

It's hunting season: Keep safety in your sights

December 5 2023, by Robin Foster



Hunting season has begun in many parts of the United States, with

millions of Americans heading into the woods in hopes of bagging a big buck.

But with the season comes tragic accidents.

"Every year, within the first 72 hours of hunting season, we see hunting-related injuries," said [Amy Bollinger](#), trauma education, outreach, and [injury](#) prevention coordinator at Penn State Health's Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. "Fortunately, there are things you can do to prevent that from happening."

What is the injury hunters tend to suffer the most?

Falling out of tree stands is a very common injury, and since most stands range from 10 to 20 feet high, a fall can be crippling, Bollinger noted.

"Falls from those heights can cause broken bones, [spinal cord injuries](#), [head injuries](#), and even death," Bollinger said in a Penn State Health news release. "You just need to use extreme caution when getting into and out of a tree."

The Pennsylvania Game Commission says these [safety measures](#) can make the difference:

- Always wear a full-body safety harness or belt whenever your feet leave the ground
- Check your tree stand for missing or broken parts before each use

- Select trees that will support your weight
- Hunt with a partner and have an emergency plan
- Carry a whistle or other signaling device, in case you need help
- Make sure harnesses fit well and meet industry safety standards. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembling and attaching a stand to a tree

As hard as it can be to climb a tree stand, carrying hunting gear up can also throw off your balance and cause you to fall. Avoid that danger by climbing the tree empty-handed and using haul lines to raise and lower hunting gear, Bollinger said.

Importantly, firearms should always be unloaded when bringing them into the tree stand, she said.

Another danger to watch out for is firearm mishaps, where hunters shoot something accidentally.

Hunters should always identify their target before shooting, and they shouldn't shoot at just sounds or movement.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission requires hunters to wear at least 250 square inches of fluorescent orange during firearms seasons. The color must be visible from 360 degrees and worn on the head, chest and back.

In addition to making sure your hunting gear is seen out in the woods, dressing properly for the weather is a must, Bollinger said.

Weather-related injuries such as slipping on ice or snow are common, and hunters may be at risk for hypothermia. Bollinger recommends water-resistant clothing and heavy boots and socks.

While it's a good idea to hunt in pairs, she acknowledged that many hunters prefer to stalk game on their own. If that's the case, be sure to let someone know where you'll be hunting and what time you plan to return.

Last but not least, take a fully charged cell phone with you, Bollinger added. Even if you're [hunting](#) in an area without cell service, [emergency services](#) may be able to ping your phone to determine your location. You should also carry a first-aid kit with you at all times.

More information: The U.S. Forest Service has more on [hunting safety](#).

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