

To put a youngster in the field with only the knowledge of how to safely handle a gun makes no more sense than permitting a teenager to drive a car without common sense, knowledge of traffic laws, rules of the road and everyday courtesy. Still to come is the main course of what to hunt or not to hunt and why.

We know from studies of the Uniform Hunter Casualty Report that hunter safety training requires added emphasis in gun handling and practical training to recognize unsafe hunting situations. Nearly two-thirds of all hunting accidents result either from a lack of familiarity with the gun or the hunting field.

What better way is there to develop both a safe hunter and a dedicated and conscientious conservationist than to teach hunter safety in the field? Here in a natural setting is the opportunity to place the whole conservation objective firmly in youngsters hands. Here is the opportunity to let young curiosity examine the hunting ethic from all angles. Here is the opportunity to pass on an appreciation of the outdoors to the next generation.

This is the real value of hunter safety training to conservation education. This is the opportunity to step outside of the circle of the convinced and carry a missionary message of conservation into a group that is eagerly awaiting its content. Hunter Safety Training is the first step to relating youngsters to the place hunting holds in game management, the place game management holds in conservation and the place conservation holds in Ecology. This then is the beginning. This in the vernacular of today is the opportunity to tell it as it really is.

## HUNTER SAFETY TRAINING A REVIEW OF METHODS AND PROGRESS

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Formal Hunter Safety training has been done for nineteen years and it is even more important now than it was when the program began. It's important to the NRA and certainly to each of us interested in the sport of hunting. It has been a significant factor in the reduction of injuries and loss of life. It has helped to reduce vandalism and property damage and has also helped to improve good sportsmanship and the relationship between hunter and landowner.

We are very fortunate in this country to have available to us so many hunting privileges. Many other countries have restrictions which make it almost impossible to participate in the sport. Let me read you some present day requirements for a hunter:

The minimum age to qualify for a hunting license is 18 and the young hunter must successfully complete a six month course on hunting laws, customs, study and identification of game and non-game species, and some fundamentals of game management. Completing this, the new hunter is examined by a board of qualified hunters. If he passes his examination, the young hunter is entitled to purchase his license — \$12 — but cannot go afield until he has also purchased hunting insurance — \$35,000 personal liability, \$3,500 property liability. Now, finally is the hunter on his own? No, first he must secure permission to hunt on the land, hire a guide and look to the guide for an O.K. to shoot whatever game is seen. These are the requirements in Bavaria, Germany.

I know that most of you realize how these requirements contrast to those in this country where the privilege of public hunting has developed so differently.

The NRA became involved in Hunter Safety in 1949. The State Legislature in New York passed a law which required all potential hunters under 16 years of age who had not hunted in a previous year to attend a course in safe gun handling. The

training was to be done by the Conservation Officers. You can imagine the situation they found themselves in when the law was passed. The Conservation Officers were completely covered up with requests to do this training. Since the NRA had many marksmanship instructors and affiliated clubs in the state, they contacted us for assistance. Both clubs and instructors assisted.

By using the statistics tabulated by the Uniform Hunter Casualty Report, and with the help of the National Education Association, the NRA Hunter Safety Course was created. This Hunter Safety Course, with many variations, is now used in a state wide program in 40 states and 7 Canadian Provinces. Even those states which have no state wide program have a considerable number of instructors and do a great deal of training in hunter safety.

The NRA Hunter Safety Course might be considered as a skeleton course or a very basic course in hunter safety. It deals primarily with the firearm and does not include information on the hunters responsibilities such as the color of clothing, game identification, the importance of observing laws, equipment, orientation in the hunting area and courtesy and sportsmanship. The course does not include anything about first aid, survival, use of the compass, map reading or other "local" special subjects. These subjects were omitted from the Hunter Safety Course because they were not felt to be related to the firearm. Also, it was felt that once we deviated from the primary subject, there would be no end to the other areas which could be included and we would end up with a volume rather than a small handbook. We feel very strongly that certain of these areas should be included in certain parts of the country, but we felt that they should be in addition to the basic hunter safety course outline. Two years ago, when the state of Maryland started their state wide hunter safety program, they felt that in addition to the areas covered by the NRA Hunter Safety Course they would add information on the principles of game management. They felt that the young hunters should be made aware of this subject and so it was added to their course.

The Bow Hunting Supplement was added to the Hunter Safety Course Material at the request of states concerned with the increasing number of bow hunters going into the field. Due to our relationship with the states in the total area of hunter safety, we felt that we should gather together appropriate information and prepare a training supplement in this areas as well.

The training of instructors is not required by the NRA but many states feel that this is essential to the success of their program. We feel that an instructor who has been trained as an instructor is usually much more effective than one who has simply completed an application and passed a written examination with a certain score requirement. However, as of this time, we have found this impossible to require but we hope that the training of instructors will be required sometime in the future. The NRA has the framework for such a requirement in our Training Counselors. A Training Counselor is a person who has a minimum of one year's experience as an instructor and whose main interest is the training of instructors, rather than basic training. At the present time, we have 202 of these people in the country. It is our intention to increase the number of Training Counselors, until the time when instructor training can be made a requirement before a person is appointed as an instructor. A number of the states have this requirement now but some of them find it extremely difficult to do the training necessary to appoint the number of instructors needed for their program.

The 40 states and 7 Canadian Provinces which I mentioned as having a state wide program are considered as such either by legislation or by an agreement by the Conservation Department to sponsor the training as part of their official and regular activities. Those states which have legislation requiring the hunter safety training before a person can purchase their first hunting license, we refer to as having mandatory programs. Those states who by official action of the Conservation Department, adopted the program we refer to as having a voluntary program. Once a state has made the decision to operate a program on a state wide basis, the NRA steps out of the picture insofar as the direct dealing with the volunteer instructors is concerned. The state usually handles all inquiries concerning the program and

requests for information on becoming an instructor. The state also appoints the instructors and then sends to us the name and address of those who have been appointed so we can add them to the master file. Special instructor identification cards are made available with both the state copy and NRA copy furnished to the states at no cost. Any inquiries sent directly to the NRA concerning hunter safety appointments are forwarded to the state for handling. At the end of each month each state sends a report of the total number of students trained and the total number of instructors appointed. These statistics are tabulated and are used to make up a monthly report which is mailed to each state.

There have been a number of innovations in recent years which are quite significant. First, is the addition of Home Firearm Safety training to the Hunter Safety Course. Also, some of the Conservation Departments have begun teaching Home Firearm Safety to adults and primarily women. They feel a responsibility in this area because hunting arms are kept in the home and are actually handled more frequently in the home than in the hunting field.

Televised hunter safety training seems to be on the increase. Televised courses have been conducted in Oregon, Utah, Washington, D. C., New York, and Colorado. Most of these courses have been done over Education T.V., but in both Washington and Colorado it was done as a public service by a commercial station.

The Ontario Department of Lands and Forests recently made a basic change in their Hunter Safety Program. The volunteer instructors conduct training courses in their usual manner but no longer test the trainee. Both written and practical tests are given by the Department at centrally located places throughout the Province. The standardized testing may help the program. However, only time will tell if there will be any effect on the volunteer instructor since he no longer makes the decision which will allow the new hunter to go into the hunting field.

#### *Montana*

During the last six license years (May 1, 1961 through April 30, 1967) the overall number of accidents dropped 25% the second three years from the first three years of this period. The number of fatal hunting accidents dropped more than 18% during this same period; this, in spite of an increase in the number of hunters in the field. During 1966-67 license year, for the first time in history, no fatal hunting accidents were caused by hunters under the age of 18.

#### *Missouri*

Missouri averages slightly more than 40 accidents a year showing no overall trend, while the permit sales continue to soar; thus the rate is steadily declining.

#### *California*

The California Hunter Safety training program successfully trained 33,767 youngsters in the safe handling of firearms during 1966-67. This brings the total to 378,042 youngsters trained since the program started on July 1, 1954.

The success of the Hunter Safety Program is evidenced by the reduction of the hunting accident ratio. In 1955, the first year of the program, the hunting accident ratio was once accident to 4,317 hunting licenses. Now, in 1966-67 — the 13th year of the program — with 102 hunting casualties and 730,543 hunters, the ratio is one accident to 7,162 hunting licenses, a reduction of 40%. The reduction in the hunting death ratio is even more impressive. The hunting death ratio in the first year of the program was one death to 18,382 hunting licenses as compared to the 1966-67 hunting death ratio of one death to 47,702 hunting licenses. This reduction of hunting accidents is quite significant when it is realized how the increased number of hunters are being concentrated into smaller hunting areas each year due to California's great urbanization and firearms closures.

Hunter Safety training cannot be emphasized too much. While it might not be the best solution to the problem, it does cut down on hunting accidents and does it even though there is an increased number of hunters going into the field every year and a smaller amount of land on which to hunt.

It allows those of us who are interested in the sport to show that we are responsible and that we can handle the problem of field firearm accidents. The