

Generally Accepted Firearms and Ammunition Interchangeability

When SAAMI was founded in 1926 at the request of the federal government, it was tasked with creating and publishing industry standards for safety, interchangeability, reliability and quality within the firearms and ammunition industry. Firearms should only be used with the ammunition designated by the firearm manufacturer for use in that firearm. Markings which indicate the appropriate ammunition to be used in a firearm are usually found on the firearm's barrel but may alternately appear on the frame or receiver. The discharge of ammunition which does not match the firearm markings can be dangerous and can result in serious injury or death to the user and/or bystanders, as well as damage to the firearm.

The best way to verify that you are using the correct ammunition is to check the head stamp on the ammunition to confirm that it matches the markings on the firearm.

Some types of ammunition, most notably rimfire and cartridges produced for military use, do not have cartridge markings on the head stamp of the case. In those instances, check the original ammunition packaging to determine its proper designation. If you have any doubt about the designation of the ammunition, you should not use it until you have it examined by a qualified person.

Remember – just because a round of ammunition can fit into a firearm's chamber, barrel, or action – this does not necessarily mean that it is safe to use that ammunition in that firearm. Again, *always* verify that the ammunition to be used matches the markings on the firearm.



Firearm and headstamp markings and other references to specific cartridges and chambers may utilize the full official name, or other approved abbreviated names, as listed in the SAAMI standards. In addition, there are some cartridges/chambers with equivalent names found in common use. A listing of the most common examples of these *equivalent/historical names* can be found at <https://saami.org/publications-advisories/advisories/>.

Beyond cartridge names that are equivalent, there are a very few firearm/ammunition combinations which will generally allow for the safe firing of an **alternate cartridge** in a specified firearm chamber. While the dimensions and working pressures of these cartridges generally allow for the safe firing of these cartridges in the chambers listed below, the user should always refer to the firearm manufacturer

prior to use for additional guidance about whether the alternate cartridge will otherwise properly function in their firearm.

These acceptable alternate cartridge/chamber combinations are limited to only the following:

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Firearms Chambered In		May Generally Safely Shoot	
FULL NAME	ABBREVIATED NAME	FULL NAME	ABBREVIATED NAME
22 Long Rifle	22 LR	22 Short 22 Long 22 Long Rifle Shot	22 S 22 L 22 LR Shot
22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire	22 WMR 22 WIN MAG	22 Winchester Rimfire 22 Remington Special	22 WRF
280 Ackley Improved	280 ACK IMP	280 Remington	280 REM
300 AAC Blackout	300 BLK	300 Whisper	
300 Whisper		300 AAC Blackout	300 BLK
32 H&R Magnum	32 H&R MAG	32 Smith & Wesson 32 Smith & Wesson Long	32 S&W 32 S&WL
32 Smith & Wesson Long	32 S&WL	32 Smith & Wesson	32 S&W
327 Federal Magnum	327 FED MAG	32 H&R Magnum 32 Smith & Wesson 32 Smith & Wesson Long	32 H&R MAG 32 S&W 32 S&WL
38 Long Colt	38 LC	38 Short Colt	38 SC
38 Special	38 SPL	38 Short Colt 38 Long Colt	38 SC 38 LC
38 Special +P	38 SPL +P	38 Special 38 Short Colt 38 Long Colt	38 SPL 38 SC 38 LC
38 Super Automatic +P	38 SUPER AUTO +P	38 Automatic	38 AUTO
357 Magnum	357 MAG	38 Special 38 Short Colt 38 Long Colt	38 SPL 38 SC 38 LC
357 Remington Maximum	357 REM MAX	38 Special 38 Short Colt 38 Long Colt 357 Magnum	38 SPL 38 SC 38 LC 357 MAG
44 Remington Magnum	44 REM MAG	44 S&W Special	44 S&W SPL
454 Casull	454 CASULL	45 Colt	45 COLT
458 Lott	458 LOTT	458 Winchester Magnum	458 WIN MAG
460 S&W Magnum	460 S&W MAG	454 Casull 45 Colt	454 CASULL 45 COLT
475 Linebaugh	475 LINEBAUGH	480 Ruger	480 RUGER
500 S&W Magnum	500 S&W MAG	500 Special	500 SPL

Shotshell Ammunition

Shotgun ammunition, or shotgun “shells,” have their own considerations when discussing interchangeability.

Using shorter shells in a longer chamber, such as firing 12-gauge 1¾" or 2¾" shells in either 12-gauge 3" or 3½" chamber, is acceptable. The reverse is NOT TRUE as the longer shell will produce higher-than-expected pressure either by design or from the mouth of the shell opening into the forcing cone of the shorter chamber and creating a constriction.

While the dimensions and working pressures of shorter shotshells generally allow for the safe firing of these cartridges in longer chambers of the same gauge, the user should always refer to the firearm manufacturer prior to use for additional guidance about whether the shorter shotshell will otherwise properly function in their firearm if it is not marked for the shorter cartridge length.

Different gauges are NEVER interchangeable, and some mix-ups are known to have the potential to cause catastrophic results. Loading a 20-gauge shell in a 12-gauge shotgun, for example, can result in the 20-gauge shell lodging in the forcing cone of the 12-gauge barrel so that another 12-gauge shell fired behind it will essentially encounter a plugged bore. This occurrence even has its own name – the "12/20 burst." Other combinations can cause the same outcome, although they are less common:

- Loading a 16-gauge shell in a 12-gauge chamber, or
- Loading a 20-gauge shell in a 16-gauge chamber, or
- Loading a 28-gauge shell in a 20-gauge chamber

Commercial vs. Military Standards

Ammunition manufactured to military standards can, depending on the cartridge, have identical or near-identical dimensions to a SAAMI commercial cartridge, like 223 Remington/5.56 x 45mm NATO.

However, ammunition made to military standards can have higher pressure levels than their commercial counterparts, and the firearms designed to fire these military cartridges may have different construction and barrel geometry to handle these higher pressures. Similarly, surplus military firearms may have headspace dimensions that are within acceptable limits to a military standard but would be excessive for a SAAMI commercial cartridge (7.62 x 51mm NATO/308 Winchester is one example).

Therefore, only use ammunition manufactured to military standards in firearms that are marked and chambered explicitly to accept that specific military cartridge. Failure to do so can result in serious injury or death to the user and/or bystanders, as well as damage to the firearm.

For more information specifically on the interchangeability of 223 Remington ammunition in 5.56 firearms and 5.56 ammunition in 223 Remington firearms, see SAAMI FAQs at <https://saami.org/faqs/>.