

Idaho Fish & Game News

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Learning Firearm Safety, Hunter Ethics are Key to Successful Hunting

By Ron Fritz

As darkness fell on a mid-October evening in eastern Idaho, a hunter saw movement below him in a small clearing.

Thinking it was a deer, he fired. The 12-gauge slug hit another hunter in the chest. The hunter, who survived, was the victim of the most common cause of hunting accidents – mistaken for a game animal.

Later the same month, a teenager in Ada County shot himself in the foot while unloading his hunting rifle inside a truck cab. And a Canyon County youth was killed when one of his hunting partners dropped his shotgun while cleaning up after a hunt.

Incidents like these are increasingly rare. They are among the reasons Idaho Fish and Game emphasizes proper gun handling and firearm safety as part of hunter education. Students are taught to be aware of where their muzzle is pointing, and they are taught to load their weapon only when at the site of their hunt and unload it immediately after shooting – before returning to their vehicle.

Teaching firearm safety to young and older hunters is one of the key parts of hunter education in Idaho, and it has cut the number of fatal as well as nonfatal accidents dramatically.

Since hunter education became mandatory in 1979, the average number of nonfatal hunting related accidents has dropped from 29.9 to 5.6 annually. The average number of fatalities has dropped from 8.9 to 1.7 annually.



Hunter education and youth clinics help teach young hunters gun safety and ethics. *IDFG photo*

Idaho's hunter education program – coupled with the voluntary use of hunter orange clothing – has helped to reduce dramatically the number of hunting-related firearms accidents in the field. The result is that today's hunters are better educated than hunters in the past. They're going into the field knowing how to hunt safely and responsibly.

But Idaho's hunter education programs are about more than just gun safety. Other topics include basic hunting and survival skills, wildlife identification, hunting rules, sportsmanship and ethics, wildlife management and conservation.

Studies from several states have shown that graduates from approved courses are more successful and show higher

knowledge than non-graduates, and they have a greater awareness of ethics and safety.

In Idaho, before buying a hunting license, anyone born on or after January 1, 1975, must attend and pass a course or show proof they have held a hunting license from another state.

Hunters can fulfill Idaho's course requirements several ways. Traditional classroom courses are taught by trained, volunteer instructors who follow statewide standards. Courses involve lectures and demonstrations, homework, field experiences, firing exercises and a written exam.

Idaho also offers two independent
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Idaho Hunting Accidents (1979-2010)			
Year	Nonfatal	Fatal	Total
1979	3	2	5
1980	7	4	11
1981	11	1	12
1982	3	2	5
1983	6	4	10
1984	4	2	6
1985	2	2	4
1986	1	2	3
1987	4	3	7
1988	6	2	8
1989	9	2	11
1990	10	5	15
1991	6	2	8
1992	9	2	11
1993	6	0	6
1994	4	3	7
1995	9	1	10
1996	6	1	7
1997	7	1	8
1998	6	0	6
1999	4	4	8
2000	10	0	10
2001	12	1	13
2002	5	1	6
2003	4	0	4
2004	4	1	5
2005	2	1	3
2006	4	2	6
2007	1	1	2
2008	3	1	4
2009	3	0	1
2010	1	0	1
Total	173	53	226
Average	5.6	1.7	7.3

(Firearm Safety from Page 1)

study options for hunter education – a workbook option or a choice between two online courses.

Interest in archery hunting has increased dramatically, especially in the past decade or so.

Because of important differences between hunting with a firearm and hunting with a bow and arrow, anyone planning to buy an archery permit in Idaho must also complete a bowhunter education course. These are offered as a classroom course or online with a required field day.

It is highly recommended that anyone who wants to participate in a fall hunt register for a course early in the year and before June 30. After that date the availability of classes and online course field days becomes very limited because the volunteer instructors, who like other hunters, want to be afield early in the hunting season.

Hunting is a great outdoor activity that can be enjoyed by the entire family. Hunter education followed by actively practicing firearms safety and responsible hunting ethics is the key to an enjoyable lifetime of hunting.

Ron Fritz is the statewide hunter education coordinator at Idaho Fish and Game.



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The Law

Mandatory Hunter Education Program. All students being certified under this program must have successfully completed at least ten (10) hours of instruction in firearms safety, wildlife management, wildlife law, hunter ethics, first aid/survival, plus practical experience in the handling and shooting of firearms. This instruction may be completed through classroom study, home study, an on-line computer course, or other approved methods. (from Idaho Code, Title 36-4)



For Hunter Ed Instructors, Volunteering is its Own Reward

By Vicky Runnoe

Anyone who has attended, or whose child has attended a hunter education class has met one of the nearly 1,000 volunteer instructors that are the backbone of Idaho's hunter and bowhunter education programs.

In 2009, these dedicated volunteers donated more than 14,500 hours of their time helping first-time hunters acquire the knowledge and skills to become safe, responsible hunters. Most instructors are lifelong hunters who believe in the importance of giving something back to their sport. Knowing that first-time hunters will head into the field properly prepared makes the volunteers' efforts worth the time invested.

Volunteer instructor hours are also a vital part of a required match for Idaho Fish and Game to receive Pittman-Robertson Act funds. Through these funds, wildlife habitat can be acquired, restored and improved. Wildlife research can also be conducted and hunter education classes provided. Hunter education instructors play an important role for wildlife and hunters in Idaho.

According to state law, hunter education must be provided by volunteer instructors. These volunteers come from all walks of life. Some become interested in volunteering after having a child complete hunter education. Others are recruited by friends active in the program. Still others observe irresponsible or careless hunters and decide that they want to get involved.

The application process for everyone begins by contacting a regional Volunteer Services Coordinator. These Idaho Fish and Game staff members can provide information about the hunter

education program and the instructor application process. Once an application is completed, applicants must be fingerprinted as part of the background check. Because youths are the main participants in hunter education, it is essential that instructors have impeccable records.

With the application approved, a new instructor must attend training to learn the details of the program. To help the learning process, new instructors

more. Not only do instructors gain new information, they also enjoy getting to network with their fellow instructors and Fish and Game employees.

New instructors are always needed. Anyone who has the time, interest and desire to help first-time hunters, should consider volunteering as a hunter or bowhunter education instructor. They will have the satisfaction of knowing they are making a difference for Idaho's wildlife and hunters.



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are also required to team-teach with experienced instructors. On-going training opportunities are provided to all instructors. These training sessions cover a variety of topics from program changes to teaching tips to skills workshops and

And for those who volunteer – one day, a student will stop to tell them about the first animal they harvested. Their shining eyes and huge smile will let the instructor know that every minute they put into the class was worth it.

To volunteer, contact the nearest Idaho Fish and Game office or visit the Fish and Game Web site at http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/education/hunter_ed/become_instructor.cfm.

Vicky Runnoe is the conservation education supervisor for Fish and Game.



Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission's policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor's office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.



Hunter Education Offers New and Old Hunters a Variety of Options

By Evin Oneale

Basic Requirements

Idaho residents born after January 1, 1975, must successfully complete a hunter education course before they can buy an Idaho hunting license or provide proof that they have held a valid hunting license in Idaho or another state. Archery hunters also must complete a hunter education course to buy a hunting license, and may have to take a bowhunter education course as well.

Idaho Fish and Game offers three course options for hunter education students and two options for bowhunter education students. Traditional classroom courses and internet courses are available for both, while the hunter education program also offers a home study workbook option.



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Traditional Course

Traditional hunter education classroom courses remain the most popular choice and are the best choice for budding young hunters. Taught by a cadre of volunteer instructors, these classes might meet six evenings in a two-week period and are capped off by a field exercise, during which students put some of their newfound skills to the test. Enrollees must be at least nine years old to participate in a traditional hunter or bowhunter education course.

Though not required, parents or guardians are encouraged to attend courses with their children and participate in the entire program.

Internet Course

For people who simply can't make a traditional course fit a hectic schedule, an internet version is available for both hunter and bowhunter education.

This option allows anyone with Internet access to complete the course at their own pace. Completion of this course requires some hunting knowledge and loads of discipline; as such, it is not recommended for students under 14 years of age.

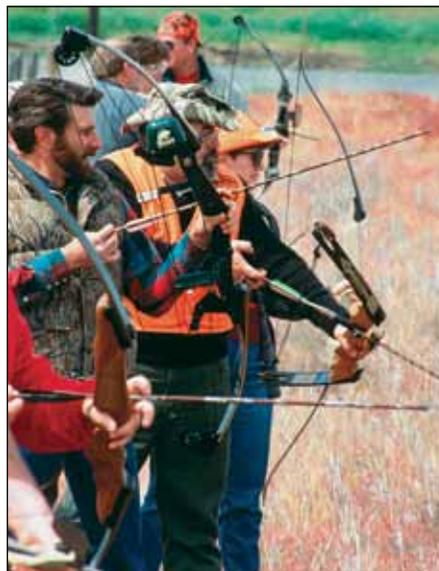
After completing the internet course and taking the online examination, students must register for and successfully complete a field day, which includes a live-fire exercise and the state hunter education examination. Internet and home-study course field days are held at various times in each region throughout the year.

Home Study Course

The last hunter education course option involves a home study workbook.

Like the internet course, it is self-paced but more rigorous than the traditional instructor-led course. But because of its increased level of difficulty, the home study option is not recommended for youngsters under 14 years of age.

When students complete their workbook and return it to a Fish and Game office, they can then register for



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one of the regularly scheduled Internet and home-study field days to complete the course.

The independent study options are not recommended for students under 14 years of age, as failure rates are high in the younger students. Younger hunters may be better served by attending a traditional



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classroom course in which they get personal instruction from certified instructors.

These options are designed for self-motivated students with good reading and comprehension skills who have some firearms and hunting knowledge or experience.

To enroll in a hunter education course contact an Idaho Fish and Game office, or go online to <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>. Available classes and online course field days are listed at: <https://fishandgame.idaho.gov/hed/public/default.aspx>.

Evin Oneale is the regional conservation educator in the Southwest Region.



New hunters are advised to become certified well in advance of hunting seasons. Courses and field days are limited. Waiting too long can keep you home on opening day.