

PENNSYLVANIA  
2023 HUNTING-RELATED SHOOTING INCIDENT  
ANNUAL REPORT



Hunter Education and Outreach Division

April 2024



# PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

## HUNTER/TRAPPER EDUCATION

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

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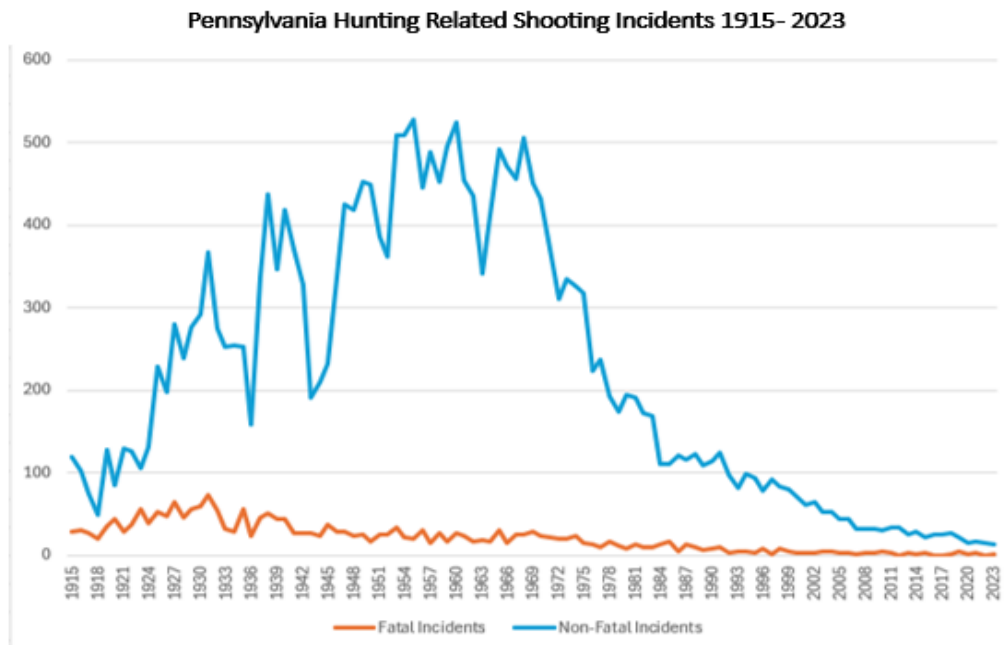
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### INTRODUCTION

A hunting-related shooting incident (HRSI) is defined as: “Any occurrence when a person is injured as the result of the discharge of a firearm, crossbow, or bow during hunting or furtaking activities.” Often these incidents result from failing to follow basic safety rules. While one incident is one too many, the marked decline in HRSI’s in Pennsylvania 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, have declined by nearly 80% since hunter education training began in 1959.



- 1931 - Highest number of fatal HRSI’s = 72
- 1960 - Highest total number of HRSI’s = 522
- 1969 - Mandatory HEd for all first-time hunters under age 16
- 1982 - Mandatory HEd for all first-time hunters regardless of age

This report summarizes data from HRSI’s that were investigated by Pennsylvania State Game Wardens during 2023.



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### 2023 HUNTER EDUCATION SUMMARY

All first-time hunters and trappers, regardless of age, must successfully complete a hunter-trapper education course before purchasing a Pennsylvania hunting or furtaking license. In 2023, the Pennsylvania Game Commission certified a total of 29,498 students, of which 15,577 were certified through in-person courses and 13,921 through online options. Although 47% 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.

### 2023 HRSI ANALYSIS

During 2023, a total of 13 HRSI's were recorded in Pennsylvania, of which one was fatal. This is the lowest number of HRSI's recorded in Pennsylvania since 1915. There were 854,081 licensed hunters recorded in Pennsylvania in 2023. The incident rate (expressed as the number of HRSI's per 100,000 participants based on general license sales) was 1.52, which is a decrease from the 2022 rate of 1.65. Nine (69%) of the 13 HRSI's reported in 2023 were inflicted by others; four (31%) were self-inflicted.

An analysis of offenders' ages revealed individuals age 20 and younger had the lowest incident rate with 2 (15%). The majority (6 or 46%) of offenders were age 21 to 50, and an additional 4 (31%) were over age 50. The age of one offender was unknown. In addition, 5 offenders (38%) had ten or more years of experience, 4 (31%) had 6 to 10 years of experience, and the remaining 3 offenders had less than two years of experience or their experience was not reported.

The majority of HRSI's (8 or 62%) occurred during daylight hours with clear weather conditions. Three (23%) occurred at dawn and the remaining 2 (15%) took place at dusk. Only one incident was reported as occurring during inclement (rainy) weather. Six (46%) incidents occurred in fields, while 4 (31%) occurred in woodlands. Most incidents (10 or 77%) took place in areas with cover reported as light or none. Only 2 (15%) incidents were reported as taking place in dense cover.

The primary causes of HRSI's in 2023 were "unintentional discharge," resulting in 6 incidents and "victim in the line of fire," responsible for 5 incidents. One incident was attributed to the "victim mistaken for game," and one to a "slip and fall." Six incidents involved rifles, another 6 involved shotguns and one incident involved a crossbow. Five (38%) of the offenders were pursuing small/upland game (dove, pheasant, or squirrels), and 4 (31%) were pursuing deer.



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Other HRSI's occurred with offenders in pursuit of turkeys, geese, and coyotes, and one incident stemmed from an offender shooting a songbird.

### 2023 INDIVIDUAL INCIDENT SUMMARIES

February 25, 2023 – Target Shooting – Potter County – District 3-53-1

Three teens were target-shooting when they observed what they believed to be a pheasant at the time. One of the individuals shot at the bird and it flew into a bush. The three surrounded the bush. A 14-year-old female (victim) saw the bird (actually a brown songbird) and as she reached to retrieve it, she was shot in the hand by a 13-year-old male (offender) who was in her target shooting group. She was treated at a local hospital for her injury.

April 29, 2023 – Turkey Hunting – Potter County – District 3-53-2

Anticipating a shot at some turkeys heard approaching, the offender, a 63-year-old male, had disengaged the safety of his shotgun. The turkeys moved on and no shot was taken. The offender had not yet re-engaged the safety of his shotgun and had it resting against his knee when he decided to readjust his position sitting on the ground. As he began to move the shotgun fell and he grabbed for it, hitting the trigger. The gun discharged hitting the victim and causing fatal injuries.

September 1, 2023 – Goose Hunting – Chester County – District 6-15-2

While goose hunting from a lay-out blind, the 32-year-old male (victim) reached for his shotgun as a flock of geese approached, discharging a round into his foot. It was determined that the safety was not engaged when the victim reached for the firearm. The injury the victim sustained was serious, requiring surgery and resulting in some permanent physical damage.

September 1, 2023 – Dove Hunting – Somerset County – District 2-56-3

A 65-year-old male (offender) peppered A 22-year-old male (victim) with shot while dove hunting in the same field. The victim was seated on a chair and could not be seen by the offender. The victim was hit by two BB's; one to the shoulder and one to the ear. The victim did not seek medical attention.

September 1, 2023 – Dove Hunting – Northampton County – District 6-48-1

An unknown offender peppered a 76-year-old male (victim) while he was dove hunting. Due to an extremely high number of hunters in the area, it was unclear where the shot came from. The victim was treated for minor injuries by emergency medical personnel and returned to hunting.

October 21, 2023 – Pheasant Hunting – Snyder County – District 4-55-1

A 26-year-old male (offender) peppered a 32-year-old male (victim) with shot when he shot at a pheasant a few minutes before legal shooting time. The victim had exited a building near where the offender took the shot and was standing near his vehicle. The victim sustained minor/superficial abrasions to his hand and neck.

October 28, 2023 – Archery Deer Hunting – Philadelphia County – District 6-51-1



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The 52-year-old male victim had been archery hunting with a crossbow. He leaned his cocked/loaded crossbow against a tree. He then slipped, kicking the crossbow, causing it to fall and discharge the bolt. The victim sustained serious, life-threatening injuries when the bolt passed through his calf. Emergency medical personnel responded to the scene to render aid with tourniquets and transport the victim to the hospital where he underwent surgery. The victim is likely to have some permanent damage from the injury.

November 11, 2023 – Squirrel Hunting – Cameron County – District 3-12-1

A 35-year-old female (victim) disengaged the safety of her rifle while she was squirrel hunting to take a shot. The animal moved out of view before the victim was able to shoot. Before re-engaging the safety, she took several steps, tripped, and discharged the firearm into her own foot. The victim was able to walk out of the woods and was taken to the hospital for medical treatment by a family member.

November 16, 2023 – Pheasant Hunting – York County – District 4-67-1

A 79-year-old male (offender) shot at a pheasant, peppering a 75-year-old male (victim) with shot. The victim, standing at 5'6" tall, was wearing hunter orange but was totally obscured by stands of grass 6' to 7' high. The victim sustained minor cuts to his nose from the shot pellets. Although he spoke with emergency medical personnel, the victim did not require any medical attention for his injuries.

November 26, 2023 – Post Deer Hunting – York County – District 4-67-4

A 19-year-old female (offender) and her 19-year-old male hunting partner (victim) were unloading their firearms on the tailgate of a truck. As the offender manipulated the bolt of the firearm to clear the chamber, the firearm discharged, striking the victim. The victim sustained a serious injury requiring surgery.

December 1, 2023 – Coyote Hunting – Westmoreland County – District 2-65-2

A 32-year-old male (offender) had been hunting deer and transitioned to predator hunting at dusk. He shot at a coyote and believed he'd hit it. He took a second shot at some movement, hitting the 60-year-old victim in the shoulder. The victim who had also been deer hunting, had just returned to his truck and removed his hunter orange vest. When he heard the first shot the offender had taken at the coyote, the victim moved toward the direction of the shot and saw the coyote hunter across a field. The victim was struck in the shoulder as he turned to go back to his truck. The offender rendered aid to the victim and drove him to meet an ambulance for transport to an area hospital.

December 6, 2023 – Post Deer Hunting – Bradford County – District 5-08-2

A 16-year-old male (victim) riding in the rear passenger seat of a vehicle sustained injuries to his shoulder when a loaded rifle that was being transported in the front seat discharged. The loaded rifle had been placed with the butt stock on the floor and the muzzle resting against the back of the front passenger seat by a 43-year-old male (offender). The rifle discharged when the vehicle hit a bump in the roadway. The rifle round struck the metal frame of the front passenger seat, causing shrapnel to strike the victim. The victim was taken to the hospital and held overnight for observation.



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December 8, 2023 – Deer Hunting – Butler County – District 1-10-1

As a 22-year-old male (victim) approached a downed deer he'd shot, it got up and ran. The victim began to run after the deer when he tripped and fell. His rifle discharged causing injury to his hand. The victim was transported to a local hospital for treatment of his injuries and released.

### CONCLUSION

Calendar year 2023 had the lowest number of HRSI's recorded in Pennsylvania since 1915 and was the eleventh consecutive year with 30 or fewer HRSI's, and the third consecutive year with HRSI's under 20. This accomplishment can be attributed to the institution of mandatory hunter education and safe practices being followed by hunters and trappers in Pennsylvania. Game Commission staff, volunteer hunter-trapper education instructors, hunters, and trappers can be proud of continuing to make hunting an enjoyable and safe activity in the Commonwealth.



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### 2023 HRSI DATA TABLE

DESCRIPTIVE FACTOR	FATAL	NON-FATAL	TOTAL
HRSI	1	12	13
<b>Injury Type</b>			
Inflicted By Others	1	8	9
Self-Inflicted	0	4	4
<b>Sporting Arm Used</b>			
Crossbow	0	1	1
Rifle	0	6	6
Shotgun	1	5	6
<b>Species Hunted</b>			
Deer	0	4	4
Furbearer (coyote)	0	1	1
Other (songbird)	0	1	1
Small Game (dove, pheasant, squirrel)	0	5	5
Turkey	1	0	1
Waterfowl (geese)	0	1	1
<b>Victim Age</b>			
12 - 15 Years	0	1	1
16 - 20 Years	0	2	2
21 - 50 Years	0	5	6
Over 50 Years	1	4	4
<b>Offender Age</b>			
12 - 15 Years	0	1	1
16 - 20 Years	0	1	1
21 - 50 Years	0	6	6
OVER 50 Years	1	3	4
<b>Light Condition</b>			
Dawn	1	2	3
Daylight	0	8	8
Dusk	0	2	2
<b>Weather Condition</b>			
Clear	0	8	8
Not Reported	0	1	1
Overcast	0	3	3
Rain	1	0	1
<b>Cause of Incident</b>			
Hunter Slipped &/Or Fell	0	1	1
Shot For Game	0	1	1
Unintentional Discharge	1	5	6
Victim In Line of Fire	0	5	5





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DESCRIPTIVE FACTOR	FATAL	NON-FATAL	TOTAL
<b>Place of Incident</b>			
Field	0	3	3
Field - Rolling	0	3	3
Open Water	0	1	1
Road/Highway	0	1	1
Vehicle	0	1	1
Woodland	1	1	2
Woodland - Rolling	0	1	1
Woodland - Steep	0	1	1
<b>Cover</b>			
Dense	0	2	2
Light	1	7	8
None	0	2	2
Not Reported	0	1	1
<b>Victim Experience</b>			
2 - 5 Years	0	1	1
6 - 10 Years	0	5	5
Not Reported	0	2	2
Over 10 Years	1	2	3
Under 2 Years	0	2	2
<b>Offender Experience</b>			
6 - 10 Years	0	4	4
Not Reported	0	1	1
Over 10 Years	1	4	5
Under 2 Years	0	2	2



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### 2023 ELEVATED STAND INCIDENTS

Although Pennsylvania does not require the reporting of elevated platform or treestand hunting incidents, such incidents are occasionally reported to and investigated by Pennsylvania State Game Wardens. Nationally, elevated platform or treestand incidents are the most frequent type of hunting accident. They are also the type of hunting accident least reported because they often happen 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 6 elevated platform hunting incidents reported and investigated by Pennsylvania State Game Wardens in 2023. Two of these incidents were fatal. One of the fatalities was caused by a 40-foot fall, the other was caused by a fire from a propane heater. Two other elevated platform incidents resulted in serious, debilitating injuries and the remaining two caused moderate injuries. The injured hunters ranged in age from 42 to 76.

“Improper Use of a Harness” (or Fall Arrest System), was the primary cause of most of these accidents – either no harness was used or if the individual was wearing one, it wasn’t used properly and/or it wasn’t attached to the tree. The following table contains data regarding the 6 elevated platform incidents reported in Pennsylvania in 2023.

6 INCIDENTS	SEX/AGE	STAND TYPE	CAUSE	DETAIL	HEIGHT OF FALL	INJURIES
10/9/23	Male/55	Lock-on	Equipment condition, improper use of harness	Straps broke, wearing harness but not attached to tree	Approx 20 feet	Serious – broken back and sternum, collapsed lung and severe head trauma
10/24/23	Male/61	Climbing	Improper use of harness	Harness not in use	40 feet	Fatal
10/30/23	Male/42	Ladder	Equipment condition	Slipped on step, harness connection broke	Undetermined	Moderate – lower back pain
11/25/23	Male/76	Fully enclosed, prefabricated polyurethane	Fire after lighting propane heater	Unable to escape	N/A	Fatal
11/25/23	Male/42	Hang-on	Equipment condition, improper use of harness	Reposition in stand, straps broke, harness not in use	25 feet	Serious – damage to vertebra, sternum, pelvis and ribs
12/8/23	Male/70	Ladder(?)	Improper use of harness	Snow on step, slipped, harness not attached	Undetermined	Moderate – broken ribs