

# Five (5) Goals for Basic Hunter Education

*By Steve Hall, TPWD Hunter Education Coordinator*

1. **BEING SAFE** - FIREARM, SHOOTING, HUNTING & OUTDOOR SAFETY
2. **BEING LEGAL** - COMPLIANCE TO WILDLIFE & PUBLIC SAFETY LAWS
3. **BEING ETHICAL** – FAIR CHASE, PUBLIC IMAGE, COURTESIES AND CONSIDERATIONS
4. **TAKING A GOOD SHOT** – REDUCING WOUNDING LOSS & AVOIDING WASTE OF MEAT
5. **TAKING CARE OF GAME** – PROPER RECOVERY, PROCESSING AND STORAGE OF MEAT

## I. **TOP TEN HUNTING INCIDENTS & Teaching Strategies**

*Hunting Incident Data Analysis (2005-2012)*

1. **FALLS FROM ELEVATED STANDS** - Falls from Stands/Failure to Use Haul Line/ Harness (n=589)
2. **FAILURE TO POINT MUZZLE IN SAFE DIRECTION** - Careless Handling of Firearms/Failure to Control Muzzle (n=549)
3. **FAILURE TO OBEY SAFE ZONE-OF-FIRE** - Swinging on Game Outside Safe Zone of Fire (n=513)
4. **VICTIM BEYOND TARGET** - Victim Out of Sight of Shooter/Failure to Check Background (n=465)
5. **VICTIM MISTAKEN FOR GAME** - Failure to Properly Identify Target (n=391)
6. **STUMBLING/DROPPING FIREARM** - A - Shooter Stumbled and Fell/Dropped Firearm (n=169)
7. **TRIGGER CAUGHT ON OBJECT** - Trigger Caught on Object (n=165)
8. **VICTIM IN FRONT OF TARGET** - Victim in Line of Fire (n=146)
9. **LOADING/UNLOADING FIREARM IMPROPERLY** - Improper Loading/Unloading (n=139)
10. **LOADED FIREARM IN OR AROUND VEHICLE** - Removing/Placing Firearm in Vehicle/Discharge of Firearm in Vehicle (n=125)

### ***Teaching/Hands-on Strategies***

1. **FALLS FROM ELEVATED STANDS** – Erect tree stand about 3-5 feet from ground, in an appropriate, sturdy tree. Cover correct way to ascend, sit/stand and descend from stand – at a level that is both instructional (everyone can see/participate) and practical (e.g. liability). Obtain and use proper gear -- a quality stand, good climbing system, stand placement system and four-point fall restraint harness -- for use in a classroom/field course (Reference: NBEF/Treestand Manufacturer’s Association and related industry materials).
2. **FAILURE TO POINT MUZZLE IN SAFE DIRECTION** 9. **LOADING/UNLOADING FIREARM IMPROPERLY** and 10. **LOADED FIREARM IN OR AROUND VEHICLE (ALL CARELESS HANDLING)** - Using *Mossberg*® or other inert training firearms, place into vehicle (some in the correct position and others outside of a case and pointing in different directions). Ask students as a team to retrieve firearms from vehicle in a safe manner, walk to the “hunting area” nearby and

selecting and loading the proper “dummy” ammunition into the firearms that they are handling. Ensure safe muzzle control at all times during the exercise – evaluate and correct wrong behaviors (you may use other students to evaluate actions as long as you put them in the same or related scenarios as well). Watch for good communication between team members, not pulling firearms out from the muzzle end, muzzle control, opening of closed actions, carries around others, etc. Review proper transportation and storage (SAFE) techniques, proper passing of firearms between team members and proper loading/unloading procedures using the various action types and dummy ammunition.

3. **FAILURE TO OBSERVE SAFE ZONE-OF-FIRE** – Set up dove/quail/pheasant/grouse “Safe Zones of Fire” using soccer cones or blaze orange tapes/lines to set up zones in front of 3-5 hunters walking side-by-side. Line students up at the correct positions and emphasize safe zones, constant communication, hunter orange, typical and erratic animal movements (using *Frisbees*® thrown by volunteers to simulate moving birds in front of line of students), non-target species (e.g. hen pheasants, meadowlarks –using off-colored *Frisbees*®) and distances to animals using stakes and decoys (e.g. dove) at various distances in front of line of hunters. Evaluate safe or unsafe swings within the safe zones of fire. Cover situations from waterfowl blinds as to what constitutes safe zones of fire in tight quarters.
4. **VICTIM BEYOND OR 8. IN FRONT OF TARGET** - Use a camouflaged mannequin or human volunteer to set up behind a game target (e.g. gobbler, deer) to emphasize how camo blends in behind game even at close ranges. Have students identify whether they would take the shot before revealing camouflaged ‘hunter’ behind game target. Use blaze orange mannequin at a far off distance slightly obscured to emphasize use of blaze/hunter orange as a way of being seen beyond target. Place decoys (e.g. deer, turkey, hog) at top of hill to emphasize not shooting at game where the bullet travels far beyond and out of sight of shooter. Use some decoys in front of earthen backgrounds to show good shot situations, too. Emphasize to be aware of surroundings so as not to walk in front of another hunter’s muzzle while hunting or around vehicles, etc. Cover situations from waterfowl blinds so as not to set up or stand in front of another hunter’s firearm.
5. **VICTIM MISTAKEN FOR GAME** – Stress the use of binoculars to clearly identify targets prior to raising the sporting arm to the target. Stress the use of appropriate (e.g. blaze orange) versus inappropriate clothing (e.g. browns for deer; red/white/blue for turkeys; black for turkey and hogs) that might resemble game animals. Test students on obscure decoys and/or mannequins in the brush using their loaner binoculars.
6. **STUMBLING/DROPPING FIREARM** – Have students cross obstacles in pairs and individually; demonstrate proper field carries and what to do when a hunter falls with a firearm (maintain muzzle control during and after fall); and load and unload while being placed into different hunting scenarios (e.g. following each other on a trail during a deer hunt; walking abreast in a

field after pheasants, etc.); Stress how to lean an 'unloaded' (action open) gun properly against a structure such as a fence or in the crook of a tree versus improper techniques such as smooth tree or tailgate.

7. **TRIGGER CAUGHT ON OBJECT** – Demonstrate the proper techniques for always keeping fingers out of trigger guards until absolutely ready to fire; constantly monitor techniques during hunter skills trail and/or live firing opportunities. Praise correct techniques; firmly fix incorrect techniques using a positive teaching tone/style. Review action types, safety mechanisms and hammer actions. Show how to protect a trigger from heavy brush and emphasize muzzle control over trusting a firearm safety mechanism. Emphasize action open at all times when not in use or while traveling through difficult brush, crawling, etc.

## II. **TOP TEN TX LAW VIOLATIONS & Teaching Strategies**

*Based on 2014/2015 TX Hunting License Season*

1. **NO PROOF OF HUNTER EDUCATION** (n=2,902) – Violators are IN YOUR COURSE, most likely, for failing to get their hunter education certificate prior to legally hunting in Texas!
2. **OVER DAILY BAG LIMIT ON DOVE** (n=461) – Cover this during your ZONES-OF-FIRE Field Station
3. **UNTAGGED WT DEER** (n=344) – Cover this upon finding the “dead deer” at the end of your blood trailing exercise
4. **NO DEER HUNTING LICENSE OR FAILURE TO SHOW** (n=310) – Cover this when you discuss having your license prior to going on the HUNTER SKILLS TRAIL and how to properly show the warden your license during one of the stations on the trail when a game warden ‘visits’ you (could be a fellow HE instructor acting as the warden if an actual TPWD GAME WARDEN is not at your particular course)
5. **DOVE HUNTING WITH UNPLUGGED SHOTGUN** (n=293) - Cover this during your ZONES-OF-FIRE Field Station
6. **FAILURE TO COMPLETE DEER HARVEST LOG** (n=286) – Cover this upon finding the “dead deer” at the end of your blood trailing exercise
7. **DOVE HUNTING OVER BAIT** (n=284) Cover this during your ZONES-OF-FIRE Field Station
8. **NO DOVE HUNTING LICENSE OR FAILURE TO SHOW** (n=279) – Cover this when you discuss having your license prior to going on the HUNTER SKILLS TRAIL and how to properly show the warden your license during one of the stations on the trail
9. **HUNTING OR POSSESSING DEER IN CLOSED SEASON** (n=258) – Cover this during the game laws presentation or during one of the stations on the trail when a game warden ‘visits’ you
10. **TAKING OF AN ILLEGAL BUCK (e.g. <13” Spread)** (n=206) – Cover this during the game laws presentation or during one of the stations on the trail when a game warden ‘visits’ you

### **III. TOP TEN ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

*“Unwritten laws” & behaviors especially “when no one is watching”*

- 1. PHYSICAL FITNESS & PREPARATIONS** – Are you in good enough shape to hike in altitude or even a hillside? Do you file a hunt plan and leave it with a responsible person? Do you have the proper boots and socks, head gear and gloves? Do you have sun screen, bug repellent and other necessary outdoor items? Do you prepare a survival kit (signaling, shelter and fire making) that includes a first aid kit for each outing? Is your vehicle properly maintained? Do you have enough water? Is your hunting gear and layered clothing ready and in good shape? These are just a few of the questions you must ask yourself before each hunt.
- 2. LEARNING & PRACTICE** – Have you learned all you can about the game animal, its behavior and habitat? Have you practiced your shooting and other hunting & outdoor skills enough? Have you enough knowledge to know the difference between what you plan to hunt and other animals that look like the animal you plan to hunt. Have you secured a quality, reputable guide, mentor and/or companion with which to hunt?
- 3. INCREASED CHALLENGE, CONSERVATION & EDUCATION** - Do you hunt where the animal has every reasonable chance to escape (i.e. fair chase)? Are you challenging yourself and advancing your outdoor knowledge and skills? Do you join hunting and conservation groups that contribute even more to habitat projects, education and mentored events? Do you enjoy wildlife/bird watching while hunting and strive to become a naturalist by educating others on the outdoors and nature’s way?
- 4. PEER PRESSURE** - Do you succumb to peer pressure and act illegally, immorally or unethically as a result? Do you hang with legal, ethical companions that hold to a high hunting standard?
- 5. IMPROVED PUBLIC IMAGE** – Do you clean up before heading to town? Do you cover animals when transporting meat and game back to home? Do you use vulgar language or otherwise act inappropriately when in the public eye? Do you inappropriately brag about game, especially in front of non-hunters? Do you consider non-hunting feelings when around a group? Do you dress professionally when representing or presenting on behalf of hunting groups and opinions? Do you teach others about the important role hunters play in conservation?
- 7. SHOOTING WITHIN EFFECTIVE RANGE** - Do you always strive to shoot within your effective range and at animals when they present the best chance for a killing shot? Do you limit your waterfowl and dove shots to known distances well within your shotgun range? Do you learn how to judge distances and carry a range finder with you while hunting? Do you use the correct ammunition for optimal penetration and hits in the vital organs? Do you employ good game recovery techniques and stick with them until the animal is found?
- 8. CHARACTER, VALUES AND HIGH STANDARDS** – Do you set a high standard for yourself and the other hunters with which you hunt? Do you exhibit quality character traits while hunting such

as sharing in the chores, leaving the hunting area better than you found it, picking up litter even if it wasn't put there by you, helping and considering your hunting companions every step of the way? Do you hold values such as honesty, humility, hard work and pride in knowing you have done the best you can under the outdoor and hunting circumstances?

9. **PHOTOGRAPHY & SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD** – Do you take only appropriate photos with respect towards the game taken? Do you emphasize the values of being outdoors, with family and friends and the overall experience versus 'killing' shots, 'trophies' and inappropriate photos/videos that shows disrespect for others and the resource/animals? Do you overly brag about the size/quantity of game taken, especially on public forums in social media? Do you give hunting a good or bad name through your media actions?
10. **THE "GIVE BACK" PHASE** - Do you teach hunter education and/or mentor other friends and family members besides your own children? Do you advocate for the hunting heritage? Do you lead youth hunts or otherwise get involved in youth/mentor hunting programs?

### ***Teaching Ethics - Strategies for Motivating Others to Act Responsibly***

1. **DILEMMA METHOD** – Posing "What would you do?" dilemma, "What if?" situations and "Shoot/Don't Shoot" scenarios are effective ways to stimulate discussions of common experiences hunters face on typical hunts. Every hunter continually faces, safe, legal and ethical choices within every outdoor experience and it is how he/she responds to those situations and makes the right decisions as to how responsible they are and how accountable they are for their actions as a hunter. A good dilemma question gives the student a chance to make the most correct choice possible among a few choices given them by the instructor. Assumptions are typically made and added circumstances given –but an instructor should try to force students to make the best choice, then discuss the scenario even further with the group. Discussing ways to be proactive so as not to be put in a dilemma is the ultimate outcome of this method of "teaching ethics" (*Ethics are caught –not taught!*)
2. **"TRIGGER VIDEOS"** - Films/videos such as "Shoot/Don't Shoot" and "The Hunter's Path" by Madison Productions are classic "*trigger films*" that depict the wrong actions/behaviors followed by a pause for instructor-led discussion, followed typically by the right or more appropriate actions that should or could have been taken by the hunters. Several states have made their own, and in today's world of *GoPro*® and phone video technology, it would not take much to make your own trigger video to discuss in hunter education. As with dilemma method, each trigger sequence is a 'typical' unsafe, illegal or irresponsible action portrayed by a hunter, followed by the correct action that should be portrayed.

3. **OPEN, FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS** – The art of using “open-ended questions” such as “How do you feel about...?”, “What do you think about...?” “What are ways hunters can act unsafely? - illegally? -unethically?” “What are Ethics?” “What are some actions by hunters that demonstrate responsibility towards self? -other Hunters? -non-hunters? -landowners? -the resource?” Guiding such discussions towards their obvious conclusion by the group instead of the dictate of the instructor, is a powerful way to involve students in critical thinking and their role in becoming a responsible hunter and steward of conservation and the outdoors.
4. **BRAINSTORMING, PROCESSING & FEEDBACK** - Brainstorming can involve every student and is similar to open discussion. A good way to start is to set guidelines, ask a basic question such as “What ways can hunters portray a bad image for hunting and conservation? The students brainstorm for 5 minutes, you assign several students catch the gist of their ideas and write them down on sticky notes, and have several other students run them up and place them randomly on a board/easel. Then you give the students the opportunity to organize their ideas by categories such as who each of the actions MOST offends? Landowners? Others? The Resource? Non-hunters? Then you can go into feedback/facilitated mode of coming to the conclusion that there are better ways to represent hunting and hunters.

#### **IV. TOP TEN CAUSES OF WOUNDING of Animals**

##### ***Considerations during Hunter Education Live-fire & Skill Exercises***

1. **POOR SHOOTING SKILLS** – Learn/practice proper shooting skills (“*practice makes perfect practice*”...) at the range (shotgun –sporting clays OR hitting 6 out of 8 crossing shots from 20/30/40 yards, rifle-100 yards, handgun-50-100 yards, archery-10-50yards) and with a hunter education instructor/shooting coach/parent that employs positive/confidence-building/effective shooting techniques
2. **SHOOTING BEYOND EFFECTIVE RANGE** – Learn/practice good distance estimation skills; use a range finder while hunting; learn how to properly “subtend” (moving targets/shotgun) or use a reference points for proper yardages (stationary targets/rifle-handgun-archery)
3. **SPORTING ARMS NOT PROPERLY SIGHTED IN** – Carry sporting arms in sturdy/protective cases while traveling; shoot regularly to ensure sights are properly aligned (primarily rifles and archery equipment). Pattern your shotgun to ensure proper loads, ‘aim” and yardage densities.
4. **RUSHING SHOTS** – In stationary shooting, ‘flinching’ or rushing the shot increases chances for wounding; use proper shooting techniques (e.g. breathing, squeezing the trigger, visualization in rifle/handgun/crossbow shooting; proper anchor point/aim/release in archery shooting; and proper lead/timing/trigger pull in shotgun shooting)

5. **POOR SHOT ANGLES** – Take only high percentage, broad-side or quartering-away shots (e.g. big game) and/or proper head shots (e.g. birds/small game); avoid ‘risky’ target angles; try to ensure animal is not alerted to your presence
6. **POOR SHOT PLACEMENT** – Understand the animal’s vital zones and focus your shot at a quarter-size ‘bulls-eye’ in the center of the vital zone on stationary shots; learn proper shotgun shooting skills (See #1.)
7. **FAILURE TO PROPERLY MARK DOWNED ANIMAL AND/OR USE DOG** – Strategies for properly marking downed game using two reference points for big game (triangulating to visual/audible clues) or using one/two reference points for downed birds/small game -- both from the hunter’s position during the shot -- are useful; of course, a properly trained pointing/retrieving dog increases harvest rates considerably for birds and scent dogs/hounds for hogs and big game (when and where legal).
8. **TOO MANY SHOOTERS/SHOTS** – Empirical data in waterfowl studies show that more than 2 wing shooters taking shots at one time and taking more than two shots, individually, while shooting at a flock or flush of birds, increases wounding loss; also, be sure to focus your shot only at ONE bird at the outer/back/upper end of the flock –moving forward if shooting at a second bird
9. **POOR GAME RECOVERY (BLOOD TRAILING) TECHNIQUES** - Learn all you can through seeing, hearing and even smelling after a shot is taken; Learn how to WAIT enough time to allow most hit animals to expire before “pushing” them (*There may be some exceptions.*); learn how to read signs (e.g. blood, spoor, tracks, broken foliage) of a hit animal and stick to the trail, no matter how long it takes to retrieve your animal; use and properly retrieve flagging material/toilet paper (*LEGAL REMINDER: Remember proper, legal tagging techniques to claim the animal as your own before backtracking to retrieve flagging tape.*)
10. **FAILURE TO USE “SWATTER” LOADS OR TAKING FOLLOW-UP SHOTS** – Using ‘swatter’ loads such as high-pellet count #6 or #7 ½ in waterfowl hunting or being ready to immediately take a follow-up shot on a big game animal that went down initially (but got back up) are useful strategies for reducing wounding loss {*SAFETY REMINDERS: During the emotions/moments after taking a first shot, always be sure a “second shot” is ALSO safe prior to raising the sporting arm, and try to stay as calm and relaxed as possible until finding your quarry dead. (i.e. Don’t let your emotions cause an unsafe situation!)*}

## V. TOP TEN CARE of GAME Considerations

*“From Field to Table”*

1. **BE SURE ANIMAL IS DEAD** – Approaching downed game needs to be performed quietly and cautiously. Touch a seemingly-dead big game animal with long stick near the eyeball. For turkeys, be careful of legs/kicks (i.e. ‘spurs’). If an upland game bird or small game animal (e.g. rabbit, squirrel) is still alive, and you did not have a sporting dog to retrieve the animal, either step on it quickly (game bird) or pin it to the ground and dispatch it immediately. Note: Be sure to exhibit good hunting and firearm safety skills in the process, especially safe muzzle control. If trapping, learn how to properly dispatch and retrieve game from the various traps, acting carefully and cautiously at all times.
2. **PROPERLY DISPATCH GAME** – Properly dispatching big game with firearm or knife is a feat which must be accomplished from time to time. One quick shot to the head, follow-up shot in the vital organs or knife cut to the jugular in the neck (only if properly instructed in such a technique) may be the quickest way to dispatch a large animal. For game birds, compression to the chest cavity or ringing/popping of the next vertebrae can be done quickly. For small game, the same separation can be achieved with a boot while holding onto of the back legs. Learn quick and effective techniques for dispatching game from an experienced hunter/guide.
3. **OBEY TAGGING REQUIREMENTS & EVIDENCE OF SEX** Though tagging requirements are covered in Game Laws (Goal #2), it is important to consider proper tagging and evidence of sex requirements when taking care of game in the field, especially if evidence of sex has to remain “naturally attached” (e.g. Colorado)
4. **PROPERLY FIELD DRESS/ SKIN GAME** – Field dressing and skinning game take practice and proper techniques. Unless you transport an entire animal to a game processing facility, you will need to skin large game afield or at camp. Wear quality game gloves (e.g. disposable) to protect from blood, cuts and, in some cases, wildlife diseases. Be careful to avoid cutting any part of the organs within the abdomen area of the animal, especially the stomach, intestines and/or bladder. Spoor, fluids or contents of such organs will taint the meat and make it “gamy tasting”. Avoid touching the scent glands with your knife edge, as this, too, will taint the meat, especially with rutting big game, collared peccaries (javelina) and furbearers. While skinning, avoid cutting through the fur from the outside. Instead, cut through the skin from the inside out. Note: As with tagging (Goal #2), know the game laws when processing game meat in the field, in preparation for transportation to the final destination.
5. **KNIFE SAFETY** – Knife cuts are the most common type of hunting injury, though rarely get recorded as hunting incidents since most are handled immediately through direct pressure, Band-Aids and gauze, and are not reported to authorities/hospitals. However, some severe cuts have led to hunting fatalities, particularly in the large femoral artery (leg/groin). Great care must be taken while field dressing, skinning and processing game meat. Always cut in a

direction 'away' from yourself and others. Do not get in a hurry. Keep knives sharp and always use quality sharpening equipment to maintain the edge(s) of your kni(ves). The same goes for saws and heavier duty equipment. Cutting Shears for upland birds and small game and loppers for larger game also can be used effectively in processing game meat.

6. **WASH/WIPE & COOL/ICE GAME MEAT QUICKLY** – Especially in warmer/hotter conditions, game should be field dressed, skinned and then washed or wiped down and the meat cooled and placed in ice as quickly as possible so heat and bacteria do not taint or spoil/dry the meat. Meat can be hung in cool/cold environments, sheds and garages away from predators such as bears and scavengers. Store game in game bags and/or use fly repellent such as pepper to keep pests from laying eggs on the meat. The easiest way for most game animals is to skin, quarter and store the meat in a cooler with ice. Prop the quarters atop the ice and keep the cooler drained at all times so that meat doesn't sit in warm water if left unchecked or for several days.
7. **PROPER DISPLAY OF GAME** – Though considered in responsible and ethical behaviors goal #5, improper display of game also may ruin the quality of the meat when transporting in the sun, on a vehicle or when exposed to muddy roads and conditions. Be sure to store game in an ice chest or covered/cooled if being transported whole (big game animals). TRAIL and how to properly show the warden your license during one of the stations on the trail
8. **CONSIDER PROPER AGING OF MEAT** – Aging meat, especially of larger animals, is a practice that improves quality and taste. A general rule of thumb is hanging the larger animals for two weeks (e.g. elk moose), medium big game animals one week for (larger deer), 3 days for smaller big game (e.g. deer, antelope) –all at a consistent temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The consistent part can only be achieved in a temperature controlled area, making it fairly tough to age meat without the proper facilities. Another option is a larger refrigerator and/or ice chest.
9. **PROCESSING MEAT FOR FREEZER** – Much game is wasted each year because it was wrapped or vacuum-sealed improperly (causing freezer burn) or left too long (generally over a one-year period) before providing quality table fare. Consider donating part or all such animals to a "Hunters for the Hungry"-style program, or better yet, to your non-hunting family and friends.
10. **WILD GAME COOKING** – There are many wild game cook books and cooking classes available. Learn from family and friends how to properly prepare and cook wild game meat. Go online or to a wild game cooking class and experiment with new recipes any time you get the opportunity. Host wild game dinners in your neighborhood. Hunting is for MEAT as much as any other benefit – since early times for survival to modern times where wild game meat is valued for its organic quality, flavor and taste. Note: Billions of pounds of wild, healthy, organic, low-carb/fat/cholesterol meat is harvested and eaten by hunters and their friends each year – meat that lessens the pressure of society/grocery stores to provide that much more commercially processed meats -- a huge 'win-win' for society and hunters. Either learn to hunt or fish for yourself (e.g. hunter/angler education) or "*Become friends with a Hunter!*"