

BLM Releases Tips for Target Shooting This Fire Season



The Bureau of Land Management is asking the public to be mindful of target shooting on public lands and to take precautions to prevent fires.

It didn't take long for the number one fire threat to strike again.

The nearly 3,500-acre Chaves Fire is the latest reminder of why fire safety

precautions are always a must. The fire is the result of target shooters taking aim on BLM property east of Dayton. The ammo may have hit its mark, but the spark did not.

"We would expect as it gets drier and the fuels become more receptive, to see more of these incidents," said Ryan Elliott. Lead Fire Investigator assigned to BLM's Carson City District.

So then how do we put an end to these human-caused flames?

Elliott says shooters need to find a better way to not only know their target, but to know what's behind it.

"They're using a backstop, that's safe," said Elliott. "The problem is they're not taking into consideration the fuels with the backstop."

However, the risks don't stop at the dry vegetation. Various agencies in the area want target shooters to know that really any type of ammunition can start a fire under the right conditions.



"It's like pounding on something, it gets hot so there's deformation that goes on that generates enough heat to cause a fire," said Casey Jones, Fire Technician with the U.S. Forest Service.

The same can even be said for lead bullets. Elliott says there's a common misconception that if rounds aren't filled with steel or copper, they won't cause an ignition.

AVOIDING FIRES WHEN TARGET SHOOTING



USE COMMON SENSE WHEN SHOOTING IN HOT DRY CONDITIONS
When target shooting always use common sense. In unusually hot, dry, or drought conditions don't go shooting outside. Pay a little extra money and go to a range instead.

BE AWARE OF ANY SHOOTING BANS IN YOUR AREA BEFORE SHOOTING
Several municipalities and counties are issuing shooting bans. When shooting outside, know which bans affect you. Shooting where banned not only forces you subject to criminal penalties, but could also expose you to civil liability for any damages you cause.



BRING A BUCKET OF WATER AND FIRE EXTINGUISHER WHEN TARGET SHOOTING
Having a 5-gallon bucket of water and fire extinguisher with you while shooting could prevent a disaster if a fire does start. We recommend placing the bucket and extinguisher near the targets you'll be shooting. That way, if a fire starts, you won't have to waste precious time carrying a heavy bucket or fire extinguisher all the way to where your targets are set up.

SHOOT ON QUALITY STEEL TARGETS
When shooting using steel targets, set the target on a 30 degree angle. Also clear away any brush or weeds from directly behind the target. Even though a good steel target rarely sparks, it is still possible for sparks to happen. Setting the target on an angle directs sparks downward behind the target. Clearing away brush or weeds keeps any sparks from starting fires.



PLACE YOUR TARGETS ON DIRT OR GRAVEL
Make sure your target is placed on a level, unvegetated surface of dirt or small grained gravel. Placing a target in tall grass increases the risk of fire.

DON'T SHOOT TRASH
Trash can become a dangerous fire hazard when shot. Since trash may contain flammable materials, hot rounds can build up inside and create enough heat to cause a fire. In hot dry conditions, don't shoot things like TVs, washing machines, or anything else that could cause a spark.



DON'T SHOOT WITH STEEL CORE AMMUNITION
Ammo that contains a steel core will spark when it hits a rock or a steel target. To avoid any chance of sparking, do not use steel ammunition and avoid shooting in rocky areas.

BRING A SHOVEL AND A NON-FLAMMABLE BLANKET WHEN SHOOTING
Use the shovel to dig a trench around your targets before shooting to ensure that any fire caused by sparks can be easily contained. Place the non-flammable blanket near the targets you'll be shooting so it's easily available if needed. A non-flammable blanket is one of the best ways to smother a fire and can be even more effective than water.



NEVER SHOOT EXPLODING TARGETS
Binary exploding targets made of ammonium nitrate and aluminum powder (commonly known as Tannerite when combined) are popular among recreational shooters, but can be highly destructive. Never use exploding targets in flammable areas. Exploding targets are outlawed on public lands by the Bureau of Land Management's Fire Prevention Order.



DON'T SMOKE WHILE TARGET SHOOTING
Even if you're following all safety precautions in regard to shooting, you can still easily start a wildfire by smoking. If you're shooting in a dry location, make sure that all cigarette butts are properly extinguished or avoid smoking at all.



PARK YOUR VEHICLE AWAY FROM DRY GRASS
Several fires have been started by vehicles parked over grass. Many people don't think about it, but the hot undercarriage of a car or truck can easily create enough heat to ignite dry grass.



"I've been told it'd be a one in a million shot," said Elliott. "Well if you have 100 shooters shooting 150 rounds per shooting session, that's 15,000 rounds per day, it takes about 60 days to get to a million rounds."

And it's not just the fire agencies who're reminding target shooters of these best practices. The owner of RAC Guns & Ammo believes we can prevent many wildfires by simply using county gun ranges.

"It's all clear, it's safe, things are there to be shot and you also know what's beyond your target," said Rick Collup.

Here are some tips to ensure shooters protect public lands and prevent wildfires from starting:

- Place your targets on dirt or gravel areas clear of vegetation and avoid shooting into rocky areas. Placing a target in dry grass increases the risk of fire.
- Shoot at quality steel targets designed to minimize risks to both the shooter and the environment. For steel targets to be functional and safe, they should be made of high quality through hardened steel that has a Brinell hardness number of at least 500. Refrain from shooting steel targets during hot, dry and windy conditions.
- Bring a shovel. Use the shovel to dig a trench around your targets before shooting to ensure that any fire caused by sparks can be easily contained.
- Don't shoot at exploding targets, you can increase your chances of starting a fire.
- Don't use incendiary or tracer ammo – Incendiary and tracer ammo are always prohibited on public lands.
- Be aware that all types of ammunition can start fires under the right conditions especially steel core ammunition. To avoid a chance of sparking, do not use steel core ammunition and always avoid shooting in rocky areas. A study of ignition by rifle bullets was published by the USDA Rocky Mountain Research Station. The paper can be found at https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_rp104.pdf

- Bring a container of water. This may seem obvious, but shooters often fail to bring enough water to put a fire out. A five-gallon bucket of water readily available while shooting could prevent a disaster if a fire does start.
- Don't shoot trash. Trash like old couches and TVs can often be found illegally dumped on public land but can be dangerous fire hazards when shot.
- Be cautious with smoking. Even if you're following all safety precautions in regard to shooting, you can still easily start a wildfire by smoking. If you're shooting in a dry location, make sure that all cigarette butts are properly extinguished or avoid smoking at all.
- Park your vehicle away from dry grass. Wildfires have been started by vehicles parked in dry grass. While it may not seem like a hazard, the hot undercarriage of a car or truck can easily create enough heat to ignite the grass.
- Please shoot responsibly, clean up after shooting and "Tread Lightly" on public land.

The BLM of Carson City said that any target shooters that start a fire will be held liable for paying suppression costs and anyone who causes and leaves the scene without reporting it could be charged criminally.

(BLM, Carson City District, contributed to this report).



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