



# **Illinois Hunters Reminded to Put Safety First, Most Hunting Incidents Involve Elevated Tree Stands**

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SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is reminding hunters to make safety their first priority as they head to the field for the state’s firearm deer, upland game, waterfowl and other busy hunting seasons.

“We want hunters to enjoy all the opportunities available here in Illinois, with hopes for a safe and successful hunting season this fall,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources Director Colleen Callahan. “While we enjoy and celebrate Illinois’ hunting heritage, we want everyone – from experienced, veteran hunters to those who may be new to hunting – to always think safety first.”

The IDNR Office of Law Enforcement, which administers the state’s Hunter Safety Education Program, has investigated six hunting incidents so far during 2019, three of which involved hunters falling from elevated tree stands or falling while climbing into or out of tree stands.

In 2018, there were 19 hunting incidents reported in all hunting seasons in Illinois. Among the hunting incidents reported last year, 14 involved tree stands.

“Hunters should use a Fall Arrest System (FAS) safety harness, no matter the type of elevated stand they are using,” said Jerry Costello, director of the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement. “Statistics show that in most of the mishaps involving elevated stands, hunters were not using a fall restraint system.”

When utilizing a tree stand, hunters should check that their stand is installed properly. They should check the harness and straps and replace worn straps if needed; and, check the ladder and other equipment before use to make sure they are in working order. They also should be aware of weather conditions that could make stands and steps slippery. Hunters should have their cellphones within easy reach to call for help, if needed. Hunters can review tree stand safety online at <http://www.huntercourse.com/treestandsafety/>

Safety educators and IDNR Conservation Police also remind everyone hunting with a firearm to:

- Treat every firearm as if it is loaded, and never assume a firearm is unloaded;
- Always point a firearm in a safe direction;
- Be sure of the target, and make sure there are no other hunters, homes, buildings, vehicles or other animals beyond the target; and
- Keep their finger out of the trigger guard and off the trigger until they are ready to shoot.

Other safety considerations include ensuring heating sources are properly ventilated in hunting cabins and boats, wearing appropriate, high visibility clothing while hunting and being familiar with the area being hunted.

Illinois' busiest hunting season, the seven-day firearm deer season, begins on Friday through Sunday, Nov. 22-24, and will conclude Thursday through Sunday, Dec. 5-8.

The Illinois Archery Deer Season opened Oct. 1 and continues through Jan. 19, 2020. Archery deer season is closed during the firearm deer weekends except in those counties where firearm deer hunting is not permitted.

For more details on Illinois deer, waterfowl, upland game, furbearer and other hunting seasons this fall and winter, check the Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations at <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/Documents/HuntTrapDigest.pdf>