

HUNTER SAFETY EDUCATION

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It is a distinct pleasure to be here in Baltimore and to have the opportunity of discussing with fellow members of the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners a subject that is of vital concern to all of us . . . Hunter Safety Education.

Not too many years ago most resource agencies were mainly concerned with the enforcement of game and fish laws, but in recent years the added responsibilities of safety in our fields of outdoor recreation have crept into the picture. With these added responsibilities resource agency field forces had to be trained in firearm safety.

The future of all outdoor recreational sports is of deep concern to all of us who are closely associated with the activity. An added work load has fallen upon the safety educator and the legislator, and especially you and me, since we are aware of the impact of literally millions of newcomers to all recreational activities.

What can be expected in the future is suggested by the projections made by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. This report attempts to predict how great the demand will be for all major forms of outdoor recreation by 1976 and the year 2000. These predictions are being widely used by the agencies and organizations involved in planning conservational, recreational and educational programs for the future.

The number one factor in predicting the degree of future activity is population. There will be a doubling of demand for facilities even if the degree of participation does not increase, but the report indicates that the individual of the near future will be more involved in recreation than he is today, which brings us up to the second factor, money.

Consumer income is expected to triple by the year 2000. Many people will move into the higher income brackets. In 1960 only 14 percent of U. S. families had incomes of over \$10,000. By 1976, forty percent of the families will be earning over \$10,000 and sixty percent expected to be in that income bracket by the year 2000.

The third factor that will bear on future recreational activity is the amount of free time people will have left over after those hours devoted to their vocations. The standard work week may be down to thirty-six hours by 1976 and might drop to thirty-two hours by the year 2000.

Both income and time are important elements in estimating future interest in all fields of outdoor recreation. Participation and the desire to participate increases rapidly with higher incomes. In looking back as well as to the future it is obvious that much more can be done to prepare ourselves, and especially our children, for a more active role as participants in many forms of outdoor recreation.

The job of thoroughly educating the public is far too great for the few agencies involved, and improved programs and program outlets must be developed.

A little bit of safety knowledge is better than none at all, and we believe additional lives can be saved by reaching millions with some basic facts about all phases of outdoor recreation through the media of press, TV, radio and demonstration.

Programs must be revised to meet today's requirements and anticipated needs of the future. The objectives of our programs must be safety through knowledge and skill, but programs should be directed more toward educating the teenager and pre-teenager. It is still true — what you learn and practice as a child you never forget. Resource agencies should set up self-supporting programs without waiting for windfalls or government subsidies. Community participation should be encouraged, which is one of the basic concepts of our Hunter Safety Program.

You may be wondering why I have been talking "program" when the subject of my topic is "Hunter Safety Education." It has been said that psychology of safe behavior is no more or less than the psychology of human behavior in general. I

believe in a series of programs, that are devoted to Hunter Safety in every aspect. These programs will help all who participate to develop a better attitude toward safety, a more personable behavior pattern and deeper sense of social responsibility. Training develops self discipline and an appreciation for the rights of others.

In short, I believe that more purposeful and progressive Hunter Safety Programs are wholesome for our youth and will help prepare them for a more rewarding and safer future.

As all of us well realize, accidents with firearms in the field and camp take a needless toll in lives and injuries every year and in every hunting season. With more and more sportsmen taking to the woods and fields each year, the probability that the outdoor recreation of some of them will end in tragedy is possible. Admittedly, the ratio of hunting accidents to the overall national accident scale is relatively small. This fact, however should not deter us from dealing with the hunting accident problem on an intelligently planned and organized basis, especially since this is a problem that involves the lives of human beings.

The National Rifle Association instituted the Uniform Hunter Casualty Report as a means of collecting, in a uniform manner, facts and factors involving hunting accidents in the United States and Canada. The facts reported were reduced to common terms which provided a guidepost to constructive action.

It should be realized that hunting accidents are not numerous; that in fact the ratio of accidents each year to the millions of licensed hunters makes hunting one of the safest of all outdoor recreations. However, the wide publicity given to hunting accidents often times creates the impression that danger continually stalks the woods and fields.

It is common practice to stigmatize many an injury as a "Hunting Accident," that is nothing of the kind. Let someone have an accident with a car while enroute to a baseball game. It is just another traffic accident — not a baseball fatality. But if the same person is headed for the woods wearing an orange hat and coat and carrying a gun in the car — hits a tree — every newspaper will carry a banner headline — "Victim Dies While Hunting."

The result of all this is that statistics-wise the sport of hunting gets a black mark and every hunter and every sportsman are victims. The Uniform Hunter Casualty Report Program has taken the myth out of hunting accident statistics and placed statistics in their true form in front of the public in relation to other types of accidents.

There are some people who believe that the answer to hunting accidents is the enactment of another law. Today the public generally accepts the principle that instead of a number of restrictive regulations regulating, the best way to reduce accidents is to make sure that the man behind the gun has been properly trained and indoctrinated in safe gun handling habits. Records indicate that gun accidents are caused by ignorance or the carelessness on the part of the person behind the gun.

Formal Hunter Safety Training has been done for eighteen years and it is even more important now than it was when the program began. It's important to The National Rifle Association and certainly to each of us interested in the sport of hunting. It has been a significant factor in the reduction of injuries and fatalities. It has helped to reduce vandalism and property damage and has also helped to improve good sportsmanship and relationship between the hunter and the 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 to 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 — \$12.00, 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 such requirements would be viewed by those in this country where the privilege of public hunting has developed so differently.

The National Rifle Association became involved in Hunter Safety in 1949. At the present time there are 38 states and 5 Canadian Provinces which have statewide programs. Of these, 14 are mandatory and the remainder voluntary. In October 1961 the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries joined with The National Rifle Association in a voluntary program in promoting hunter safety state wide. At first the program was concentrated just prior to hunting season, but presently the program is on a twelve month basis with a monthly average of over 800 students per month with a grand total of over 47,000 to date.

Boy Scouts of America, 4-H Clubs, American Red Cross, Future Farmers of America, AT & T, Rifle and Pistol Clubs, plus many sport minded individuals have supported the Virginia Program. The main concentration has been in the schools where you have a captive audience. We have used the physical education periods with great success. We are now embarked on a program to train all the physical education teachers in the state as hunter safety instructors who in turn can return to their respective schools and present the program at any time during the school year. Material for the course is maintained in the Richmond Office and the Local Game Warden coordinates the programs within the schools. Believe me this takes a big load off the field force. One thing you should bear in mind is this. Don't try to start with the superintendent of schools, but get down to the grass roots and contact the principals and the physical education teachers. In Virginia this has been very effective. During the summer months 4-H camps and boy scout camps are concentrated on. These people are looking for programs that will help to make the encampments a great success. Remember, without the volunteer instructor who receives nothing but gratification for his work, the volunteer programs would be stagnated. The only disadvantage that I know of in a volunteer program is overcoming the fact that since the program is not mandatory it takes continuous selling and promotion effort year after year to keep it going in each community. It does not continue to go by itself. In a mandatory program there may be more of an inclination to think that, since it has to be done, we'd better get down to work and do it.

Your local rod and gun clubs, hunt clubs and rifle and pistol clubs can play a very important part in your program. Through the program they can and do attract new members and the public relations aspect is probably the most important factor. Becoming active in shooting and/or safety programs tends to bring the public to you in a favorable light, therefore justifying your club's existence. All clubs can demonstrate to the public that their members and the students that they train are responsible shooters and interested in safety.

For instance, one club in Virginia has as their membership requirement to be a hunter safety instructor. This club has sponsored and put on the course for not less than twelve different groups of young people. Think of the potential if 50% of the clubs in your state did the same. Visit these clubs and show them the way and the light.

One definite way for us to reduce hunting accidents is to present the Home Firearm Safety Course in conjunction with the Hunter Safety Course. The Home Firearms Safety Course designed for the housewife and the girls in the home will without a doubt help to curb some of the unfortunate accidents that occur within the home. Recently I had the privilege of presenting the Home Firearms Safety Course to over three hundred young ladies in one high school. The workshop type instruction was utilized, as I find this type of instruction is superior. Training films were used plus a portion of the slides used in The Hunter Safety Course. We felt that at the end of the five day course there was not a young lady in the audience who was not able to pick up any type of firearms normally used for hunting and competitive shooting and check that gun to see if it was loaded. Here are over 300 prospective

mothers and housewives and I assure you that in their homes guns will be treated with respect and not with fear.

Virginia has started to make a dent in presenting the course to the young people and there is a noticeable decline in the number of reported accidents involving a trained hunter. Yet more good instructors are needed who will stay on the job and not just be a card carrying member. Each shooter-sportsman has an obligation to share in the responsibility of making hunters of tomorrow aware of their responsibilities in the field of hunting.

Public relations can play a very important part in making your program a success. Keep in touch with every media at your disposal and furnish them with information concerning your program. In other words keep your program in the public's eye at all times. One thing I would like to mention and that is this. Virginia's field force has found that their job is much easier when it comes to enforcing the game laws as a result of the Hunter Safety Course. It is better to educate than to agitate.

In closing I would like to say that Hunter Safety Training cannot be emphasized too much. While it might not be the best solution to the problem, it does work — 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 tremendous effect this training has on young people is impossible to overstate. They learn not only about safety, but of their responsibilities while in the field. And, of course, the best thing about it, is that it works.

HUNTER SAFETY IN MISSOURI

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First of all, I would like to say that I believe it is a fine idea to have an annual meeting of the Hunter Safety Coordinators during the Southeastern Conference. Certainly, it is an opportunity to gain new ideas and to measure our progress by that of other states. Any time a group of people can discuss mutual procedures and challenges, some good should come of it.

In the second place, I am not the Hunter Safety Coordinator for Missouri, although I have been familiar with and participated in the program since its inception. The Hunter Safety Coordinator for Missouri is Supervisor Francis "Bud" Eyman. Unfortunately, there is a limit to the number of persons permitted to participate in out-of-state meetings, and since I was selected to attend, Mr. Vernon Bennett, our Chief of Field Activities, asked me to prepare this report.

The correspondence pertaining to this meeting was reviewed and I find the following phrase rather intriguing: "It is imperative that we have a few, excellent papers presented on well established, successful Hunter Safety programs." Now, I wish that those compliments had been reserved until earned. About all I can do here is to give you the history of the Hunter Safety Program in Missouri.

The program was actually started in the summer of 1957, but few students were trained until January of 1958. The interim was spent in training Department and volunteer instructors, and in publicizing our intention to offer this training. One of our Commissioners had learned of the NRA Hunter Safety Program through a conversation with a representative of the NRA. If I remember the events correctly, he came to the next Commission meeting with the question — "Why don't we have a Hunter Safety program in Missouri?" I don't know what the answer was, but shortly afterwards the Field Activities Division was given the responsibility of implementing such a program.