

Firearm Use on Private Land

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Issue

Does state or local law restrict the use of firearms on private land other than shooting ranges and shooting preserves? (This report updates OLR Reports [2016-R-0196](#) and [2013-R-0475](#).)

The Office of Legislative Research is not authorized to provide legal opinions and this report should not be considered one.

Summary

Several state laws and regulations limit using firearms on private land, including restricting hunting near buildings and criminalizing certain uses to prevent injuries. Additionally, municipalities may pass ordinances to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of their citizens, but the scope of a firearms ordinance is limited.

According to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), it is generally legal under state law to conduct target practice on private land, but local ordinances may prohibit the discharge of firearms within a town's limits. DEEP recommends that shooters notify neighbors and local law enforcement officials of when and where target practice will occur to help prevent alarm and misunderstanding (see its [website](#)).

Hunting

Connecticut regulations generally prohibit hunting with, discharging, or carrying loaded firearms within 500 feet of any building (1) occupied by people or domestic animals or (2) used to store flammable or combustible material. However, certain waterfowl hunting is only prohibited within

250 feet of such buildings. Closer hunting distances are allowed if the written permission of the building owner is obtained and carried. These prohibitions do not apply to landowners, their spouses, and certain other relatives hunting within the above distances to buildings owned by them ([Conn. Agencies Reg. § 26-66-1\(d\)](#)).

The regulations also prohibit discharging a hunting weapon toward any person, building, or domestic animal when they are within range or from or across the traveled portion of a public roadway ([Conn. Agencies Reg. § 26-66-1\(e\)](#)).

Any person who violates these requirements is guilty of a class D misdemeanor ([CGS § 26-71](#)) (see Table on Penalties, most recently published as OLR Report [2022-R-0143](#)).

Criminal Law

State law establishes several criminal offenses that can affect the use of firearms on private land. For example, if a person fires his or her firearm in a manner likely to cause bodily injury or death to a person or domestic animal or wanton destruction of property, he or she may be found guilty of unlawfully discharging a firearm, a class C misdemeanor ([CGS § 53-203](#)). Additionally, a person may be found guilty of reckless endangerment if he or she recklessly engages in conduct that creates a risk of physical injury to another person. Depending on the severity, this is either a class A misdemeanor or class B misdemeanor ([CGS §§ 53a-63](#) and [53a-64](#)).

Municipal Authority to Pass Local Ordinances

Connecticut law generally allows municipalities to pass ordinances to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of their citizens, including regulating activities causing noise pollution ([CGS §§ 7-148](#) and [22a-73](#), as amended by [PA 22-143](#), § 3). While state statutes do not expressly prevent or preempt local ordinances regulating firearms, state courts generally have ruled that the statutes implicitly preempt municipalities from passing ordinances regulating firearm sales and hunting (see OLR Report [2011-R-0137](#)). Several towns have ordinances on other aspects of firearm use, such as prohibitions on the use of firearms in residential areas and regulations on range safety, gunfire noise, and target practice.

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