

Health & Safety Fact Sheet

STARTING PISTOLS AND CAPS

Safe use, storage and licensing of starting pistols in schools and related sporting environments.

Starting pistols usually use caps or for some older designs, blank shells, in order to prevent injury. **Schools are not to use the older style starting pistols which use a metal encased charge, have the appearance of a weapon and require the user to have a permit under the *Firearms Act 1996*.** It would be rare that schools still have these guns on the premises; however any school which has such a gun should surrender it to the local police.



Above: examples of metal encased charge and starting pistol that require a permit under the *Firearms Act 1996* that **ARE NOT TO BE USED IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS.**

Commonly, starting pistols are mechanical devices which rely on a hammer being set by the user and released by a trigger action to explode a paper encased cap. These starting pistols are fairly inexpensive, are available through sporting goods outlets and do not require a permit or licence.

Starting gun caps are sensitive explosives which have the potential to cause serious burns and permanently damage hearing. Concerns for staff and students' health and safety require that all schools take care in the storage, instruction and use of starting pistols and caps.



Above: examples of hammer style starting pistol and starting pistol caps (including paper sheets to prevent friction).

Safe Use of Starting Pistols and Caps

The following actions are required to ensure the safe use of starting pistols at schools:

- when not in use, starting pistols and caps are to be stored separately from each other and securely in locked cupboards that are inaccessible to students or unauthorised persons.
- no student is to operate a starting gun or have access to a starting pistol or caps.
- teachers/staff that are operating the starting pistol are given instructions in the safe use of the equipment, including hearing protection.

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When using a starting pistol and caps, the staff member must ensure that:

- caps are not carried in pockets or placed in situations where friction or static electricity may cause ignition.
- caps are kept in their original packaging, or if that is not possible – in a secure container (spark proof) that is kept closed at all times except when caps are put into, or removed from the container.
- Where an explosive is transferred from its original package to another package, the word 'EXPLOSIVE' is to be shown clearly on the last mentioned package together with a reproduction of all other words in relation to safety which would have been shown on the original package. If caps are removed from the original packaging, then the paper sheet from the original packaging must be placed between any cap surfaces that may rub together
- no more than 10 caps are to be removed from the original packaging at any one time. If caps are removed from the original packaging, then the paper sheet from the original packaging must be placed between any cap surfaces that may rub together
- when removing caps from the original packet and inserting them into the starting pistol, care is to be taken to ensure no sharp objects come into contact with the caps. This includes fingernails, keys, pens etc.
- any caps removed from the original packaging and not placed in the starting pistol must be placed in either an empty cap packet or a dedicated non-metallic container e.g. small bag or leather pouch.
- naked flame is kept well away from any storage of caps.
- when the starting pistol is fired that it is held at arm's length above the shoulder into the air.
- the starting pistol is not pointed or aimed at anyone.
- all other persons are positioned at a safe distance (at least 5 metres) from the starting gun area
- the gun and caps are in their possession at all times and are not handled by students or unauthorised persons
- all spent or partially spent caps are disposed of securely. Particular attention must be paid to ensuring spent or partially spent caps are placed in a secure container immediately after use.

Hearing Protection

Principals must ensure that:

- staff using, or in close vicinity to the use of a starting pistol have been provided with, and are wearing ear muffs or ear plugs with an SLC 80 rating of not less than 25dB; or ear plugs with an SLC 80 rating of not less than 25dB.
- the hearing protection provided complies with Australian Standard 1270:2002 Acoustics – Hearing Protectors.

When using a starting pistol, the staff member must ensure that:

- they have been provided with, and are wearing ear muffs with an SLC 80 rating of not less than 25dB; or ear plugs with an SLC 80 rating of not less than 25dB. Ear muffs are easy to fit and generally give the best protection. Other adults (e.g. volunteers) assisting with the starting procedure are also required to wear hearing protection.
- all people are kept as far away as practicable from the starter during races. A minimum distance of 5 metres should be enforced. People who are within this distance should also be provided with hearing protection.