

10 tips on practicing good hunting safety



By Doug Carter, Rankin
County Extension Agent

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With many hunting seasons opening this month, I want to stress hunting safety. The 10 commandments of firearms safety are:

1. **Always watch the muzzle!** Keep it pointed in a safe direction at all times.
2. **Treat every firearm with the respect due a loaded gun.** It may be loaded, even if you think it is not.
3. **Be sure of your target and what is in front of it and beyond it.** Know the identifying features of the game you hunt. Make sure you have an adequate backstop, don't shoot at a flat, hard surface or water.
4. **The best way to prevent an accidental discharge is to keep your finger outside of the trigger guard, until you are ready to shoot.**
5. **Make sure the barrel and action are free of obstructions, and carry only the proper ammunition for your firearm.**
6. **Unload firearms when not in use.** Leave actions open, and carry firearms in cases and unloaded to and from the shooting area.



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7. **Only point a firearm at something you intend to shoot.** Avoid horseplay with a gun.
8. **Don't run, jump, or climb with a loaded firearm.** Unload a firearm before you climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch. Pull a firearm toward you by the butt, not the muzzle.
9. **Store firearms and ammunition separately and safely.** Store each in a secured location beyond the reach of children and careless adults.
10. **Avoid alcoholic beverages before and during shooting activities.** Also avoid mind- or behavior-altering medicines or drugs.

Also, more and more hunters are using tree stands, so I want to stress tree stand safety. Most deer hunters in Mississippi know someone who has been involved in a fall from a tree stand. There are hunters who are now confined to a wheelchair and many others who have lost their lives due to tree stand falls. While the number of firearm-related accidents has dropped dramatically in the past two decades, the number of tree stand accidents has risen sharply.

Seventy percent of tree stand falls occur when hunters are climbing up and into the stand or getting down from the stand. Almost the same percentage of hunters

don't wear a fall restraint system during this critical time. Failure to wear a fall restraint system is the most important factor in tree stand falls.

I sometimes wonder why hunters climb 20 feet off the ground without any fall restraint system. Some people are willing to take more risks than others. Just maybe it's the same thing that draws hunters to wild places.

Another problem is financial in nature. Many hunters just don't want to spend a lot of money on a fall restraint system. Some hunters will pay thousands of dollars each year to participate in the sport they love. They spend money on hunting gear, leases or licenses, but, when it comes to climbing safety, that willingness disappears.

Tree stands are a popular and effective method of hunting. However, they also pose a significant safety risk. If you choose to hunt from a tree stand, you alone must be responsible for your own safety. Knowing and practicing safe tree stand procedures can minimize these risks and ensure your time afield will be both safe and enjoyable.

Source: *Today's Mississippi Hunter*, "Mississippi's Guide to Hunting Responsibly and Safely" Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks.

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