



TOP

Turkey Hunting Safety Tips

APRIL 11TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

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Report Provided By Missouri Department of Conservation

MDC offers turkey hunting safety tips

Turkey hunting is getting safer, thanks to the efforts of volunteer hunter-education instructors.

JEFFERSON CITY—When hunters head out for the opening day of Missouri’s spring turkey season April 18, they will have a lot on their minds, including weather, equipment and of course gobblers. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) wants them to add one more item and put it at the top of their lists – safety.

Safety clearly has moved up on turkey hunters’ priorities in the past 25 years. In 1986, MDC recorded 31 firearms-related incidents during the spring turkey season. Two were fatal. Contrast that to last year, when only six hunters were injured during the season, and none died.

The difference, according to MDC Hunter Education Coordinator Tony Legg, is hunter education, which became mandatory in Missouri in 1987. Since then, the number of safety-trained hunters has increased by approximately 30,000 annually. The results have been dramatic.

“From 1985 through 1994, we averaged a little more than 17 firearms-related incidents

per year during the spring turkey season,” said Legg. “Over the past 10 years, the average has been just six a year, and over the last five years, the average has been fewer than five per year. That is amazing progress.”

Amazing or not, Legg says spring turkey hunters still are more likely to be hurt in firearms-related incidents than those who pursue other species, including deer. Only two deer hunters were injured by other hunters during the 2010 firearms deer season, compared to six during the spring turkey season. Furthermore, deer hunters outnumber turkey hunters approximately four to one. If firearms deer hunters were hurt at the same rate as spring turkey hunters, Missouri would have had 25 deer hunting injuries.

Legg said hunter education instructors will not be content until the number of turkey hunting injuries falls to zero. However, he said it is important to keep the dangers of turkey hunting in perspective.

“Last year, only one of every 20,000 spring turkey hunters was injured in a firearms incident,” said Legg. “That’s a one in .00005 chance. It is a small risk, much like the risk we take when driving or riding in a car, knowing that thousands of people die in traffic accidents every year.”

Legg said smart motorists wear seatbelts and practice defensive driving techniques to reduce their risk of injury. In the same way, wise turkey hunters wear hunter orange clothing and practice defensive hunting.

“Turkey hunters most often are injured when another hunter mistakes them for game or does not know they are in his or her line of fire,” said Legg. “Decades of deer-hunting experience have proven that wearing hunter orange reduces the frequency of such incidents dramatically.”

Legg said turkey hunters don’t need to wear hunter orange all the time to reap safety benefits. Instead, he recommends wearing an orange vest and hat when moving between hunting spots, then hanging the garments on a tree when calling. This alerts other hunters to your presence.

Legg said hunters should always wrap turkeys in hunter orange when carrying them out of the woods.

“Walking through the woods in camouflage clothing while carrying a gobbler in plain sight is asking for trouble,” he said.

Other defensive hunting tips include:

- Choose calling locations that offer a clear view to the front and sides so you know if other hunters approach.
- Sit with your back against a tree at least as wide as your shoulders for protection if a hunter behind you shoots at a turkey and catches you in his line of fire.
- Remain in the immediate company of hunting partners. Accidents often occur when hunting partners separate and lose track of one another's locations.
- Never assume you are the only hunter in the area. Legg says most turkey hunting accidents occur on private property, where hunters don't expect to meet other hunters.
- Use gobble calls with extreme caution, since these make you sound like a target.
- Don't wear clothing or take any item to the woods that is white, blue or red. These colors are associated with the head of a turkey gobbler.

Missouri's lifesaving hunter education program is staffed almost entirely by unpaid volunteer instructors. Legg calls them "the unsung heroes of hunting."

"These dedicated men and women save lives every year and spare Missourians the heartache of hurting friends and family members or being hurt in hunting accidents. It's impossible to thank them adequately for what they do. Fortunately, they do it for the love of hunting. Knowing their work makes a difference is all the thanks they need."

For more information about hunter education classes, visit [" onclick="target='_blank';">http://mdc.mo.gov/node/3477](http://mdc.mo.gov/node/3477).

MDC also has programs to help aspiring hunters and encourage hunting mentorship. For more information, visit [" onclick="target='_blank';">http://mdc.mo.gov/node/10054](http://mdc.mo.gov/node/10054).

LAST UPDATED ON APRIL 11TH 2011 BY UNKNOWN

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