

OE-3: 2018-06

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## Unintentional Discharge of Firearms

### PURPOSE

This Operating Experience Level 3 (OE-3) document provides information about unintentional discharges of firearms that have occurred at Department of Energy (DOE) facilities.

Unintentional discharges of firearms can be classified as accidental, wherein the weapon malfunctions and discharges, or negligent, wherein the discharge is caused by operator error. Accidental discharges are avoided by firearms maintenance and inspections. Negligent discharges are prevented by strict adherence to gun safety rules.

### BACKGROUND

In October 2017, there were two unintentional discharges of firearms reported into the Occurrence Reporting and Processing System (ORPS). A review of the ORPS database revealed seven unintentional discharges of firearms since 2012, and 15 since 2007, indicating that this is a consistently repeated occurrence at the DOE, with an average of one to three ORPS-reported occurrences per year.

On October 16, 2017, a Security Police Officer (SPO) was involved in a training exercise, at the Savannah River Site (SRS), where each participant had only two rounds in their weapon's chamber. After the string of fire and the buzzer had sounded, the SPO, who had not fired both rounds, raised their hand to indicate that they needed help. The Firearms Instructor moved to their location to ask what the issue was. The SPO responded by saying "it," then placing their finger on the trigger and pulling it. Pulling the trigger caused one round to discharge, which impacted

10 feet downrange of the firing line. The rifle was inspected, test-fired, and determined to be in working order with no issues identified. (ORPS Report EM-SR--CENT-SECFOR-2017-0002)

On October 6, 2017, during an SPO Live Fire Shoot House (LFSH) training exercise at the Y-12 National Security Complex, a rifle discharge occurred while the SPO was in the process of lowering his rifle, placing it on safe, and transitioning to a handgun. The round discharged into the floor toward the target of the LFSH. No injuries were sustained. No issues were noted with the rifle upon inspection. (ORPS Report NA--NPO-CNS-Y12NSC-2017-0044)

On September 8, 2016, an SRS SPO was participating in weapons qualification at the Advanced Tactical Training Academy when an unauthorized discharge occurred while the SPO was transitioning from a rifle to a handgun. The weapon discharged directly forward and toward the ground. No injuries occurred. (ORPS Report EM-SR--CENT-SECFOR-2016-0002)

### ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

These events were reviewed to determine common factors and identify lessons learned. The following observations are noted.

- The individuals who were involved in these events were all SPOs.
- Depression of the trigger was the identified cause in the October 16, 2017 incident. There was no cause identified in either the October 6, 2017, or September 8, 2016, incidents.
- The incidents occurred during training exercises. Some other events, not reported in

this OE-3, have occurred during weapons cleaning activities.

- There were no injuries because of the accidental discharges.
- These incidents were reported into ORPS as management concerns.

## DISCUSSION

These events signify the importance of adhering to all policies and procedures and maintaining strict attention to detail when performing assigned tasks involving weapons. Strictly following four basic gun safety rules can prevent negligent discharges of firearms. They are:

1. All firearms are always loaded.
2. Never point a firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target.
4. Be sure of your target.

Over the past ten years, violation of Rule #3 was identified as a cause in 5 out of 11 incidents that were reported into ORPS. Violation of Rule #1 was indicated in six of the incidents, where employees were not aware that a gun was loaded. In some instances, the employee who negligently discharged the firearm was terminated from employment.

Following the second rule, i.e., never pointing a firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy, prevented injuries from occurring in all incidents. If this “muzzle discipline” is strictly practiced, unintentional discharges are not likely to lead to injury, death, or property damage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce the risks posed by negligent discharge of firearms, it is recommended that:

- The four general firearms safety rules be emphasized at the beginning of all training exercises and strictly adhered to by all employees handling firearms.
- Violations of any of these safety rules compels action by management, including, but not limited to: mandatory retraining, disciplinary

actions, and/or increased supervision of the employee.

To enable tracking/trending of firearms safety violations, it is recommended that any violations of the four basic gun safety rules be reported into local occurrence reporting systems or ORPS.

## CONCLUSION

Handling firearms poses risk of death, injury, or property damage if risks are not mitigated by strict adherence to gun safety rules and procedures for handling. Any violation of the safety rules should be acted upon by management, whether the violation results in unintentional discharge of the firearm or not. Additionally, safety violations involving guns, including but not limited to those that result in discharges of the weapon, should be tracked in local or DOE-wide reporting systems so that recurrent or trending safety issues can be addressed and mitigated as needed.

## REFERENCES

ORPS Report EM-SR--CENT-SECFOR-2017-0002. *Unauthorized Weapons Discharge During Weapons Qualification*

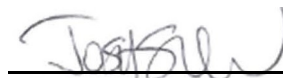
ORPS Report NA--NPO-CNS-Y12NSC-2017-0044. *Weapons Training Issue*

ORPS Report EM-SR--CENT-SECFOR-2016-0002. *Unauthorized Weapons Discharge during Weapons Qualifications*

DOE O 473.3A. Protection Program Operations

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This OE-3 document requires no follow-up report or written response.



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