

Policy and Procedures

Firearms and Weapons Policy

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear framework for the use of firearms and weapons as part of Scouting activities. Firearms and weapons are dangerous and are subject to strict legislative controls. In addition, parents and guardians of youth members may have differing views as to the appropriateness of their children engaging in activities involving firearms and weapons. In particular, this policy is intended to assist leaders to make decisions about the use of firearms and weapons as part of youth programs.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all formations of The Scout Association of Australia, Victorian Branch ('Scouts Victoria') when undertaking Scouting activities, including Activity/Event Teams, and to all Scouts Victoria Employees. It also applies to non-Scout Members on Scout Association property.

The policy covers the use and storage (whether or not such activities are provided by Scouts Victoria or others) of:

- **Firearms** (as defined by the Firearms Act 1996) - which includes shotguns, rifles and handguns as well as air guns, imitation firearms, air rifles and paintball guns/markers; and
- **Weapons** (as defined by the Control of Weapons Act 1990) - which includes throwing blades, swords, crossbows, knives and spear guns.

Activities which are NOT covered by this Policy

Archery activities are outside the scope of this policy (including using bows and arrows, non-sharp arrow tips e.g. forms involving magnetic tipped arrows (e.g. 'Stick-it Archery') or arrows with foam marshmallow tips (e.g. 'Archery Tag')). Members wishing to include archery activities in their programs should refer to the State Leader – Campcraft & Pioneering for Scouts Victoria's requirements in relation to these activities.

Toy firearms (such as water pistols and foam dart guns), nail guns, or purpose-built starter pistols are also outside this Policy, **unless the toy firearm meets the definition of an "imitation firearm"**. For more information about what is an imitation firearm, refer to the section "**Imitation Firearms**" below.

Splatball (a commercially provided lower impact paintball activity) uses guns which are not regarded as imitation firearms, and Splatball activities are therefore outside the scope of this Policy (although commercial providers may impose minimum age and other requirements).

POLICY STATEMENT

It is Scouts Victoria policy that the use of firearms and weapons at a Scouting Event or on Scout Association property be limited and carefully controlled, and that at all times any such use must comply with the requirements of Victorian firearm and weapons legislation, this Policy, and The Scout Association of Australia Policy & Rules.

More specific policy requirements in relation to use of firearms and weapons are set out below:

Firearms

Firearms (including imitation firearms) must not be brought into, used or stored on any Scout Association property, except in exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval of the Chief Commissioner, for example for pest management purposes where there is no practical alternative to the use of firearms. In addition, personnel who require the use of a firearm in the course of their official duties or employment or similar (including police, DWELP, Agriculture Victoria, Cash Management guards (Armaguard)) may carry

firearms on Scout Association property while acting in that capacity.

A Member or Employee must not otherwise possess, carry or use a firearm at a Scouting Event or on Scout Association property, except where:

- the firearm is used at an Official Shooting Range supervised by an authorised person of an approved Target Shooting Club, **and**
- they meet the relevant respective age-based restrictions (see below); **and**
- all safety and any other requirements of the Club conducting the activity are met.

Age Based Restrictions

- No Youth Member under the age of 12 may participate in a shooting activity involving firearms.
- No Youth Member under the age of 16 may participate in a paintball activity.
- Youth Members aged 12 to 17 years may **only** participate in a shooting activity (other than a paintball activity) if their parent/s or guardian has given their written permission to participate.²

Imitation firearms

Imitation firearms are toy firearms or weapons that do not have the functionality of a working firearm, but which could reasonably be mistaken for working firearms based on their overall appearance. In Victoria, these toy firearms are classified as “imitation firearms”, and a special exemption is required from Victoria Police or the Governor in Council to carry or use them.

Whilst imitation firearms cannot cause death or injury by shooting projectiles, they can nonetheless cause public alarm due to their similarity in appearance to working firearms. Even items that remotely resemble firearms could be easily mistaken as working firearms in certain circumstances depending on factors such as lighting conditions, distance from the object, the viewer's knowledge of firearms and/or circumstances in which they are carried. Whether a particular device could be perceived to be a working firearm is open to interpretation, and should be considered 'on balance'. For example, a device fitted with a coloured barrel plug or coloured grip, is not sufficient, in and of itself, for it to be considered a toy firearm rather than an imitation firearm. The link below provides further guidance on the distinction between toy firearms and imitation firearms: <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/Quick-Guide-Imitations-toys-and-other-themed-paraphernalia.pdf>

Weapons

The Control of Weapons Act 1990 regulates the use of any weapon other than a firearm. Under the Act, weapons are categorised as **prohibited weapons** (e.g. swords, crossbows, martial arts weapons, certain knives and blades, blow guns, knuckle dusters and machetes) and **controlled weapons** (weapons that can be possessed, carried and used for legitimate purposes but may pose a potential danger to the community (e.g. some knives, spear guns, batons, cattle prods, etc.) Throwing blades, including knives, hatchets or axes modified to be thrown, are also prohibited weapons in Victoria and thus illegal unless specific approval by the Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, or a Governor in Council Exemption Order, has been granted for their possession and use.

No member is permitted to possess, use or carry a **prohibited weapon** at a Scouting Event or on Scout Association property, except:

- where the weapon is a sword carried by a person aged 18 years or over who is an active Rover Scout or Rover Advisor **and** the sword is **solely** used for the purpose of “keeping and displaying a sword; or participating in ceremonial activities”¹ conducted by a Rover Scout Formation; or
- where the weapon is a throwing axe, hatchet or tomahawk used in a Scouting activity, **and** an exemption has been obtained under the Control of Weapons Act 1990, **and** the relevant activity is conducted in accordance with the requirements for the activity prescribed by the State Leader – Campcraft & Pioneering.

No Member is permitted to possess, use or carry a **controlled weapon** at a Scouting event or on Scout

Association property, other than a knife which is not of a type listed as a prohibited weapon, and which is used solely “when engaged in lawful sport, recreation or entertainment” (for example, a kitchen knife or a Swiss Army style knife (clasp knife) can be used for their normal purposes during a Scouting activity) ² **Spearguns³ and crossbows⁴ may not be carried or used at a Scouting event.**

Leaders in charge of a Scouting activity may require that knives of this type be held in a secure central location and be accessed only where appropriate.

Events held by other State Branches or overseas Scout Associations

At such events, the Victorian Contingent Leader shall ensure that the principles of this Policy are adhered to and that, in particular, Victorian youth members who have applied for the event and wish to participate in an activity at the event involving a firearm or weapon, and who are eligible under this Policy to participate, and their parents or guardians, give explicit approval to participate in that activity.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Executive Manager

- Ensure that this policy is made generally available to members and is placed on the Scouts Victoria website.

Victorian Rover Council

- Maintain a ‘record of possession’ of all swords owned by a Victorian Rover Unit and/or stored on Scout Association property.

Leader (of Section, Group or District)

- Must not organise a shooting activity involving firearms, other than one conducted at an Official Shooting Range supervised by an authorised person of an approved Target Shooting Club as provided for in this Policy.
- Must not permit a youth member to participate in a shooting activity involving firearms unless they wish to do so and their parent/s or guardian have given written permission to participate, and all safety and other requirements of the Club conducting the activity are met⁶.
- Must ensure in connection with a shooting activity that all legal requirements set out in this Policy, including age limits, are met (including ensuring that no Member, or person accompanying the Member to the activity, is a ‘prohibited person’ under the Firearms Act 1990).
- Must ensure that any other Scouts Victoria general activity notification requirements are met including completion of an ‘Adventurous Activity Notification Form’, ScoutSafe risk management plan, and seeking authorisation of external experts as detailed in the current Scouts Victoria Guide to Running Adventurous Activities in Victoria.

Leader of a Rover Unit

- Responsibilities as per Leader above
 - Must ensure that if a ceremonial sword is possessed by a Unit, that it is registered with the Victorian Rover Council, is stored safely and securely (i.e. locked) and used in a safe and appropriate manner and in accordance with relevant Victorian Rover Scout Council’s procedures.
-

DEFINITIONS

In this Policy, the following terms have the meaning given below

Activity Team / Event Team: A team or group under the auspices of, and reporting to, a District, Region or Branch, with an approved charter or terms of reference. They include, for example, activity teams such as Branch Adventurous Activity Teams and Event Teams such as those established to run large camps.

Adult Member: A Member over the age of 18 years.

Approved Target Shooting Club: A club approved under the Firearms Act 1996.

Firearm: Has the meaning given in the Firearms Act 1996. In summary, any device designed or adapted, or is capable of being modified, to discharge shot or a bullet or other missile including air guns, handguns, long-arm firearms such as rifles and shot guns but excluding spear guns designed for underwater use, which are classified as controlled weapons, and signal flares.

Leader: An adult holding a Certificate of Adult Leadership in the Scout Movement.

Members: As defined by 'Policy 3.1 Members' of Scouts Australia Policies and Rules

Youth Member: A Member under the age of 18 years.

Official Shooting Range: A target shooting range operated by an approved Target Shooting Club. Note that a firearms licence is not required when undertaking target practice at an approved club's shooting range.

Scout Association Property: Land and improvements, including freehold and leaseholds as well as land and improvements held or occupied by Scouts Victoria under licence or other legal instrument or arrangement.

Weapon: Has the meaning given in the Control of Weapons Act 1990 - that is, any weapon other than a firearm. Under the legislation, weapons are categorised as **prohibited weapons** (e.g. swords, crossbows, martial arts weapons, certain knives and blades, blow guns, knuckle dusters, hatchets and machetes) and **controlled weapons**, the latter being weapons that can be possessed, carried and used for legitimate purposes but may pose a potential danger to the community (e.g. some knives, spear guns³, batons, cattle prods, etc.)

1. The legal exemption to possess swords is made by Order in Council dated June 3 2014
2. Other examples: diving tool/knives, fishing knives and utility/hobby knives used for their specialised purpose
3. Spear guns are a controlled weapon, but Scouts Victoria Policy prohibits the use of spearguns for any purpose whatsoever, including spear fishing – as they are not only potentially dangerous but difficult to supervise.
4. Crossbows are specifically listed as a prohibited weapon in the regulations.

GOVERNANCE

Supporting procedures	Australian Adventure Activity Standard National Adventurous Activities Framework https://scouts.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/NAAF-National-Adventurous-Activities-Framework-V11.1.pdf Guide to Running Adventurous Activities https://scoutsvictoria.com.au/activities-events/adventurous-activities/policies-and-procedures-for-adventure/
Supporting documents	Victoria Police website www.police.vic.gov.au Victoria Police guide to imitation firearms https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/Quick-Guide-Imitations-toys-and-other-themed-paraphernalia.pdf Rover Scouts Victoria – Sword Information https://www.vicrovers.com.au/resources/crews/swords
Associated policies	Policy and Rules - The Scout Association of Australia
Related legislation	• Control of Weapons Act 1990 (Vic) • Firearms Act 1996 (Vic)
Endorsed by	Chief Commissioner
Authorised by	Branch Executive Committee August 2025
Policy owner	Chief Commissioner, Scouts Victoria
Date effective	August 2025
Review date	August 2028
Version	2.0

VERSION CONTROL HISTORY

Version number	Date	Changes made
1	2020	New policy, superseded the 'Guns and Firearms Policy 1998'
2.0	August 2025	Revisions to remove Archery from scope on the basis that it is not regulated under legislation; include imitation firearms as a firearm for the purposes of this Policy; to include an expanded reference to hatchet throwing and to clearly exclude Splatball from scope of this Policy.
2.1	October 2025	Minor typographical amendments