

# Reducing injuries when training with steel targets



■ BY JOHN KRUPA III

Training with steel targets has become very common in modern firearms training programs. Unfortunately, when steel targets are not set up properly or used correctly on the range, the chance of projectile splash back injuries significantly increases.

Here are some common reasons why projectile splash back injuries occur:

Direct splash back injuries occur when projectiles impact a steel target head on, with no angles involved and the shooter is too close to the target (usually less than 10 yards). Deflected projectile fragments most commonly strike the person that is shooting the target.

Indirect splash back injuries occur when projectiles impact a steel target on an oblique angle greater than 45 degrees. Projectile fragments deflect back into the firing line and will strike shooters other than the person who shot the target.

Deflecting splash back injuries occur when steel targets are placed too close together. As projectiles impact the steel targets, projectile fragments deflect off the sides of adjacent steel targets, back into the firing line, randomly striking shooters on line.

Ricochet splash back injuries occur when projectiles impact steel targets and projectile fragments are directed into a hard base surface, usually concrete, asphalt or heavy gravel. Splash back deflects off the steel at a 20-degree angle into the hard base surface, then back into the firing line at a 30 to 45 degree angle, randomly striking shooters on line.

Angled target splash back injuries occur when steel targets are not set up correctly facing the firing line. Targets that are set up on an angle to the firing line or vibrate out of proper alignment to the firing line will result in angled deflection of projectile fragments back into the firing line, randomly striking shooters on line.

Damaged target splash back injuries occur when projectiles impact steel targets that have divots or craters on the impact surface. Projectile fragments and sometimes entire projectiles are “cupped” and deflected directly back into the firing line, randomly striking shooters on line. This form of splash back will result in the most serious splash back injuries.

What to do?

When setting up steel targets on the range, make sure you leave enough spacing between the targets so deflected projectile fragments don't deflect off adjacent steel targets back into the firing line.

Ensure that the steel targets are facing the firing line and not angled to the firing line. Periodically inspect the targets between shooting drills to ensure that the targets have not vibrated into an angle to the firing line.

Set your steel targets up on a soft base surface to avoid ricochet. Setting targets up on grass, dirt, mud or clay base surfaces will allow the base surface to absorb deflected projectile fragments.

Whenever possible, set up steel targets behind cardboard targets and space the cardboard targets just wide enough so the steel targets can be engaged in between the cardboard targets. This will allow the back of the cardboard to absorb deflected projectile fragments, eliminating splash back deflection back into the firing line.

Ensure that shooters maintain proper standoff distances – a minimum of 10 yards for handgun targets and minimum of 50 yards for rifle targets.

Be sure to inspect target surfaces where projectiles will be impacting. If any divots or craters are discovered, that target should be taken out of service immediately.

Train smart and shoot safe. ♥

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