

## Information Data Sheet

**Category** Small Arms Ranges

**Description** Small arms ranges (such as rifle ranges) can provide a source of UXO, explosive and metallic contamination, depending on their operational history and length of use.

Rifle ranges were a common feature in the open countryside during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with local volunteer and militia forces using them extensively for practice.

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the rifle ranges had fallen into disuse, although some were retained for training purposes by the regular army.

Small arms ranges vary considerably in length, from 25yd machine gun ranges (typically found at airfields, barracks and in urban areas) to 1,000yd shooting galleries. On the larger ranges, medium-calibre and close combat munitions, such as grenades and mortars, were occasionally used, particularly during wartime.

Most of the larger small arms ranges still in use are under MoD control and access is carefully managed. They often have extensive danger areas within which live firing may occur.



**Stop butts at an old rifle range**

**Hazard** Generally, small arms ammunition does not provide a significant UXO hazard and, whilst some live ammunition is likely to be found at former small arms ranges, it does not typically have a high explosive charge.

It should be noted that some larger calibre smalls arms ammunition does have high explosive filling and, at airfield sites, machine gun ranges were used to test cannon shells in addition to small arms. The possibility that some of the larger rifle ranges were used for close combat practice, using grenades and mortars, can also not be discounted.

A significant hazard arising from small arms ranges is metallic contamination associated with spent ammunition. This contamination is usually from lead, although antimony and zinc may also be present. These substances are potentially toxic to humans and the environment.