

Hunting-Related Shooting Incidents (HRSIs) 2018

Introduction

A hunting-related shooting incident (HRSI) is defined as any occurrence when a person is injured as the result of the discharge of a firearm or bow and arrow during actual hunting or furtaking activities. Often these incidents result from failing to follow some very basic safety rules. While one incident is one too many, the marked decline of shooting incidents can be attributed to the success of hunter education training and mandatory use of fluorescent orange clothing.

Records dating back to 1915 have been kept by the Pennsylvania Game Commission in order to track these incidents. For comparative purposes, the Game Commission tracks trends in hunting-related shooting incidents by measuring the accident rate per 100,000 participants. In Pennsylvania, hunting-related shooting incidents have declined by nearly 80% since hunter education training began in 1959.

Included in this report are a series of charts, graphs, and related data that summarize records for incidents that were investigated by Pennsylvania Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officers for this reporting year. Refer to these items for specific information. Overall, a look at these records will show that **hunting is safe and getting safer.**

Year-end Summary - 2018

During 2018, there were a total of **27 HRSIs** recorded, **one of which was fatal**. This number represents an increase in the total number of incidents reported during 2017 (24). The **incident rate** (expressed as the number of incidents per 100,000 participants based on general license sales) was **3.16**, which was an **increase** from the 2017 incident rate of **2.73**. **More than half** of incidents reported in 2018 were **self-inflicted (59%)**.

An analysis of offenders' ages revealed that individuals **ages 16 and younger** had an incident rate of **0.47** per 100,000 participants, an increase compared to the 0.22 incident rate in 2017. Hunters in the **age range of 17 to 50** had an incident rate of **0.75** per 100,000 participants, while those **over 50 years of age** had an incident rate of **0.94**. A total of **7 incidents**, or **35%** of all 2018 incidents with an identified offender, resulted from individuals with **10 or fewer years of hunting experience**. This represents an increase from 17% in 2017.

A look at reported weather conditions shows that 8 (**44%**) of incidents took place on days with **clear** conditions, while 6 (**33%**) of the remaining incidents occurred during **overcast** conditions. 4 (**22%**) occurred during **inclement weather**, including foggy, rainy, and snowy conditions.

Additional environmental factors, such as time of day and cover density, show the **majority (79%)** of incidents occurred during **daylight** hours. **Dense** cover was involved in **22%** of incidents, while cover

considered **light** accounted for **67%**, and no cover accounted for **48%**. HRSIs occurring in locations identified as **wooded (67%)** and **field (19%)**, accounted for the majority of recorded incidents for 2018.

In 2018, the primary cause of hunting-related shooting incidents was **Unintended Discharge (67%)**, with 18 incidents reported. The second most common cause, **Victim In Line Of Fire (19%)**, fell far behind with just 5 incidents reported. Although the numbers for Victim in Line of Fire for 2018 is identical to those in 2017, those for Unintentional Discharge increased significantly (from 25% in 2017). An important note is that only **one incident** identified by the cause "**Shot for Game**", the **lowest number ever recorded** for this category.

In terms of species being hunted when incidents occurred, **deer (12 incidents)** and **small game (10 incidents)** led the way, followed by **bear** and **spring turkey** (both having **2 incidents**). The deer incidents represent **nearly half (44%)** of the 2018 incident total, while **small game** incidents represent **37%**, an increase from 38% and 21% respectively in 2017. **Spring turkey** saw the most significant change in terms of percentage of the incident total, decreasing from 33% in 2017 to just **7% (2 incidents)** in 2018.

A total of **33,315 students** (25,088 traditional course students and 8,227 online HTE students) were certified through a Basic Hunter-Trapper Education course conducted during 2018. This educational effort is spearheaded by a dedicated corps of 1,904 volunteer instructors teaching Pennsylvania's hunters basic hunting safety and advanced hunting skills. The 2018 student total represents an increase of 849 in the total number of students certified compared to the totals for 2017.

The year 2018 was the **sixth successive year that fewer than 30 HRSI's** were reported. This accomplishment may be attributed to the institution of mandatory hunter education in Pennsylvania and the effort that continues to improve the safety of our sport. Volunteer hunter education instructors, student graduates, and the entire hunting public should be congratulated for continuing to make hunting an enjoyable and safe activity.