

PENNSYLVANIA 2025 HUNTING-RELATED SHOOTING INCIDENT ANNUAL REPORT



Hunter Education and Outreach Division

April 2026



PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

HUNTER/TRAPPER EDUCATION

2001 ELMERTON AVENUE HARRISBURG, PA 17110-9797 | 717-787-7015

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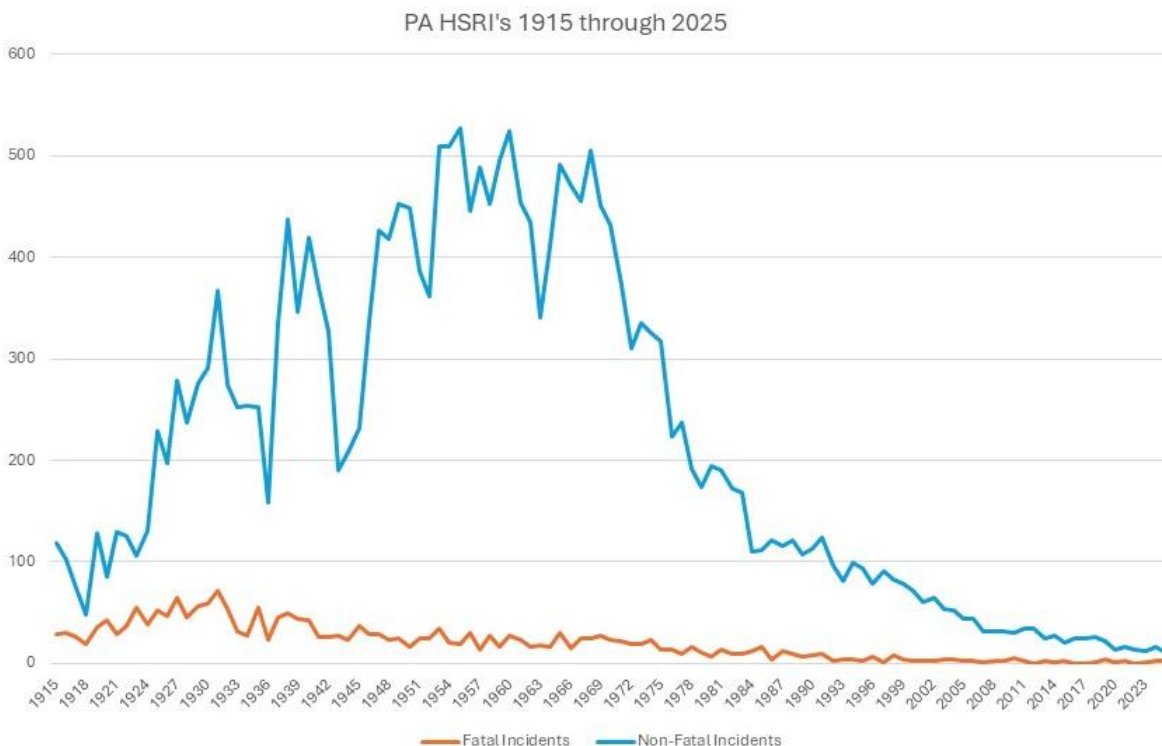
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INTRODUCTION

A “hunting-related shooting incident” (HRSI) in Pennsylvania is defined as: “An occurrence when a person is injured as the result of the discharge of a firearm, crossbow, or bow during hunting or furtaking activities.” Further criteria notes that the incident must have occurred during a legal hunting or trapping open season and when the individual(s) was/were preparing to enter the field, in the field, while parked in the field or in a moving vehicle on a valid hunting or trapping location. Often these incidents result from failing to follow basic safety rules. While one incident is one too many, the decline in Pennsylvania’s HRSI’s in recent years can be attributed to the success of the Hunter-Trapper Education Program and mandatory use of hunter orange clothing.

Since 1915, the Pennsylvania Game Commission has kept records of these incidents across the state. For comparative purposes, the Game Commission monitors trends in HRSI’s by measuring the accident rate per 100,000 participants. In Pennsylvania, HRSI’s began to decline after voluntary hunter safety courses were made available to the public in 1959. Since hunter education became mandatory in the Commonwealth in 1969, HRSI’s have declined by nearly 80%.





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2025 HUNTER EDUCATION SUMMARY

This report summarizes data from HRSI's investigated by Pennsylvania Game Commission State Game Wardens during the 2025 calendar year.

All first-time hunters and trappers in Pennsylvania, regardless of age, must successfully complete a hunter-trapper education course before purchasing a Pennsylvania hunting or furtaking license. In 2025, the Pennsylvania Game Commission certified a total of 29,579 students, of which 14,636 were certified through in-person courses and 14,943 through online options. Although slightly more than half (51.5%) of Pennsylvania's hunter-trapper education graduates completed their certification online, the Pennsylvania Game Commission relies heavily on certified volunteers to offer in-person hunter-trapper education courses across the state. The decline in HRSI's in Pennsylvania is largely due to the dedication and hard work of our volunteer hunter-trapper education instructors who provide this training to the public.

2025 HRSI ANALYSIS

During 2025, a total of 13 HRSI's were recorded in Pennsylvania, which included 13 victims and 14 offenders. Nine (69%) of the HRSI's were inflicted by others; one of these was a fatality. Four (31%) of the 13 were self-inflicted.

There were 831,203 licensed hunters recorded in Pennsylvania in 2025. The incident rate for the year (expressed as the number of HRSI's per 100,000 participants) was 1.56, a nearly 31% decrease from the 2024 rate of 2.25.

An analysis of the 14 offenders' ages revealed those aged 21 to 50 had the lowest incident rate with two (14%). The highest incident rate for offenders were those over 50 with seven (50%). Of the remaining offenders, four (28%) were aged 20 or younger and the age of one offender was unknown.

The youngest of the 13 victims was 16 years old and the oldest was 64. Seven (54%) of the victims were 21 to 50 years old. Three (23%) were 16 to 20 years old and three (23%) over 50. The age of one of the victims was not reported.

Six (43%) of the offenders had ten or more years of hunting experience. Three (21%) had 2 to 5 years of experience. One (7%) had 6 years of experience and years of experience was not reported for four (28%) of the offenders.



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All (12 or 92%) of the HRSI's occurred during daylight hours. The remaining one (8%) occurred at dusk.

Clear weather conditions were reported for five (38%) incidents. Six (46%) occurred during overcast conditions, and one (8%) occurred during snow. Weather conditions were not reported for one of the incidents.

Seven (54%) incidents occurred in woodlands and five (38%) occurred in fields. Terrain was not reported for one incident.

Six (46%) incidents reportedly took place in areas with light cover, four (31%) in dense cover, one (8%) with no cover and cover was not reported for two incidents.

The primary cause for most of the HRSI's in 2025 was "Victim in the Line of Fire," attributing to five (38%) incidents. All five victims were wearing some form of florescent orange clothing. "Victim Shot for Game" was the cause of three (23%) incidents. None of these three victims were wearing any form of florescent orange. Of the remaining incidents, two (15%) were attributed to "Unintentional Discharge," one (8%) "Dropped Firearm", one (8%) "Stray Shot," and one (8%) "Ricochet." Multiple factors may have contributed to some incidents; incident summaries note additional considerations.

Seven (54%) of the incidents involved shotguns; one of these incidents included two offenders, both of whom were using shotguns. Five (38%) incidents involved rifles, and one (8%) incident was the result of a flintlock muzzleloader. There were no incidents involving long bows, recure bows, crossbows or handguns reported.

Of the 14 offenders, seven (50%) were pursuing Whitetail deer. Three (21%) were turkey hunting and three (21%) were hunting pheasants. While the remaining offender was initially hunting rabbits, an injury occurred when the individual took a random shot at a sparrow and the shot ricocheted, causing self-inflicted injuries.

2025 INDIVIDUAL HRSI SUMMARIES

January 11, 2025 – Flintlock Muzzleloader Deer – Schuylkill County – Non-fatal/Self-inflicted

A 52-year-old male was acting as a poster in a deer drive. He saw an antlerless deer and subsequently fired his .54 caliber flintlock muzzleloader at the animal. The hunter immediately began reloading with a speed loader. The firearm discharged causing injuries to his hand consisting of broken/missing fingernails and wood and other debris lodged in his hand. It is believed that there was a hot ember in the



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breach of the gun which caused the blackpowder to ignite and discharge the firearm during the reloading process. **Cause(s): Accidental/Unintentional Discharge**

February 8, 2025 - Small Game - Juniata County - Non-Fatal/Self-inflicted

A 56-year-old male was hunting rabbits when he decided to shoot at a sparrow. The shot from his .410-gauge shotgun ricocheted back at him, penetrating his arm and knee. **Cause(s): Ricochet; Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

May 3, 2025 - Spring Turkey - Bucks County - Non-fatal

A 42-year-old male had successfully harvested a turkey and was exiting the woods with his juvenile daughter when he was struck on the right side of the face and torso with 12-gauge shot pellets. The offender, an 80-year-old male, told investigators he thought he saw two turkeys approaching and shot at the larger of the two. **Cause(s): Victim Shot for Game; Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

May 7, 2025 - Spring Turkey Lehigh County - Non-fatal

The 54-year-old male offender was calling turkeys and saw movement which he assumed were two turkeys he'd seen circling his location. He thought he saw a red head and fired his 12-gauge shotgun, striking the 30-year-old male victim in the face. **Cause(s): Victim Shot for Game; Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

May 12, 2025 - Spring Turkey - Allegheny County - Non-fatal

After seeing and hearing turkeys that were too far away to take a shot, the 65-year-old male offender decided to pursue the birds. He heard calling and stopped to return calls. He then saw movement and fired his 12-gauge shotgun, hitting the 21-year-old victim who had also been calling. The victim sustained injuries to his hand, forearm, shoulder and head. **Cause(s): Victim Shot for Game; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it; Never stalk a turkey or turkey sounds**

November 1, 2025 - Small Game/Pheasant - Indiana County - Non-fatal

Two separate hunting parties were actively hunting a field edge. The offender, a 31-year-old male, observed a pheasant on the ground in a hedgerow and fired his 12-gauge shotgun at the bird. The shot traveled through the hedgerow striking the 25-year-old victim in the legs and feet and also hitting the victim's hunting dog. Although there were no serious injuries to the victim or the dog, the victim's boots showed visible pellet strike marks. **Cause(s): Victim in the Line of Fire; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

November 7, 2025 - Small Game/Pheasant - Blair County - Non-fatal



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The 64-year-old victim was hunting the same field as the two offenders, a 73-year-old male and a 67-year-old male. The victim was standing on the edge of the field when the two offenders, both using 12-gauge shotguns, fired at flushed birds. The victim was peppered with shot but did not sustain any injuries. **Cause(s): Victim in the Line of Fire; Stray Shot; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

November 29, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Crawford County - Non-fatal

Four individuals were engaged in an impromptu deer drive when the 24-year-old male victim was shot in the leg by the offender, a 25-year-old male, who was a member of the victim's hunting party. The offender was hunting with a .308 rifle. Investigating officers first received conflicting stories from the hunters as to which hunter actually shot the victim. The offender eventually admitted they were on hunting revocation, and the others were covering for him. **Cause(s): Victim in the Line of Fire; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

December 2, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Juniata County - Fatality

A group of 24 hunters was conducting a deer drive when an antlered deer jumped in front of the 20-year-old male offender. The offender, who was hunting with a .30-06 rifle, shot at the deer, striking the 26-year-old victim in the hip. Due to steep, slippery terrain and heavy snow, emergency services personnel had difficulty removing the victim from the woods for transport. The victim succumbed to his injuries after being transported to a medical facility. **Cause(s): Victim in the Line of Fire; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

December 6, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Venango County - Non-fatal/Self-inflicted

Three individuals were hunting together when they stopped to rest. An 18-year-old male in the group sat down on a rock and a shot rang out from the .243 Winchester rifle he was carrying. The shot went through the victim's foot. The victim told investigators he was "positive the safety was on; the gun just went off." **Cause(s): Unintentional/Accidental Discharge; Sporting Arm in a Dangerous Position; Breach of Safety Rules - Always point the muzzle in a safe direction**

December 7, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Erie County - Non-fatal/Self-inflicted

After pushing through a patch of woods to the edge of a field, an 18-year-old male was standing with his 6.5 Creedmoor slung around his chest. The sling gave out and as he reacted by trying to catch the falling firearm his fingers/hand caught the trigger. The firearm discharged, striking him in the foot. **Cause(s): Accidental Discharge; Sporting Arm in a Dangerous Position; Dropped Firearm; Defective Equipment**



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December 12, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Northumberland County - Non-fatal

The 24-year-old male victim was hunting when he was struck in the chest by a rifle shot believed to have been fired by nearby target shooters. The victim was transported by helicopter for medical treatment. No suspects were identified.

Cause(s): Stray Shot; Victim in the Line of Fire; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it

December 13, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Chester County - Non-fatal

Seven hunters were conducting a deer drive with 3 posters and 4 drivers. The victim, a 16-year-old male, had moved approximately 30 yards from his designated post spot when he was hit in the leg with a 20-gauge slug. The offender, a 13-year-old male, had been walking (driving) toward the posters when an antlerless deer jumped up in front of him. He fired at the deer; the shot passed through the animal and struck the victim. **Cause(s): Victim in the Line of Fire; Breach of Safety Rules - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

2025 HRSI CONCLUSION

The calendar year 2025 saw a nearly 32% decrease in the number of HRSI's from the calendar year 2024, making it the thirteenth consecutive year with fewer than 30 HRSI's, and the fifth consecutive year with HRSI's under 20. A total of thirteen incidents continues to be a significant decline when compared to the annual HRSI data from 1915 to 2012, which averaged 263 incidents per year, with a low of 34 incidents in 2012 to a high of 552 in 1960.

The overall decline in annual HRSIs in Pennsylvania can be attributed to the institution of mandatory hunter education and safe practices being followed by hunters and trappers. By continuing to offer quality hunter-trapper education programs and continually evaluating ways to improve these programs, the annual number of HRSI's is expected to remain low compared to historic figures. Hunting in Pennsylvania continues to be a very safe activity with roughly 13 incidents per 800,000+ hunters.

Game Commission staff, volunteer hunter-trapper education instructors, hunters, and trappers can be proud of their efforts to make and keep hunting an enjoyable and safe activity in the Commonwealth



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2025 HRSI DATA TABLE

DESCRIPTIVE FACTOR	FATAL	NON-FATAL	TOTAL
HRSI	1	12	13
Injury Type (13 victims)			
Inflicted By Others	1	8	9
Self-Inflicted	0	4	4
Offender Age (14 offenders)			
10 - 15 Years	0	1	1
16 - 20 Years	1	2	3
21 - 50 Years	0	2	2
Over 50 Years	0	7	7
Not Reported	0	1	1
Victim Age (13 victims)			
10 - 15 Years	0	0	0
16 - 20 Years	0	3	3
21 - 50 Years	1	6	7
Over 50 Years	0	3	3
Offender Experience (14 offenders)			
Under 2 Years	0	0	0
2 - 5 Years	0	3	3
6 - 10 Years	1	0	1
Over 10 Years	0	6	6
Not Reported	0	4	4
Light Condition (13 incidents)			
Dawn	0	0	0
Daylight	1	11	12
Dusk	0	1	1
Dark	0	0	0
Weather Conditions (13 incidents)			
Clear	0	5	5
Overcast	0	6	6
Snow	1	0	1
Not Reported	0	1	1
Place of Incident (13 incidents)			
Woodland	1	6	7
Field	0	5	5
Not Reported	0	1	1



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DESCRIPTIVE FACTOR	FATAL	NON-FATAL	TOTAL
Cover (13 incidents)			
Dense		4	4
Light	1	5	6
None		1	1
Not Reported		2	2
Primary Cause of Incident (13 incidents)			
Victim In Line of Fire	1	4	5
Shot for Game	0	3	3
Unintentional Discharge	0	2	2
Stray Shot	0	1	1
Dropped Firearm	0	1	1
Ricochet	0	1	1
Sporting Arm Used (14 offenders)			
Shotgun	0	8	8
Rifle	1	4	5
Muzzleloader (flintlock)	0	1	1
Species Hunted (13 incidents)			
Deer	1	6	7
Turkey	0	3	3
Small Game (pheasant)	0	3	3
Other (sparrow)	0	1	1

2025 ELEVATED STAND INCIDENT ANALYSIS

Although Pennsylvania does not require the reporting of elevated platform or tree stand hunting incidents, such incidents are occasionally reported to and investigated by Pennsylvania Game Commission wardens. Nationally, elevated platform and/or tree stand incidents are the most frequent type of hunting accident. They are also the type of hunting accident least reported because they often occur before the actual hunting seasons start (when a stand or platform is being put into place), or shortly after the seasons end (when the device is being taken down). Even if a victim was not actively hunting when an elevated platform incident occurred, if they were erecting a platform for hunting or removing it after hunting, they were in fact, performing a “hunting-related” activity.

There were ten elevated platform/tree stand hunting incidents reported and investigated by Pennsylvania Game Commission wardens in 2025. Three of these incidents were fatalities. Four of the nonfatal incidents resulted in severe, debilitating injuries. Of the remaining nonfatal incidents, one resulted in minor injuries, a second incident with the victim having no visible injuries was determined to have likely been caused by an undiagnosed medical condition, and injuries to another individual



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remain unknown as they did not report back to the investigating officer and did not return phone calls.

Two of the fatality victims were wearing some sort of fall safety gear but there was no evidence that either victim had attached their safety gear to their respective tree. The remaining fatality victim was not wearing any fall safety system.

None of the four victims who suffered severe injuries were wearing/using any type of fall arrest system or safety harness. The two individuals with minor and unknown injuries were also not wearing/using any safety gear. The individual with an undiagnosed medical condition was wearing a safety harness, which likely prevented serious injury.

The height of the stands was not reported for all incidents, however, heights that were reported ranged from 12 feet off the ground to 35 feet off the ground. There was one female victim and nine male victims. Individuals involved in the nonfatal incidents ranged in age from 20 years old to 79 years old. The victims of the three fatal incidents were ages 50, 65 and 80 years old.

2025 INDIVIDUAL ELEVATED STAND INCIDENT SUMMARIES

October 4, 2025 – Archery Deer – York County – Non-fatal

The victim in this incident, a 43-year-old male, was using a climbing stand he'd set approximately 15 feet off the ground when the bottom part of the stand fell out from under him. The hunter stated he'd held on to the 14-inch diameter tree the stand had been attached to for a short period of time before letting go and dropping to the ground. The stand was an older model which had been damaged the previous year, and the hunter had repaired by welding it himself. Although the hunter fell on his back he had no apparent injuries and was able to leave the woods on his own.

Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use

October 5, 2025 – Archery Deer – York County – Non-fatal

A 53-year-old male was hunting from a hang on stand approximately 12 feet off the ground. Upon seeing several deer moving nearby, the hunter reached for his crossbow, after which he remembered nothing until he arrived at the hospital. The hunter acknowledged that the stand was left up all year and he'd replaced worn straps last year but did not check them this year. Investigators noted the stand appeared to have shifted and was tilted. The hunter was not wearing a fall arrest system/safety harness. Severe injuries included 10 broken ribs, bruising to one lung, a collapsed lung and a tear in the diaphragm. **Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Loss of Grip/Footing; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**



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October 10, 2025 - Archery Deer - Westmoreland County - Fatality

When the victim, a 65-year-old male, did not return home as expected, his wife asked a family acquaintance to look for him. He was found beneath a lock on stand, which had been placed approximately 35 feet off the ground. He had bruising and bleeding to his face and other unknown injuries. He was transported for medical care but succumbed to his injuries. Investigators found the platform of the stand leaning forward against a branch underneath it. The cables that would have held the platform level were broken. It is believed that the cables broke when the hunter stepped onto the platform. Although the victim was wearing a safety harness, the tether appeared to have been cut and there was no evidence to suggest it had been attached to the tree. **Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**

November 8, 2025 - Archery Deer - Luzerne County - Non-Fatal

The 23-year-old male victim in this incident was wearing a safety harness at the time of the fall and did not appear to have any visible injuries. The victim seized for approximately 1 minute after being freed from the harness by a member of their hunting party. Subsequent medical evaluation revealed a previously undiagnosed condition which may have contributed to the fall. **Cause(s): Medical Condition; Loss of Grip/Footing**

November 8, 2025 - Archery Deer - Lycoming County - Non-fatal

A 36-year-old male was using a hunting saddle. While repositioning himself a component of the equipment failed. The hunter suffered a fractured hip and a fracture to the L-1 vertebra. **Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Improper Use of Equipment**

November 12, 2025 - Archery Deer - Westmoreland County - Fatality

The 80-year-old male victim in this incident was hunting approximately 12 feet off the ground from a climbing stand when the fall occurred. The exact cause of the fall is unknown. The hunter had not been heard from for several days. He was found tangled in the base of the stand with a broken ankle. **Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Loss of Grip/Footing; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**

November 16, 2025 - Archery Deer - Armstrong County - Non-fatal

It was deduced that the victim, a 28-year-old male, lost balance or footing. The type of stand used was not reported. The hunter was not wearing a fall arrest system/safety harness. Severe injuries included a cracked skull and concussion, multiple facial fractures and lacerations from broken eyeglasses and a broken arm. **Cause(s): Loss of Grip/Footing; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**



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November 18, 2025 – Archery Deer – Westmoreland County – Fatality

After not receiving any communication from the victim, a 50-year-old male, and not being able to contact him, family members initiated a search. The hunter was found deceased with severe injuries including blunt force trauma to the back of the head, and trauma to his shoulder and upper and lower back. He was using a saddle system with a safety harness and was wearing climbing spikes, but the safety harness was not attached to the tree. Investigators believe he slipped while descending the tree, causing the fall. **Loss of Grip/Footing; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**

November 29, 2025 – Firearm Whitetail Deer – Armstrong County – Non-fatal

A 20-year-old female was hunting from a manufactured ladder type stand at a height of approximately 20 feet when the stand collapsed. The hunter was not wearing a fall arrest system/safety harness and suffered a broken back at the L-2 vertebra.

Cause(s): Equipment Condition/Failure; Improper Use of Equipment; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use

December 8, 2025 – Firearm Whitetail Deer – Potter County – Non-fatal

The 79-year-old male victim in this incident was not wearing a fall arrest system/safety harness and is presumed to have lost his balance or footing. The type of stand used was not reported. The wife of the victim reported that the hunter sustained injuries to his lower back or spine and had to crawl to his vehicle. Although the hunter and/or his wife were asked to provide a final report of injuries when they returned home from the hospital, they did not and investigators could not reach them by phone. **Cause(s): Loss of Grip/Footing; Not Wearing a Safety Harness/Safety Harness Not in Use**

OTHER INCIDENTS INVESTIGATED DURING 2025 HUNTING SEASONS

October 4, 2025 – Shooting Range – Centre County – Non-fatal

A 36-year-old male presumed to be sighting in a firearm and/or practicing at a shooting range sustained an injury to their chin from lead. Investigators were unable to determine whether the lead came from a hunter's stray shot or a ricochet at the range. **Cause(s) of Incident: Victim in the Line of Fire; Stray Shot**

October 4, 2025 – Presumed Archery Hunters – Dauphin County – Non-fatal

A crossbow bolt was shot through the window of a home and lodged in a door. Around the time of the incident, two individuals dressed in camo clothing were reported to have been sighted in a field adjacent to the residence, but no positive identification was made. A makeshift blind was located in the field, and a kick-off point was observed between the house and the blind suggesting one of the



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individuals likely shot at a deer in the direction of the house. **Cause(s) of Incident: Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

October 8, 2025 - Target Shooting - Lehigh County - Non-fatal

A round fired by a target shooter pierced the siding of a house on a neighboring property and came to rest on a dresser. The violator admitted to shooting in the direction of the home. The residents of the home were on vacation when the incident occurred. **Cause(s) of Incident: Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it**

December 11, 2025 - Firearm Whitetail Deer - Indiana County - Non-fatal

After returning from a hunt, a 37-year-old male was unloading a .243 rifle when the firearm discharged, hitting the victim, a 38-year-old male, in the lower leg. The victim was transported to a local medical facility for initial treatment and then to a second medical facility for next level treatment. **Cause(s) of Incident:**

Accidental/Unintentional Discharge; Breach of Safety Rule - Always point the muzzle in a safe direction; Unload firearms when not in use; Do not transport loaded firearms in vehicles

October 2025 - Archery Whitetail Deer - Northampton County - Non-fatal

An individual was hunting in his backyard with a crossbow when he shot and killed an antlered deer. The bolt passed through the deer and traveled approximately 100 yards where it struck and became lodged in the back door of a nearby residence.

Cause(s) of Incident: Breach of Safety Rule - Be sure of your target, what lies in front of and beyond it