

Treestand Safety Pamphlet

TREESTAND SAFETY

Treestand use among deer hunters is very common. There are many advantages to using elevated stands. They include greater visibility and a decreased chance that deer or other game will catch your scent. Along with these advantages, there are significant dangers associated with treestands.

While firearms related hunting accidents have dropped tremendously since mandatory hunter education and blaze orange laws have been passed; treestand falls have risen sharply. Treestand falls have become the most common type of hunting incident in many areas of North America

Studies have found that:

- The majority of treestand accidents occur while hunters climb up to or descend from their stand.
- About one-third occur while actually hunting from or occupying the stand.
- The majority of hunters never use a safety harness or belt while climbing to or from their stand when falls are most likely to occur.

Hunter Responsibility

As a responsible hunter, you should always be aware of the laws that regulate the use of treestands in the area you will be hunting. These laws vary from state to state, and can vary from public to private land. Hunters should also obtain permission to use treestands from the landowner, as some treestands harm the trees. In some cases, landowners may restrict the type and location of treestands that are allowed on their property. Many timber companies prohibit the use of fixed position and permanent treestands, since the

nails and screws used to assemble them can harm their equipment. Public lands may have restrictions on the use and type of treestand that can be used, so be sure of the laws where you intend to use a treestand. If you plan to trim trees or brush for shooting lanes, make sure you obtain the landowners permission. It is important to remember that sportsmen must regulate their own behavior. If hunters want to be viewed favorably by the public, they must act responsibly at all times.

Benefits of treestands

There are many advantages to using treestands while hunting. They increase the hunter's field of view and allow the hunter to be aware of approaching game. Animals are less likely to catch your scent if you use a treestand, since the wind will help disperse your scent before it hits the ground. Treestands allow the hunter to get out of the animals normal sight path, aiding in the likelihood of taking game. Animals that are shot while hunted from a treestand leave a better blood trail; since the shot would have entered high on the game, and exited closer to the ground. Hunters confined to a treestand are also not scaring game by walking around disturbing animals. Shooting from a treestand is safer, forcing the shot downward instead of toward the horizon.

Types of Treestands

The type of treestand that is used should be based on several factors such as the type of terrain and trees. There are pros and cons associated with all types of treestands. It is important to understand your stand and use it according to the manufacturer's guidelines.

- **Fixed position stands** are used more than any other type of stand, due to their low price and low weight. It is usually the smallest of all stands, however it can be difficult to place in a tree and tree steps may be required.



- **Vertical step stands** may also be referred to as ladder stands due to their design. Hunters use a ladder to climb the tree. These ladders can sometimes be risky if they are too steep, or improperly installed. Most require more than one person to safely install.



- **Climbing stands** normally come in two sections. The use of a fall restraint system is generally easier to use while using this type of stand. The stand locks on the tree while in use and is usually taken down after each trip. Hunters use their physical strength to climb up large straight trees that are lacking lower branches.



- **Permanent stands** are nailed or screwed to the tree and are subject to various weather conditions. Permanent stands can become weak with age, and should be thoroughly checked before each hunting season. Permanent stands that are unsafe should be torn down. Make sure the treestand is stable and the platform is not slick. Homemade permanent stands are not recommended.

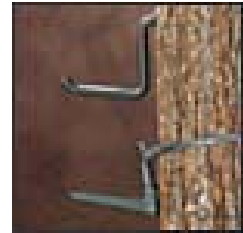
- **Tripod stands** and other self-supporting stands must be placed on level ground and used in accordance with manufacture guidelines. These stands are difficult to move and are usually left in one place for extended periods of time. Hunters gain access to the stand by using a ladder. These stands are mainly used in or around clear-cuts, where there is a lack of large trees.



Safety precautions and stand inspection

All stands need to be inspected prior to use. It is important to adhere to weight restrictions and follow all of the manufacturer's instructions. When purchasing a manufactured stand, be sure to read and understand all of the instructions. Visually inspect all of the components of the stand, replacing any parts that are worn or damaged. As with all manufactured products, defects do occur.

One of the most important safety precautions to consider when hunting is the proper use of tree steps. There are manufactured types, "homemade" steps, rope steps, and strap-on steps. Some factors to consider when using tree steps include:



- Do not use previous holes made by the steps. These may be weak and have started to decay.
- On thickly barked trees, clear the bark off of the tree before inserting the step. The bark does not have any holding strength; therefore make sure steps are screwed deeply into the wood and not just the bark.
- Make sure to use a healthy tree. Steps can be easily pulled out of a tree if the tree is not in good condition.
- Be sure that the steps are not wet or covered in ice.
- Place steps a comfortable climbing distance apart. If you have to reach too far for the next step, you can lose your balance.
- Be sure you have the landowner permission to use steps, since many cause damage or tree scarring.

- Inspect the steps to make sure that they are not cracked, worn, or otherwise defective.
- Steps can break. Maintain 3 points of contact on the steps at all times.
- Always wear your safety harness and stay connected at all times when using steps!
- Consider using high quality strap-on or pole steps rather than screw in steps

Fall-restraint systems

When using a treestand, **your fall restraint system is your single most important piece of safety equipment.** However, it can only protect you if it is worn and worn properly.

Many different styles of fall restraint systems are available; however, **a full body harness is recommended.** This is a parachute style harness that has straps under the legs and a tether to the tree. This type is the safest of any fall restraint system, and is designed to hold you upright. It is critical that you wear your fall restraint system whenever you are off the ground.



Finding a suitable tree

The right tree for the job will depend on many factors; including the type of terrain, types of trees present, choice of treestand, and weather conditions. Trees should generally be relatively large in diameter and in good condition. Trees that are irregularly shaped or lean excessively may be too weak to hold the additional weight of you and your stand. Trees with loose or flaking bark should also be avoided. Hunters should try to find trees that allow them to place stands 10-12 feet off the ground, and avoid placing stands any

higher than 15 feet off the ground. Trees that have branches just over the stand location are optimal, as they break up the hunter's silhouette.

Ascending or descending

Extreme care should be taken when climbing up or down from a treestand. This is the most common time for an accident to occur; accounting for 74 % of all treestand accidents. **A fall restraint system should be in use anytime the hunter leaves the ground.** With a little practice, hunters can quickly learn to climb trees while using a fall restraint system. Always use a haul line to raise and lower your equipment. Never climb with a firearm in your hand or slung across your back. Be sure to unload your firearm and cover your arrow points when raising or lowering them. Never attach a haul line in the trigger guard of a firearm.

Staying Connected

Staying connected to the tree whenever you are off the ground is critical to your safety. There are generally three ways to stay connected while ascending or descending. Which is best depends on the type of stand you use and whether the tree has lower branches or not.

- For climbing stands and fixed stands in trees that are free of limbs below your stand a lineman's belt and strap that you slide up the tree can work well.
- For trees with lower limbs a fixed line climbing system works well. It is designed to allow the hunter to climb trees with branches while staying connected to the fixed line.
- For fixed stands using pole type steps and ladder stands, a lineman's belt with lobster claws on a short tether may be best. This system uses special

carabineers that the hunter alternatively clicks on to the steps as they go up. By attaching one claw before detaching the other, the hunter is always connected. There are new fall restraint systems being developed every year. Hunters should chose a system that they feel comfortable and confident using and most importantly, one that will work when they need it. As is the case with most purchases, you get what you pay for.

Be prepared in case of an accident

If you fall from the stand and are suspended in your harness, do not panic. The thought that you are not going to fall to the ground may be reassuring and help you stay calm. If you can, climb back into the stand. If the stand is gone, find a healthy limb to hang onto and relieve some of the pressure off of the restraint system. If, as a last resort, you have to climb down the tree, wrap both legs and one arm around the tree. With the free arm, cut or remove the tether that holds you to the tree. Throw the knife far away from the tree and grasp the tree with both arms and legs. You can now slide down the tree. If you are not wearing a full body harness and are only wearing a safety belt, you will have a limited amount of time before you may loose consciousness if you can't take pressure off the safety belt.

Important points to remember

- Whenever you leave the ground, wear a fall restraint device and stay connected.
- The full body harness is the safest type of fall restraint device.
- Use care when placing and using tree steps.
- Perform regular safety inspections on your equipment and stands.
- Use the proper stand for your type of hunting situation

- Always let someone know when and where you are hunting and the location of your treestand.
- Always use a haul line to raise and lower your equipment. Never climb with a firearm in your hand or slung across your back.
- Try to hunt with a partner.
- Do not take chances with treestands.

Acknowledgements

International Hunter Education Assn. – Sponsor of the 2002 Elevated Stand Survey

The NC Wildlife Resource Commission

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

Cabelas- for their photo contributions

National Bowhunter Education Foundation