

Starting pistols and caps

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

Traditional starting pistols use caps or for some older designs, blank shells, and are designed exclusively to start races at track-and-field events, swim meets and boating races. 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.

Prohibitions

Schools are not to use older style starting pistols which use a metal encased charge, have the appearance of a weapon or require the user to have a permit under the Queensland [Weapons Act 1990](#). 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.



Examples of metal encased charge and starting pistol. Pistols that require a permit under the *Weapons Act 1990* **ARE NOT TO BE USED IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS.**

No student is to operate a starting gun or have access to a starting pistol or caps.

Alternatives to starting pistols and caps

Starting gun caps are friction, shock and heat sensitive explosives which have the potential to cause serious burns on detonation and can permanently damage hearing on discharge.

Due to the hazardous nature of caps and the increasing difficulty to source in them Australia, schools are strongly encouraged to use alternative starting devices e.g. electronic starting pistol or beeper with flash, air powered horn, whistle, starting clap board or portable PA system.

Note that pressurised (aerosol) air horns contain compressed gases that can expand and explode if exposed to prolonged periods of heat from direct sunlight that may occur during sporting events. Label safety instructions must be adhered to. Hearing protection is to be worn for alternative starting devices as well.



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 storage, instruction and use of starting pistols:

- 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.
- ignition sources are to be kept well away from any cap storage.

- staff/adults nominated to operate the starting pistol are given instructions in its safe use and follow the cap manufacturer instructions for use.
- obtain a product safety data sheet and record caps in the school's hazardous chemical register.
- Staff/adults using, or in close vicinity to the use of a starting pistol are provided with, and are wearing **Class 5 ear muffs** that comply with [Australian Standard 1270:2002 Acoustics – Hearing Protectors](#). Instructions in proper use are also to be provided. Ear muffs are easy to fit and generally give good protection against the noise generated by starting devices.
 - Safety glasses, prescription or sunglasses can make a gap between your ear muffs and head. For ear muffs to work effectively they need to form a tight seal around your ear to block noise. Wearing earplugs under your earmuffs is a good way to protect against excessive noise leaking in through the seal of the earmuff *if* you wear glasses. Earmuffs can also be worn with sun safe hats that enable earmuffs to be comfortably worn.



When using a starting pistol and caps, the staff member/adult 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 rigid container (non-metallic, spark proof) that is kept closed at all times except when caps are put into, or removed from it.
- where an explosive is transferred from its original package to another package, the word 'EXPLOSIVE' is to be shown clearly on the **front** of 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 ten 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 container e.g. small bag or leather pouch.
- the starting pistol is held at arm's length above the shoulder and fired into the air.
- the starting pistol is not pointed or aimed at anyone regardless of whether it is loaded or not.
- all other persons are positioned at a safe distance (> five metres) from the starting gun area.
- the pistol and caps are in the starter's 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.
- All people are kept as far away as practicable from the starter during races. A minimum distance of five metres is to be enforced. People who are within this distance are also to be provided with Class 5 hearing protection.