Deer Hunting Safety

Now that firearm season for deer is upon us, let’s take extra precautions or hunt defensively as we enter the woods in pursuit of the elusive whitetail. According to the DNR regulations, Michigan hunters are required to “wear a hat, cap, vest, and jacket or rain gear of highly visible color, commonly referred to as "Hunter Orange". During the November firearm deer season, this law applies to all deer hunters, including those hunting with a bow and arrow. The garment featuring Hunter Orange must be the outermost garment and must be visible from all sides. Camouflage orange garments, with 50 percent or more of the surface in Hunter Orange, are legal.”

This “Hunter Orange” is designed to help you be visible to other hunters, not deer. Deer can’t distinguish red from green or orange from red, so you don’t have to worry about them seeing you like humans do. Please remember this when you are picking out your hunting apparel: the more you stand out as a hunter, the less likely you’ll ever be mistaken for game.

Deer hunting safety isn’t limited to what we wear – don’t assume another hunter is as safe as you are. Always carry a flashlight and use it when moving in low light conditions. “Deer are smart but I have yet to see one walking around with a flashlight, or with hunter’s orange on,” joked Dan Lowery, avid outdoorsman and Health Educator for the Central Michigan District Health Department. “In low light conditions turn your light on as you enter or leave the woods. Don’t make the mistake of thinking no one else is hunting there too; the risk isn’t worth it,” Lowery stated.
Using a tree stand or blind presents several safety issues. Ladders or steps can become snow/ice covered, so be aware when climbing. Always use a rope to haul your unloaded weapon up to the blind instead of trying to climb with it. Most falling accidents occur when a person is stepping onto or off of the tree stand. Always wear a safety belt specifically designed to prevent falling accidents. Used properly, safety belts/harnesses will provide the hunter with about two feet of slack, which is plenty of space to move around while still preventing the hunter from plummeting to the ground.

Always positively identify game before you shoot. Lowery states, “Deer hunting takes a lot of patience and skill, and when you are constantly scanning for game, it is easy for your eyes or mind to play tricks on you. I would swear some bushes looked exactly like a buck bedded down or out of the corner of your eye you saw movement. At other times a doe moving through brush can look like it has all sorts of antlers, yet when I studied it with binoculars, it was as bald as Mr. Clean®.” Lowery also mentioned that you should never use your firearm’s scope to identify objects or animals. “Binoculars are essential to any hunt and you can view that dark shape moving through brush without ever pointing your gun at it – since it could be another hunter.”

Lowery has taken the hunter’s safety course that is required in Michigan for individuals born after January 1, 1960, who want to hunt. He agrees that it is a great idea for everyone interested in the outdoors to take the course. “I’ll just leave you with a few hunting basics,” Lowery said. “Never point a weapon at something you don’t positively intend to shoot. Always
keep the safety on your firearm until you are ready to pull the trigger. When walking to or from your blind, keep your weapon unloaded and with the safety on, slipping or falling are risky enough without the possibility of your weapon firing unexpectedly. When traveling in a vehicle or ATV, your weapon should be unloaded and in a case. Hunt safely and defensively, and you will increase your chances of avoiding unnecessary accidents in the pursuit of game – best of luck to everyone this year.”

This article has been brought to you by Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves the residents of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon Counties.