

CHECK IT OUT

Make sure your equipment is safe before hitting the field

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Every year, hunters get in a hurry or lazy, fall from their stands and seriously hurt themselves. Many of them never hunt again — or worse!

Before hunting season begins, take time to prepare for opening day. Many deer hunters leave their stands in the woods for months. Others take portable stands down at the end of the season and dump them in the garage until the next opening day. Straps deteriorate, animals chew through things, nuts come loose and critical pieces break.

“Check all the parts of a stand and make sure nothing is missing or broken so everything works properly,” emphasized Chris Cook, the deer program coordinator for the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. “Squirrels could damage old ladder stands or weather could cause straps to rot. If that happens, a hunter sitting in the stand could shift his or her weight and something breaks. That could cause that person to get seriously injured. Taking a few steps to prepare ahead of time could prevent a lot of trouble later.”

Shooting houses could also need attention. Landowners might want to move stands or build new ones. New stands should stay in place a while so animals grow accustomed to seeing them. Also, let the materials weather to remove human scent. Check and clean the windows. Inspect all moving parts, supports and other vital pieces.

Also, hit the shooting range. Perhaps the rifle fell against something and knocked the sights out of whack. Practice to regain familiarity with the weapon and make sure the sights send bullets where they should hit to put game down as quickly and humanely as possible.

Sportsmen can shoot at a state range in the Upper Delta Wildlife Management Area and several private ranges around the area. To find a shooting facility close to home, see www.Wheretoshoot.org. For other state ranges, see www.outdooralabama.com/activities/shooting-ranges.



Photo courtesy of Hunter Safety Systems

Hunters sitting in tree stands should always wear safety harnesses, and they should make sure they are in good working order.

Bow hunters also need to check their equipment. Look at the sights, strings and other gear. Bowstrings weaken and break periodically. Some archers replace their bowstrings before each hunting season so they know they can rely on sending an arrow to the right spot downrange when it counts.

Archers must practice longer than people who use firearms to hunt. Some archers release more than 100 arrows a week, perhaps more as hunting season approaches. Practice as if hunting. Archers who plan to hunt from elevated

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