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Safety Tips Offered For Deer Season

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JEFFERSON CITY - As the Show-Me State's most popular hunting season approaches, self-help tops the list of safety tips from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

Approximately 500,000 hunters will take part in Missouri's main firearms deer season Nov. 12 through 22. Last year, MDC recorded nine firearms-related hunting incidents during the 11-day hunt. Although none of those incidents was fatal, last year was far from the best for deer-hunting safety. That distinction belongs to 2004, when MDC recorded only four firearms-related deer hunting incidents, all nonfatal.

MDC Hunter Education Coordinator Tony Legg says one astonishing fact stands out about last year's deer-hunting incidents. Eighty-seven percent of them were self-inflicted.

"Self-inflicted incidents are common every year," said Legg, "but 2010 was a new high...or low point for deer hunters hurting themselves. The best advice last year would have been, 'Look out for the guy in the mirror.'"

Following are brief descriptions of last year's bumper crop of self-inflicted gunshot wounds and the violation of hunting-safety rules that caused them.

- *A 55-year-old hunter chambered a cartridge in his semiautomatic pistol and was moving the safety into the "safe" position when the pistol discharged, striking the palm of his left hand. Safety Violation: Failed to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.*
- *A 13-year-old leaned his rifle against the tree in his tree stand to get something out of his backpack. He bumped the gun, causing it to fall. The rifle's external hammer struck one of the tree stand's steps, and it fired, striking him in the finger. Safety violation: Firearm leaned against an insecure rest.*
- *A 42-year-old hunter loaded his muzzle-loading rifle and walked to his tree stand. He tied the rifle to a haul rope with the muzzle facing up. After climbing into his stand, the hunter was pulling the rifle up when it bumped an object and discharged, striking him in the upper chest and shoulder. Safety violations: Failed to unload firearm before hauling into tree stand and attached rifle to haul line improperly.*

Legg said tree-stand safety should be another major concern for deer hunters. MDC only records injuries caused by firearms, so no one knows exactly how many hunters are injured, paralyzed or even killed in Missouri each year as a result of falls. However,

Legg said the number is substantial and has grown with the increased availability and use of tree stands.

“Evidence suggests that injuries from tree-stand falls far outnumber those from firearms,” said Legg. “One study showed that one out of every three tree-stand users will fall at some point in their hunting career.”

He said tree stands don’t have to be dangerous. In fact, hunters have access to safer stands and better protective gear today than ever before. Furthermore, decades of experience have revealed the causes of tree-stand falls and enabled safety advocates to address them. Hunters who follow safety recommendations and use equipment approved by the [Treestand Manufacturer’s Association](#) (TMA) have little to worry about. He offered the following advice.

- Always wear a Fall-Arrest System (FAS) with a full body harness, even during ascent and descent.
- Read and follow manufacturer’s instructions before using a tree stand.
- Inspect the tree stand and the FAS before each use and dispose of worn or damaged equipment.
- Practice in your FAS at ground level before using it in an elevated position.
- Be aware of dangers that exist even with a FAS. Prolonged suspension in a harness can be fatal. Have in place a plan for rescue, including the use of cell phones or signal devices that may be easily reached and used while suspended.
- with a plan and if possible with a buddy. Before leaving home, let others know your exact hunting location and when you plan to return.
- Keep emergency signal devices, such as a cell phone, walkie-talkie, whistle, signal flare or flashlight, so they are within reach even if you are suspended in your FAS.
- Never hurry while climbing with a tree stand. Make slow movements of no more than ten to twelve inches at a time. Maintain three points of contact with each step on ladder stands.

Finally, MDC cautions deer hunters about two dangers associated with campfires. One is wildfire.

Much of Missouri is in a serious drought, heightening normal fire danger. Do not light a campfire unless the surrounding area has been cleared of leaves and other flammable materials. Don’t light a fire if windy conditions create the potential for embers to blow into surrounding woods or fields, and never leave a fire unattended.

MDC also cautions hunters against moving firewood. The presence of the emerald ash borer and the potential for bringing other destructive forest pests into Missouri make this precaution critical to protecting the state’s forest lands. Obtain firewood locally and burn it all before leaving

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