

Hunting Safety in Pennsylvania: A Safe Season Starts with Smart Choices

As fall turns to winter, hunters across Pennsylvania head into the woods to enjoy one of the state's most time-honored traditions. Hunting provides opportunities to connect with nature, practice conservation, and spend time with family and friends, but it also comes with risks that require preparation, awareness, and respect for safety.

The American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division (ATSPA) encourages all hunters to make safety a top priority this season. Whether you're an experienced outdoorsman or a first-time youth hunter, following a few essential precautions can help ensure everyone returns home safely.

Firearm Safety

Responsible firearm use is the cornerstone of safe hunting. The Pennsylvania Game Commission and safety experts emphasize the following rules:

- **Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.** Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- **Keep your finger off the trigger** until you are ready to shoot.
- **Identify your target and what's beyond it.** Never shoot at movement, sound, or shapes in low light.
- **Wear blaze orange.** Pennsylvania requires hunters to wear fluorescent orange clothing to ensure visibility and reduce the risk of unintentional shootings.
- **Unload firearms before climbing into a tree stand, crossing a fence, or entering a vehicle.**

Taking a certified **Hunter-Trapper Education Course** is a great way to refresh your knowledge and skills before heading out.

Safe Firearm Storage

Even outside of hunting season, firearm safety continues at home.

- **Store all firearms unloaded and locked** in a gun safe or cabinet.
- **Store ammunition separately** from firearms.
- **Use trigger locks or cable locks** for an added layer of protection.

- **Educate family members**, especially children, about firearm safety and what to do if they encounter a gun.

Safe storage prevents unintentional shootings, suicides, and theft — protecting everyone in the home.

Tree Stand Safety

Falls from tree stands are one of the leading causes of serious hunting injuries each year. Follow these tips to prevent tragedy:

- **Inspect your stand and straps** for wear, rust, or damage before every use.
- **Use a full-body harness** (fall arrest system) whenever your feet leave the ground.
- **Always maintain three points of contact** when climbing up or down.
- **Never climb with a loaded firearm.** Use a haul line to raise and lower your equipment after securing yourself.
- **Select a sturdy, healthy tree** and avoid installing stands in high winds or poor weather.

Remember: most tree stand falls happen while climbing — not while shooting — so stay alert from start to finish.

ATV Safety

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are convenient tools for getting around hunting areas, but they also pose serious risks if misused.

- **Always wear a helmet and protective gear.**
- **Ride only on designated trails or private land with permission.**
- **Never carry loaded firearms on an ATV.**
- **Avoid riding under the influence of alcohol or drugs.**
- **Use caution on uneven terrain, slopes, or wet conditions** that could cause rollovers.

Young riders should only operate ATVs suitable for their age and size — and under close adult supervision.

Hunting is more than a sport, it's a responsibility. By following safety best practices, hunters help protect themselves, their companions, and the future of Pennsylvania's outdoor traditions.

ATSPA encourages everyone to practice injury prevention in all activities, on and off the trail.