

Gun Cleaning and Maintenance – What You Need

- By Joe Aiello / October 3, 2012

When it comes down to shooting, many gun owners are unaware of just how important it is to perform proper cleaning and maintenance.

Today's firearms are at the height of durability and reliability. Unlike years ago, we have come to expect performance and function even with very little (or in some cases, non-existent) maintenance. Just because a firearm can go for extended periods without cleaning and maintenance, doesn't mean that you should do that.

Proper cleaning and maintenance serves a variety of purposes. First and foremost, it improves accuracy and reliability. A clean and properly lubed firearm will shoot better and have less of a chance of malfunctioning. Secondly, performing maintenance gives you the ability and opportunity to inspect all the parts of your gun and become familiar with how they operate and what they should look like. The fact is you have a better chance of catching a small problem early on a regularly maintained firearm before it becomes a much bigger problem down the road. That old saying about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure is absolutely true when it comes to firearms.

For the sake of clarity, I will break down maintenance into two articles. This article will focus on what tools and supplies you will need, while the next article will go into detail on the actual procedure. So, let's run down what tools and supplies you will need and what purpose they serve.

Necessary Tools:

Solvent:

This is designed to clean the firearm. It differs from lubrication in that it is meant to clean rather than lube. Think of solvent as being the "soap" and lube as being the "lotion"...you can also think of it as "shampoo" and "conditioner" if that helps.

Lubrication:

Commonly referred to as "lube" or "oil", this is designed to help the moving parts slide or rotate over each other easily and also serves as a layer of protection against rust and corrosion. Sometimes, you can buy special solvent and lube in the same bottle. Sometimes called "CLP" (Cleaner/Lubricant/Protector), this is designed to serve a double function. Yes, I know you were thinking, "Shampoo and Conditioner in one bottle". In this case, you're correct.

Cleaning Rod:

Threaded at one end, the cleaning rod allows the bore brush and the patch pullers/jags to be attached to the end so you can clean the inside of the gun barrel (or “bore” as its commonly referred).

Bore Brush:

A cylinder-shaped brush that screws into the top of your cleaning rod. Note two very important things about bore brushes:

First, bore brushes are sized for a specific caliber. Make sure the brush you are using is meant for the caliber of your gun. Second, only use bronze or nylon brushes. Never use stainless steel brushes. Steel can severely damage the bore and the finish of your gun.

Patch Puller/Jag:

A patch puller looks like a big eye of a needle. It is designed to have you thread a cotton patch through it and then push/pull the patch through the bore. A cleaning jag is a cylinder-shaped piece of plastic or brass that is sized for your bore (much like the bore brush). You lay the patch over the top and then push it through your barrel. Note that patch pullers are somewhat generic and can be used in a variety of calibers. A jag is mostly caliber-specific, but can get you a tighter fit in the bore that can be more efficient than the puller.

Parts Brush:

A parts brush looks just like a toothbrush. As a matter of fact, you can use an old toothbrush. Remember that you should only use a brush with nylon bristles. Never use a brush with metal bristles as this can damage your firearm.

Patches:

These are nothing more than clean, cotton squares (or sometimes circles). They serve as little disposable rags for cleaning the inside of the bore as well as getting into the small areas in and around the firearm. In a pinch, you can cut up an old cotton T-shirt to make your own patches. As a side note, two things gun owners never throw out are old T-shirts and old toothbrushes for obvious reasons.

Rag:

Pretty self-explanatory. I don't think I need to go into how to use it. Just know that you will need one.

This marks the bare minimum you will need to clean and maintain your firearm. What I would like to do now is list some of the things that, while not absolutely mandatory, are still very important and very useful.

Bore Snake:

A very useful item that can help quickly clean your bore...even in the field. It is a long piece of heavy cotton floss that is connected to a long string with a small brass weight on the end. The way you use it is you drop the string down the bore from the back (breach) end until it exits the muzzle. Then you grab the string and pull the whole bore snake

down the barrel until it exits the muzzle. It even has small brush bristles built into the top of the floss so it serves as a bore brush and a patch puller all in one. Note that like bore brushes, Bore Snakes are also sized for a specific caliber. So, make sure you buy/use the correct caliber Bore Snake that matches the caliber of your gun. Also, be sure to wash it out after use and allow it to air dry.

Cleaning Mat/Gun Rug:

This is another one of those things that are so obvious, yet often overlooked. It is simply a tightly weaved rug with a rubber backing. It provides a firm, non-slip surface that helps prevent spills, dirt and other assorted muck from getting everywhere, keeps small parts from rolling away and getting lost and protects the table/workbench from damage.

Small Squeeze Bottles:

A common mistake that many people make is they dip their bore brushes and patches directly into their solvent bottles. You should never do this. This will quickly contaminate the solvent in the bottle as well as introduce grit and dirt into the solvent. By buying a bunch of cheap, small squeeze bottles from a craft store, you can put a small amount of solvent into one of the bottles and apply it easily to your brushes and patches without contaminating the solvent and without making a mess. Use them a few times and then throw them out when they become too soft or worn out.

Q-Tips/Cotton Swabs:

Do yourself a big favor and buy a small economy package of cotton swabs and keep them with your gun cleaning kit. Nothing is easier to use for cleaning hard to reach areas and even for applying lube to specific points.

Storage Box:

I don't think there has ever been a shooter/gun owner who hasn't, at one time, used an old, stained cardboard box for his/her cleaning supplies. My advice is to go and buy a cheap, plastic tackle box or toolbox. This way, you can easily move all your supplies, avoid them getting lost, keep fumes and spills down to a minimum and even use the small shelves built into it to organize your tools. This is especially helpful if you have multiple firearms in multiple calibers as you can easily separate caliber-specific brushes, jags, etc. Finally, some firearms require special tools to disassemble. Keeping those tools all in one place inside of the storage box keeps them from getting lost.

Precision/Gunsmith's Screwdriver Set:

Some firearms require you to remove screws to do a normal fieldstrip. Others will use screws to hold parts like the grips in place. Whatever the case may be with your specific firearm, know that there will probably come a time where you will need to use a screwdriver. Now, anyone who has ever put in or removed a screw a number of times will know that it is very easy to slip or use the wrong size screwdriver and strip or damage the slot in the head. Aside from looking terrible, this can also cause you to fail to tighten it enough or be unable to get it out. All of these problems can be avoided by using a precision or gunsmith's screwdriver that is properly sized for the screw head and slot. Head over to the store and pick up a couple that matches the screws you need.

Better yet, buy an inexpensive kit that has several different sized screwdrivers and keep it in your kit.

Bore Guide:

When cleaning a rifle, one of the problems encountered is getting excess solvent and even dirt and grit flowing back into the receiver. Also, it can be difficult to maneuver the long cleaning rod into the breach from the back of the rifle. Using a Bore Guide solves both of these problems. A Bore Guide is a tube about 8” to 12” long that fits into the receiver in place of the bolt and sets into the chamber. The end that sets into the chamber is plastic and slightly tapered so it forms a good seal and keeps solvent, dirt and grit out of the action. It also guides the cleaning rod into the bore (hence, the name) and keeps the rod from rubbing on the edges of the chamber, preventing possible damage to your firearm. They are inexpensive, easy to use and work fantastic, so there is no reason not to pick one up.

Disposable Gloves:

Solvents can be nasty stuff. They are designed to break up fouling, remove copper and lead deposits and penetrate metal surfaces. Of course, the stuff you are actually cleaning out of the gun can be even nastier...both dirty and even poisonous. So, it makes sense that buying a box of disposable rubber gloves from the drug store would be a very good idea. Tight, disposable, surgical gloves also allow you to be able to pick up small parts and do fine work as opposed to heavier protective gloves like you would normally use for dishwashing. You will understand my point the first time you try picking up and setting small screws while wearing those heavy gloves.

Rifle Rest:

If you do a lot of rifle shooting, a rifle rest or stand could be a very good investment. While not cheap, they do vary in price and an inexpensive one could cost somewhere around \$30 to \$40. The rest is designed to hold your rifle in a horizontal position so you can clean and maintain it, but also will help if you are doing any other work like sight replacement, scope installation, etc. It certainly falls into the “nice to have” category, but merits consideration if you use a rifle a lot.

Feel free to print out this article and use it as a checklist the next time you are going shopping. As always, don’t hesitate to drop in on us at the shop and we can walk you through any questions you may have about these items or the correct procedure for cleaning. Keep an eye out for our next article, which will go into details on how to clean a firearm.

I hope this article has been informative and helpful to you. To stay up to date on the latest class schedule, new articles, store specials and news, follow us on Twitter:

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Stay Safe!

-Joe