforcement employees are not authorized to wear or carry a sidearm when dressed in a BLM uniform. Only warranted BLM law enforcement officials have the authority to interact with the public when wearing a sidearm. Uniformed non-law enforcement employees should avoid carrying any type of firearm in locations where extensive contact with members of the visiting public is likely to occur, such as campgrounds or waysides, unless there is a known threat of an aggressive wild animal in the area.

Should a uniformed employee carrying a firearm in the field unexpectedly encounter and engage in an interaction with a member of the public, the employee is advised to identify themselves as a non-law enforcement BLM employee and inform the member of the public that the purpose of their firearm is for protection from wild animals.

Non-law enforcement employees should always arrange for a BLM – Alaska Ranger or Special Agent to accompany them for public contact situations having a known or suspected potential for violence.

Storage and Security Requirements: The [BLM Safety Manual Handbook H-1112-2](#) (Section 17.6), requires non-LE firearms not in active use be stored in an unloaded condition, in a secure place, out of sight, and under lock and key.

In order to further ensure the safety of our employees, their families, and the public, all BLM – Alaska personnel responsible for Bureau issued or Bureau approved firearms will also utilize an effective and fully engaged trigger locking mechanism on any firearm that is being stored or transported.

This requirement applies to any non-law enforcement firearm regardless of the length of time it will be stored or the distance it will be transported. Exceptions to the policy are:

1. A firearm actively being carried for its intended purpose in a field situation
2. A firearm designated for use to protect a work camp from dangerous animals, provided it is secured under the direct control of a designated authorized individual

This requirement also applies to any personal firearm that has been approved by an authorized BLM – Alaska Firearms Instructor for official use, when that firearm is being transported or stored as part of the official duties of the employee responsible for it. In order to have a personal firearm approved for official use, the owner must present to the qualifying firearms instructor a fully functioning trigger locking device for the firearm, and physically demonstrate the lock's operable condition and effectiveness to the instructor.

There are two types of approved safety locking devices:

1. A locking device that, if installed on a firearm and secured by means of a key or a mechanically, electronically, or electromechanically operated combination lock, prevents the firearm from being discharged without first deactivating or removing the device.
2. A locking mechanism incorporated into the design of a firearm that prevents discharge of the firearm by any person who does not have access to the key or other device designed to unlock the mechanism.

Trigger safety locking devices that meet these criteria are available from the Campbell Tract and Alaska Fire Service warehouses for use with the twelve gauge pump shotguns that are currently the standard firearm issued by BLM – Alaska.

Lockable hard-sided cases and locking gun cabinets do not meet the requirements of this policy and will not negate the requirement for trigger locking mechanisms. An employee that is responsible for a locked firearm that is in transport or storage must ensure that the key to the firearm's safety lock is secure at all times.

Reporting Requirements: It is important to track all incidents involving firearms and/or wild animal attacks. The primary reason is to learn as much as we can from such incidents in order to prevent or mitigate future occurrences. From a program standpoint it is also important to document all incidents that demonstrate the necessity of maintaining the option to authorize non-law enforcement employees to carry firearms in the Alaska work environment.

All incidents of the following types must be reported to the employee's supervisor and their Safety Specialist:

1. An on-duty discharge of a firearm at an aggressive animal in defense of life and property with the intent of taking the animal's life
2. A discharge of firearm intended to drive off an aggressive animal
3. An accidental discharge of a BLM – Alaska issued firearm, at any time
4. An accidental discharge of an approved personal firearm that occurs while the bearer is on official duty or official travel status
5. An on-duty discharge of a firearm in defense of life and property resulting in the death or wounding of an animal

6. Any incident in which a wild animal:
 - a. Attacks, or makes any physical contact with, an on-duty employee or a member of the public visiting lands managed by the BLM – Alaska
 - b. Displays aggression toward an on-duty employee or a member of the public visiting lands managed by the BLM – Alaska to a degree that forces the employee or visitor to retreat or take other defensive action/s.

Allowing employees who are not law enforcement officers to carry firearms in the field is a sensitive matter. Our firearms program is subject to intense scrutiny by our agency and the public. Highly professional training, constant situational awareness, accurate data, and strict adherence to these policies will help ensure that we continue to maintain the ability to authorize our employees to carry weapons in the field for protection against dangerous animals.

Violations of this policy will result in the loss of the employee's authorization to carry a firearm. Threatening behavior toward other people involving a firearm is cause for disciplinary and legal action.

If you have any questions or need more information regarding these policies, contact Ken Higgins, Alaska State Safety Manager, at 907-271-6370.

Signed by:
Thomas P. Lonnie
State Director

Authenticated by:
Maria Rivero-Folmar
Records Manager