

Section 3: Being A Hunter

Chapter 6: Hunter Safety

In this section, the student should learn:

1. Hunter safety is an “attitude of safety”
2. Hunter orange is the most effective visual safety device
3. The proper method of transporting a firearm
4. Hunting with others requires careful planning and safety considerations
5. The importance of a safety harness when using an elevated platform
6. How to safely cross a fence
7. The proper storage method for guns and ammunition

Hunter Safety

Hunter safety is not about warning labels and lists of do’s and don’ts; it is an “attitude of safety.” Hunter safety is the way we handle firearms and archery equipment at all times. Hunter safety leads to a confidence that when a firearm or bow is discharged, the game or target will be safely hit without danger to the shooter or others.

Hunting injuries are often a result of carelessness, ignorance, or a disregard of safety rules or laws. The following safety rules have continually protected hunters and their companions year after year. These rules need to stay foremost in the mind of every hunter. Ignoring these rules may lead to a hunting incident that will be forever regretted.

Ten Commandments

The following are the Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety.

1. **Treat every gun as if it was loaded.** Every time a gun is handled, check to make sure that the gun is empty of shells or cartridges. Always assume the gun has the ability to load itself.
2. **Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.** No one should ever see the muzzle end of your gun! An experienced hunter is always aware of the safe direction to point the gun’s muzzle and would not hunt with anyone who does not do likewise.
3. **Be sure of your target *and beyond*.** A safe hunter would never take aim at a sound, movement, or flash of color. A safe shot is taken at a positively identified target against a clear, safe background.
4. **Never point a gun at anything you don’t want to shoot.** Avoid **all** horseplay with a firearm.
5. **Unload guns when not in use.** Have the actions open to ensure that a gun is not loaded. Guns should be carried in cases to the shooting area.
6. **Store guns and ammunition separately.** Store in a place where the guns are out of reach of children or careless adults.
7. **Be sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions.** Only carry ammunition for the gun you are carrying and the game you are hunting.

HUNTER SAFETY KEY TERMS

Hunter orange
Safe shooting zones
Drivers
Standers
Safety harness
Haul line

8. **Never climb a fence or tree, cross a log or a stream, or jump a ditch with a loaded gun.**

9. **Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water.** When target practicing, be sure your backstop is adequate.

10. **Never use alcoholic beverages or drugs when handling a firearm.** Alcohol or drugs should not be used before or during the hunt, or when cleaning a gun. Always be fully alert and in control.

Transporting Firearms

A firearm transported in a vehicle must be unloaded and either cased or racked in plain sight. Always check hunting and motor vehicle regulations when preparing to transport your gun. For example, a muzzleloader is considered unloaded if the percussion cap is removed or if the priming pan is empty (flintlocks).



Additional transporting considerations are:

ATV- Guns should be kept unloaded and secured in a scabbard or holder designed for this use. Protecting the gun from damage and the weather is essential.

Boating- Never put a loaded gun on the bottom of a moving boat, especially when dogs are aboard. Before getting into the boat, unload and open the action. Secure your gun to protect it from the motion of the boat.



Trigger locks, cable locks, and locking gun cabinets are all good ways to keep children and other people from using your firearms without your knowledge or permission!

Storage

Proper storage of a gun is as important as how you handle it. Proper storage protects against misuse or damage.

In addition, it is important to store firearms and ammunition separately to prevent anyone from having access to both the gun and ammunition. Ideally, the guns should be stored in a locked gun cabinet or gun safe.

Even though the gun is locked away, educating non-hunting members of the family is often more safe and effective than hiding the gun away.



Cleaning Your Gun

To assure that your gun is always in good working condition and safe to shoot, it should be cleaned every time you handle it. All metal parts should be wiped with an oily rag. If not, the natural, salty oils in your skin **will** cause the gun to rust.

Any time you shoot your gun, it must be thoroughly cleaned, especially the bore. This is true whether it is a rifle, shotgun, or handgun. Follow these simple steps to clean your gun:

1. **Make sure the gun is unloaded and the action is open.**
2. Put a cloth patch on the cleaning rod and dampen with a bore-cleaning solvent.
3. Run patch down the barrel and let set for a couple of minutes.
4. Put the proper size cleaning brush on the rod and brush bore several times.
5. Put a clean, dry patch on the rod and wipe the bore.
6. Repeat the above steps until wiping patches are clean.
7. When the bore is clean, wipe with a clean patch that is lightly oiled.
8. Wipe all exterior metal with an oiled rag.

If possible, always clean your rifle from the breech end of the barrel. If you must clean from the muzzle of the gun, be sure that you use a muzzle guard to protect the rifling. Always use good gun oil, and use it sparingly.

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Safety In the Field

Expectation and excitement are as much a part of hunting as any other sport. However, when excitement overpowers caution and safety, a well-planned hunt can quickly lead to injury or death. A few precautions will keep a well-planned hunt on track.

Hunter Orange

Hunters are responsible for themselves, as well as other hunters, landowners, and other people that might be outdoors, such as hikers. For most species of game hunting, hunters should wear **hunter orange**, also called blaze orange. This is particularly important when transporting game. Ohio has strict regulations for wearing hunter orange during



Hunter orange makes you visible to others!



any deer gun hunting seasons, so always check the proper regulations before going out in the field.

Hunter orange is effective as a safety precaution because it is a color that is not found in nature, and does not blend with any other color found in the field. Hunter orange also shows up well at dawn and dusk.

Colors to **avoid** for certain hunting seasons are:

Turkey hunting season- Red, black, blue, white, or only a small patch of hunter orange

Deer hunting season- Brown, tan, and white. Brown or tan overalls should be avoided unless covered with hunter orange.

Inexperienced hunters are often concerned that deer may see the hunter orange as easily as humans do. In fact, deer are colorblind and cannot see hunter orange or any other color. Instead, deer rely on their keen senses to detect sound, motion, and scent.



Notice how well the boy's pants match the deer's coloring.



Avoid wearing clothing that is colored the same as the turkey's natural coloring.



Deer are color blind - compare this photo with the same photo on page 21.

Safe Gun Carries

Appropriate gun carries provide a safe way to carry your firearm for:

- Ready use when in the field
- Rest on long carries in the field
- Protection of your firearm when crossing difficult terrain
- “Muzzle awareness” when hunting with a friend.

Six common safe gun carries are:

The **two handed**, or **field carry**, is the best for ready use and muzzle awareness in the field.

The **cradle carry** is a resting carry that provides good firearm protection and muzzle awareness in the field.

The **shoulder carry** is a ready use or resting carry that provides good muzzle awareness. This carry should not be used when there are people behind you.

The **elbow carry** is a resting carry that provides good muzzle awareness when fellow hunters are by your side.

The **sling carry** is a resting carry that provides comfort on long walks. Never cross an obstacle using a sling carry.

The **trail carry** is the least ready carry. This carry should never be used when walking behind other hunters.



Two handed or field carry



Cradle carry



Shoulder carry



Elbow carry



Sling carry



Trail carry



Cross That Fence Safely

Take the time to unload your gun



Pass the unloaded gun under or over



Cross at a strong or secure post



Resume the hunt



Crossing Obstacles

The crossing of fences is a common obstacle in the field. When crossing fences, three factors must be considered: respect for the landowner, safe gun handling, and the age and condition of the fences.

The safest way to pass a gun through a fence is to open the action, unload it, and then pass it to a companion on the other side.

Always point the muzzle in a safe direction when passing a firearm through or under a fence.

When crossing a fence by yourself **1.** Unload the firearm leaving the action open. **2.** Place your firearm on the ground and pass it under and through the fence, to the other side. **3.** Cross the fence at a strong fence post, a safe distance from where your firearm is lying. **4.** Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, pick up your firearm.

After using any of these methods, quickly check the barrel (**before loading!**) for obstructions.

Safe Shooting Zones



Hunting with Companions

When a hunt is carefully planned, hunting with friends and family will provide many cherished memories. A carefully planned hunt always starts before entering the field. Always remember to “**plan your hunt and hunt your plan.**” Here are some things to consider when preparing a hunt plan:

Safe Shooting Zones- Zones of fire provide a safe area for firing when multiple hunters are crossing a field. Maintain an even line with straightaway shots given to the hunter whose zone the game enters.

A crossing shot, however, requires that each hunter know the limits of his zone. A bird that flies between or behind a line of hunters will be one of many shots not taken for safety’s sake. Swinging a gun out of your zone of fire and placing a companion in your line of fire is something that should never happen.

Deer Drives are effective but are potentially dangerous. If you are going to conduct a deer drive, it is important that the drive be properly planned and that the plan be carried out by **all** who participate. Drives with more than six or seven hunters should be avoided because of increased risk.

The first priority is to have a competent leader that is familiar with the area where the drive will take place. The leader is responsible for the safety of all the hunters and the hunters should listen to his/her instructions. **All of the hunters should wear plenty of hunter orange!**

The leader will assign the “**drivers,**” or *those who will walk, to drive the deer in front of them.* The leader will also assign the “drivers” direction of movement. The “drivers” force the deer to move in the direction of the “**standers,**” or *those who stand ready to shoot the deer when they move past them.*

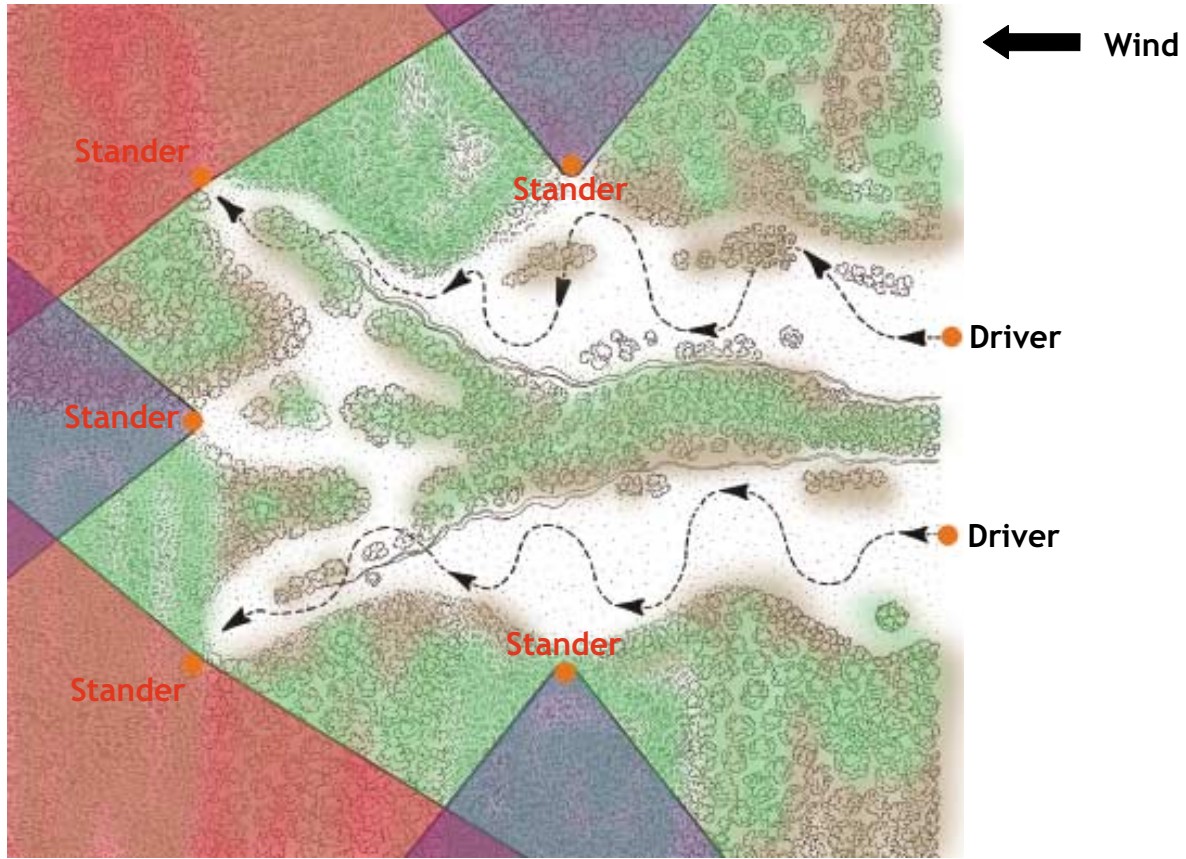
Again, every hunter needs to know the direction of the drive! Remember that *drivers* are rarely shooters. They will be surrounded by *standers* and will not have a safe shooting zone.

In most cases, one or two drivers are enough. It is more important to have more *standers* than *drivers* because *standers* are the only hunters in the group who **may** have a safe zone of fire.

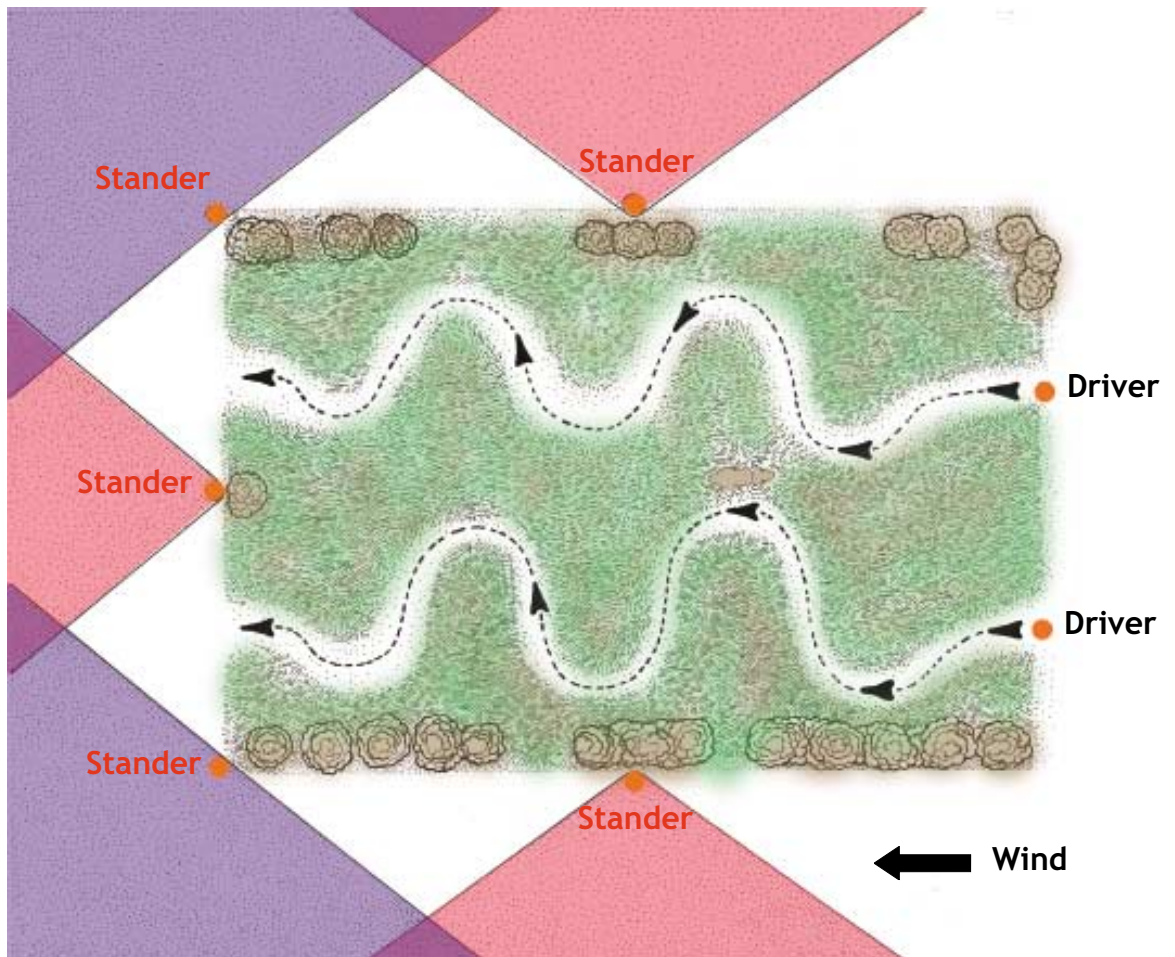
Remember that the purpose of the drive is **to get the deer to move, not run.** The drive should be slow and planned, and the *drivers* should stop every few yards to avoid forcing the deer to run from them. They should try to cause the deer to move slowly past the *standers* for an easy and safe shot. **Shooting at a running deer is not likely to be successful, and should be discouraged.**



Deer Drive (Hill Country)



Deer Drive (Woodlot)



Standers must remain motionless and watch closely for deer moving ahead of the *drivers*.

Remember to never shoot at a deer that is coming toward you. A shot in this direction will **always** have an unsafe background. Shooting at a deer in front of you will mean that you are shooting in the direction of the *drivers*.

Shooting at a deer passing you is also an unsafe shot because of the other *standers* in the background.

As a *stander*, the only safe shot will be **after** the deer has passed you.

There are many unsafe shots presented to a hunter during a deer drive. This is why a hunting plan with safe zones of fire mapped out for each hunter is very important. Regardless of your role in a deer drive, you should only shoot at a deer in your safe shooting zone. Remember to always “**plan your hunt and hunt your plan**” for a safe and successful hunt.

Hunting from a Tree Stand (Hunters Beware!)

Hunting deer and other animals from elevated platforms, usually called tree stands, is an

effective way to take game species. However, if not used properly, these elevated platforms present one of the most dangerous situations a hunter can face. In recent years, *Deer and Deer Hunting Magazine* conducted two surveys and discovered some startling facts. **One out of every three tree stand hunters will fall during their hunting career.** Make no mistake, if you fall chances are you will be hurt! Nationally and in Ohio, we have hunters seriously injured and killed each year from tree stand falls. A fall from a stand can change your life forever, not to mention the effect on your family. The shame of it is that none of these accidents have to occur. They are all preventable. **It is your responsibility to learn proper tree stand safety rules and to follow these rules each time your feet leave the ground. Your life may depend on it!**

There are some basic guidelines that will prevent you from becoming an accident victim. **You need to follow these each and every time you use an elevated platform to hunt.**

- **Tree Stand Selection** - Your selection and proper use of a tree stand is one of the most important factors in having a safe and rewarding hunt. **Never use**



home-made tree stands and tree stands made from wood.

Home-made stands are involved in the highest number of falls and usually cause permanent damage to the tree. You should only use a tree stand that has the approval of the Tree Stand Manufacturer's Association. When purchasing or using a stand, look for the

“TMA” seal on the box or on the stand. If you cannot find this seal, purchase or use a different model that you can identify as TMA approved. You must read, understand, and follow the manufacturer’s instructions included with the stand prior to its use. Practice mounting and using the stand along with all of the other safety devices at home before using them in the field.

• **Climbing Steps or Aids** - There are many different climbing steps or aids currently available to hunters. Screw-in tree steps are probably the most common, but can cause falls and damage to the tree if not used properly. Hunters should seek permission from the landowner to use any device that screws into the tree. You also need to pay attention to regulations that pertain to use of these devices on public or state-owned hunting areas. **Hunters should never use wood steps that are attached to the tree with nails or spikes.** A lot of falls are associated with these home-made 2x4 wooden steps. Whether you choose screw-in steps, climbing sticks, or ladder stands, you need to follow the manufacturer’s instructions for use and safety. Use a climbing safety device when using these steps or climbing aids.

• **Fall Restraint System (Safety Harness)** - Hunters must use a fall restraint system when using an elevated tree stand or platform. **Note: A single safety belt is not a system!** In years past, hunter education organizations stressed that hunters needed to use a safety belt that went around the hunter’s waist and attached to the tree with a strap. We have now found that in a fall these types of belts can and do cause serious injury and even death. The best advice is to not use this type of belt. If you disregard this advice, at least put the belt around your chest under your armpits and then attach the safety tether to the tree so that there is no slack when sitting down in your stand. Failure to do this can result in the belt twisting during a fall and tightening to the point where you cannot breathe. **This has caused death to Ohio hunters!** All hunter and hunter education organizations now recommend a full body restraint system (safety harness) *that wraps around your chest, waist, and legs.* These systems use a full body harness along with climbing and tree attachment devices to create a “total safety system” that provides the hunter maximum protection against falls. A good system allows the hunter to use one harness that allows for attachment of a climbing rope or strap and also



provides a way to attach a safety tether to the tree once you are safely and securely in your tree stand. There are many good systems available on the market today and the price of \$30 to \$40 is a small price to pay for your safety. Whatever system you choose will require your com-

plete understanding of the instructions and faithful use of the system in the field. The number one rule to follow is that **when your feet leave the ground, a restraint system is in use!**

- **Haul Line** - Always use a **haul line**, or a rope attached to the tree stand left hanging to the ground, to attach and raise your firearm or bow into the tree stand. Double-check firearms and crossbows to be sure that they are unloaded before attaching them to the tow line. Never attach the tow line to the trigger guard of a gun or crossbow. The tow line should be located on the opposite side of where you climb up to your stand. This will keep you from falling on your gun or bow if you should happen to fall.

Using elevated platforms or tree stands requires skill in addition to knowledge. Hunters must be in good physical shape and have a reasonable sense of balance and coordination. Do not attempt to use a tree stand if you have a fear of heights. Your fear will be enhanced because you will be on a small, see through platform. Wind can move a hunter by moving the tree, even in a properly placed tree stand. This can scare or unnerve anyone.

If you choose to use a tree stand, there are other things to be aware of and to consider. Building tree stands on private lands requires the permission of the landowner. Check your hunting regulations for information on the use of tree stands on public lands. Use common sense when determining the height of a stand. Thirty feet, for example, is definitely too high and is unnecessary! Regardless of what other hunters tell you, the average tree stand height of 12 to 15 feet from the ground will give you all of the advantage you need. If a hunter approaches your stand, do not move or wave. Call out instead to alert the hunter to your presence. And finally, if you plan to stay in the tree stand until after dusk, or get there before daylight, remember to take along a flashlight.



One out of every three tree stand hunters will fall during their hunting career.