

Hunters, be careful up there

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The Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division's Hunter Education Program wants to teach old hunters new safety tricks. Actually, these are not new safety tricks, but experienced hunters seem to be failing to follow them, according to last year's hunting accident reports.

During the 2018-19 hunting seasons, 15 treestand accidents were reported, and more than half of those individuals were age-exempt from having to complete a hunter education course. Of the five who did take the hunter education course, all under the age of 40, only one of those was wearing a full-body harness when the accident occurred.

"That full-body harness probably saved his life or saved him from serious injuries," said Marisa Futral, Hunter Education Program Coordinator. "He fell asleep in his stand, but he lived to see another day. He did everything he was supposed to do, excluding the falling out of the tree part."

"Three of the 15 accidents were fatalities. Still, a lot of these injuries could have been prevented with a full-body harness."

For those born on or after Aug. 1, 1977, must complete the hunter education course before they can purchase a hunting license. However, Futral urges everyone who plans to pursue game this fall to take the hunter education course.

"Even if you are grandfathered in, there's always something you can learn," she said. "I've noticed over the years that it is the hunters who don't have to take the course are

the ones having the accidents.

"I think the mentality is they've been hunting their whole life and get complacent. But those older hunters could learn a lot by taking the hunter education course, which is a lot more than firearms safety. The No. 1 hunting accident is falling out of trees. That is covered extensively in the hunter education class."

Of the three fatalities, none were wearing a full-body harness. Two of the fatalities were using climbing stands, while the other was in a hang-on stand.

The accident reports indicated one fatality occurred when the hunter was using a climbing stand and was about 21 feet off the ground when the straps on the stand broke.

The other fatality using a climbing stand also fell 21 feet when rusty connectors broke as he was sitting in the stand.

"One of the problems is that people aren't inspecting their equipment before they climb," Futral said. "You cannot leave your stands in the woods all year and expect them to be safe."

The hunter who was using the hang-on was killed when he apparently fell as he climbed into the stand.

"If they had been wearing full-body harnesses, they would probably still be alive," Futral said.

Futral also stresses that hunters should be connected to the tree in some way when they are climbing and descending the tree. Several accidents have occurred when hunters have been wearing safety harnesses but fell going up or coming down the tree. Several products are available that keep hunters attached to the tree at all times.

Of the non-fatal treestand accidents, the 11 who were not wearing full-body harnesses suffered a variety of injuries, including broken bones and internal injuries.

"Again, the guy who wore a harness had no major injuries," Futral said. "You don't have to suffer the consequences of a major injury."

WFF Hunter Education stresses the following 11 guidelines for using a treestand safely:

1. Always wear a safety harness, also known as a fall-arrest system, when you are in a treestand, as well as when climbing into or out of a treestand. Statistics show that the majority of treestand incidents occur while climbing in and out of a stand.

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