



# AIR RIFLE MARKSMANSHIP FOR YOUTH

*A resource for youth-program leaders,  
decision-makers, parents and youth.*



*The Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP) compiled this document to provide comprehensive, factual information for youth organization leaders and school administrators to consider when deciding whether to establish or approve rifle marksmanship programs (JROTC units, club programs, club or varsity rifle teams, physical education courses). This document may also be used by youth, who are considering participation in air rifle marksmanship, and their parents to learn more about this sport. To obtain additional information about target shooting, contact the CMP at 419-635-2141 or via email at [info@thecmp.org](mailto:info@thecmp.org).*

**AIR RIFLE MARKSMANSHIP—A SUMMARY.** Air rifle marksmanship is a sport in which the primary items of sports equipment are 4.5 mm (.177 cal.) air rifles designed expressly for target shooting. All sports test athletes' or participants' skills. In air rifle target shooting, participants fire rifles in three different shooting positions at targets placed 10 meters away. All sports measure athlete performance by using times, scores or some similar means. In air rifle, scores are determined according to how close to the center of the target a series of shots are placed. Target shooting requires its athletes to develop fine motor control skills and mental discipline and it demands strict adherence to safety rules. Air rifle is a gold medal event for men and women in the Olympic Games. Air rifle shooting is practiced as a sport in more than 140 countries of the world. When you make decisions or choices about establishing or participating in an air rifle target shooting program, you are encouraged to give careful consideration to the information in this document.

**Rifle marksmanship is one of the safest of all youth sports.** The CMP currently tracks over 2,600 high school rifle teams (the majority are JROTC teams) and over 2,050 junior rifle clubs. In eight years of collecting safety data, these 4,650 plus youth rifle teams and clubs have reported only one injury resulting from gun handling practices. That one injury, sustained while removing a compressed air cylinder for recharging, resulted from the misuse of maintenance equipment and was not a shooting accident. This outstanding safety record is the result of rigorous safety training provided for leaders and participants. Safety rules that are applied in target shooting have been effective in fulfilling a "zero accidents" goal within the sport. Rifle shooting is one sport where achieving a goal of no accidents or injuries is, in fact, attainable.

**Rifle target shooting is a sport where sex, size, speed or "natural ability" do not determine success.** Shooting is a sport for everyone.

- In this sport, participants advance and succeed as a result of motivation and practice; hard work almost invariably pays off; and, the most important component of "talent" is motivation and interest.



*Effective safety instruction, supervision by trained range officers and strictly enforced safety rules make air rifle target shooting one of the safest of all youth sports.*

- Girls and boys compete equally in rifle; 48% of recent NCAA college teams were women and 33% of the National JROTC teams were women.

- Target shooting is a skill sport that offers all of the general benefits of sports competition to a wide variety of youth, including many who do not have the physiological attributes to succeed in some popular sports.
- Target shooting is a lifetime sport where active participation can start as early as age 10 and continue until age 70, 80 or even beyond.



*Shooting is one of the oldest and most popular Olympic sports. Matt Emmons, USA (left), won the men's air rifle silver medal in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.*

**T**arget rifle training teaches valuable life skills. The discipline and practice of target rifle shooting is extremely effective in teaching life skills that enhance student performances in schoolwork as well as in home, family, social and job-related activities. Life skills that are effectively developed through marksmanship experiences include:

- Self control, self discipline and emotional control
- Responsibility (from being responsible for the safe handling of firearms)
- Concentration and attentive skills
- Goal-setting and understanding how to achieve goals
- Fair play, teamwork and leadership
- Rewards of hard work, practice and competition
- Self-image enhancement

**S**hooting is an Olympic sport. There are currently 33 different sports in the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. Four of the 33 Olympic sports, Shooting, Archery, Biathlon and Modern Pentathlon, involve target shooting.

- Shooting is one of 26 Summer Olympic Sports. Shooting has 15 different gold medal events for rifles, pistols or shotguns.
- Shooting was on the first Olympic Games program in 1896 in Athens and has been in every Olympic Games since 1896 except two, 1904 and 1928.
- Nine Olympic Shooting events are for men; six are for women.
- There are five Olympic rifle events, five pistol events and six shotgun events. Six of the 15 Olympic events are for air rifles or air pistols.
- 108 different countries qualified athletes to participate in Shooting in the 2008 Olympic Games. Only Athletics (track & field) and Swimming had more participating countries.

**R**iflery is a popular high school sport. CMP state directors have identified over 2,000 high schools in 45 states that have high school varsity or club rifle teams (the actual number is probably higher). For example, in Georgia, where the Georgia High School Association recognizes rifle as a varsity sport, 125 high schools have varsity rifle teams. High school teams in Georgia compete with each other during the season in district home and away matches that are followed by district play-offs and a state championship. The Hawaii High School Athletic Association sponsors popular boys and girls state rifle championships for schools with varsity teams. High school riflery is organized, in many other states, on a regional basis within the state by JROTC leaders or other organizations.

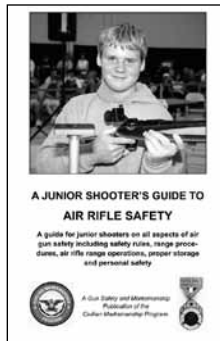


*Shelby County High School (Kentucky) precision air rifle team won the 2011 National JROTC Championship and then went on to win the National Junior Olympic Championship.*

**Rifle shooting is an NCAA collegiate championship sport.** The NCAA reports that athletic departments in 36 universities and colleges sponsor varsity rifle teams (6 women's teams and 30 mixed teams). Each year several hundred student-athletes receive college scholarships that are awarded based on rifle shooting and academic qualifications. In addition, over 186 universities and colleges have organized club rifle teams or other shooting sports programs.

**T** **Training curriculum material and instructor/coach training are readily available.** A wide variety of marksmanship training and instructional curriculum materials are now available. The CMP cooperated with the Army JROTC Command to produce new marksmanship training curriculum for JROTC instructors to use in teaching safety and basic skills.

This or similar material is available to all JROTC instructors (Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force). The CMP also makes similar curriculum material for basic marksmanship training available to other school and club programs. Coach and instructor training is readily available through cooperative programs provided by USA Shooting (Olympic shooting NGB), the NRA and CMP.



**A** **ir rifle ranges are simple and inexpensive--air gun ranges can be set up almost anywhere.**

Air rifles used for target shooting fire 8 grain pellets at velocities of 400-600 feet per second and that generate about five foot pounds of energy. This means a target backstop made of 1/8" sheet steel or even a box filled with several layers of cardboard or newspaper easily can capture a fired air rifle pellet. A room



*Safe air rifle shooting ranges can easily be set up in any enclosed area that is at least 40 x 20 feet in size. The photo shows simple target holders and backstops that can be made in any workshop.*

that is at least 40 feet long and 20 feet or more wide, that is covered with ordinary wallboard or wood, where there are no exposed windows, and that facilitates controlled access to the firing area, will serve as a range. The unique protective measures required for firearms ranges are not required for air rifle ranges.



*Two classes of air rifles are used in youth target shooting. Sporter air rifles (above) are inexpensive and require minimal additional equipment. Precision air rifles (below) are the same air rifles that are used in national and international competitions. Shooters in the precision air rifle class need special shooting jackets and some other equipment.*



**E** **quipment is readily available and affordable.** Almost all entry-level training and competition is done with sporter class air rifles that range in cost from \$175 to \$350 each. Except for slings and gloves, no other special equipment is required. More than half of the air rifle competitions at high school and junior levels are sporter class competitions where additional special equipment is not even permitted. This means that for a relatively small expenditure, a school, team or club can obtain all of the equipment needed not only for initial instruction, but also to compete in youth competitions at the local, state and national levels. In addition, there are programs available through JROTC commands, the CMP and Daisy Outdoor Products (primary supplier of sporter class air rifles) that provide special purchasing terms to keep program start-up costs affordable. Low cost training grade equipment, including sporter class air rifles, training-grade pellets and targets, is available for purchase at subsidized costs through the CMP. The CMP also has a delayed payment program for air rifles that can be paid for over a period of two years at no interest.

**P** **roper range management practices effectively eliminate lead exposure risks.** Lead exposure risks are successfully eliminated or controlled by using properly constructed target backstops and following recommended hygiene practices. There now is ample scientific evidence to confirm that rifle shooters who fire on properly designed air gun ranges and who

follow recommended hygiene practices do not experience any problems from lead exposure that require medical intervention or that even cause concern.

- Tests in Germany, the U. S. and other countries confirm that firing air rifle pellets does not generate airborne lead in the firing line area where participants are active.
- Properly designed target holders successfully contain the lead generated by the impacts of lead pellets.
- Shooters handle lead pellets while loading and firing, but keeping food or open beverage containers out of ranges and requiring participants to wash hands after firing effectively prevents lead absorption.
- U. S. Olympic Training Center resident athlete shooters, who daily spend six to eight hours per day on USOTC ranges have periodic blood tests to monitor lead. These shooters have potential exposures much greater than any school or club participants have. In 15 years of testing, no USOTC shooting resident athlete has ever registered blood lead levels requiring medical intervention. Most, in fact, consistently register blood lead levels that are below normal.

**T**arget rifle training is a proven means of reducing firearm accidents. Students who are taught rifle safety through air rifle marksmanship programs and who have opportunities to handle air rifles in actual range firing, acquire safety knowledge and skills that significantly reduce the possibility they will ever be involved in a firearm accident. This training increases the probability that these young people can prevent accidents when they are exposed to firearms in any other situation.



**Y**outh air rifle shooting in the U. S. has an active national governing body. National shooting sports and youth-serving organizations that foster air rifle shooting for youth established the National Three-Position Air Rifle Council to provide national coordination, competition rules based on the Olympic model, participant recognition programs and promotion of three-position air rifle training and competition opportunities. The Council provides **National Standard Three-Position Air Rifle Rules** that now govern almost all junior air rifle competitions in the U. S. Current Council members are:

- The American Legion
- The Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force JROTC Commands

- Boy Scouts of America
- Civilian Marksmanship Program
- Daisy/U. S. Jaycees Shooter Education Program
- National 4-H Shooting Sports
- The U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit
- USA Shooting (National Governing Body for Olympic shooting in U. S.)

## **O**ther important considerations:

• Firearms are an integral part of American heritage, culture, sports and recreation. It is realistic to recognize that most youth will be exposed to firearms and that many will develop an active interest in guns and shooting. Marksmanship and target training assures that these interests are channeled through a positive, structured, disciplined, sports-oriented program. This counteracts unguided interests that might grow out of any negative images of guns conveyed by popular culture and the media. Target shooting effectively prevents such interests from becoming destructive or dangerous.

• Target shooting is a sport of discipline, control and non-violence. It creates attitudinal qualities in youth that make them extremely unlikely to commit acts of violence of any kind. Air rifles used in target shooting are low-powered, single-shot pellet guns that have no other purpose apart from target shooting. In the sport of target shooting, participants' competitive energies are directed towards targets placed downrange and not directly against opponents. In this environment, the air rifle is a piece of sports equipment that must be treated with respect, but which is never regarded as an instrument of violence.

To obtain additional information, check these web sites:

- Civilian Marksmanship Program and the National Three-Position Air Rifle Council (site has links to many other youth air rifle program web sites)  
<http://www.TheCMP.org/3P.htm>  
<http://www.TheCMP.org/Training/CoachingResources.htm>
- USA Shooting (U. S. Olympic governing body)  
<http://www.usashooting.com/about.php>