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Guidance on Ammunition That Has Been Submerged In Water

Torrential rains and storms surges that can result in flooding in areas of the United States bring about several interesting questions. Is it possible to salvage ammunition that has been exposed to water? Can ammunition that has been submerged in water for a period of time be salvaged? Should one set it out and attempt to dry it? What are the potential hazards?

To supply answers to these questions, one should look at the situation from two perspectives: First, ammunition that has been exposed to rain or moisture as could be normally encountered when hunting or shooting; and, secondly, ammunition that has been, for whatever reason, totally submerged for any length of time.

Centerfire rifle, handgun and shotshell ammunition is reasonably tolerant of exposure to light rain or dropping in the snow or on damp ground as long as the exposure is limited and the cartridges are wiped dry immediately. Ammunition should not be carried or stored in any manner that may collect and trap water, further increasing the exposure of the ammunition to moisture.

Rimfire ammunition is much more susceptible than other ammunition types to moisture damage from exposure to the elements due to the unique construction of the cartridges. Every effort should be made to prevent rimfire ammunition from being exposed to rain or dropped in the snow or on water-soaked ground.

Regarding ammunition that has been submerged in water for any period of time, there are too many variables that would need to be considered such as the cartridge type (e.g., rimfire, shotshell, centerfire rifle, centerfire handgun); depth of the water; length of time the cartridges were submerged; are the primers on the cartridges sealed providing some degree of water resistance? what contaminates may have been in the water that might affect the powder charge or priming compound? and many others.

Some of the potential hazards of attempting to salvage or use the previously submerged ammunition include, but are not limited to:

- Potential safety hazard in attempting to “dry out” the cartridges.
- Possible further deterioration or damage of the loaded cartridge or its components due to
- drying methods.
- Failure of the cartridge to fire, which could have life-threatening ramifications.
- Initiation of only the priming compound or ignition of only a proportion of the propellant powder charge. This may result in insufficient pressure to push the projectile clear of the barrel resulting in the projectile stopping part way down the barrel and creating a bore obstruction. Firing a subsequent round through an obstructed barrel could result in serious bodily injury, death and property damage.

It would be impossible to ascertain for certain the extent of the deteriorating effect, if any, the

water may have had on each individual cartridge. **Therefore, the safe answer is that no attempt be made to salvage or use previously submerged ammunition.** The ammunition should be disposed of in a safe and responsible manner. Do not ship the ammunition back to the manufacturer. Contact your local law enforcement agency for disposal instructions in your area.