

## **New York's 2021 Hunting Season Safest on Record**

Since the inception of the Hunter Safety program in 1949 and the creation of hunter safety education requirements for all who go afield in search of wild game, New York's DEC team has had one goal - reduce the number of hunter related injuries. In the 1950's there were on average over 130 shooting incidents every single hunting season. Can you imagine? That's just New York State! If you went to hunt and knew that each year there were an average of 130 times when a hunter was shot by themselves or another hunter, would you want to go out there? Crazy to think about. Those numbers have significantly declined over the decades since the Hunter Safety program was put in place. And while I will admit there is also data to show there are fewer hunters afield in modern times, and the access to land has also gone down, the number of hunting opportunities has gone up with longer seasons and more game. Consider that the number of deer taken during all seasons in New York has risen from around 50,000 harvested in the 1960's to over 150,000 harvested today - every year! So with that as a little history lesson, consider this amazing fact - 2021 saw only 9 (nine) shooting incidents caused by hunters during the hunting seasons - that's small game, big game, turkey, and migratory bird hunting combined - and that's bow, crossbow, rifle, shotgun and handgun incidents all combined! Just 9!! That's the first time it was below 10 in the history of recording this data in New York State.

Amazing right? Safe right? Well, it's even more astounding when you consider two other major factors that came into play during the 2021 seasons - both of which many thought would cause more incidents. The first was the introduction of new legal shooting times for big game seasons - 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset. Many thought this would cause more people to accidentally shoot others in the darker-light conditions. Not a single incident occurred during those hours! The second factor was the introduction of 12 & 13 year old hunters for deer hunting. Many believed it would be these inexperienced hunters who would do something wrong and cause shooting incidents to rise, even though the law states they must be mentored and hunt only in the presence of their mentor or legal guardian - a licensed-to-hunt adult! I'm also happy to say, not one single incident involved a 12 or 13 year old hunter.

Sadly there were still 9 shooting incidents, and one resulted in a hunter losing his life after being shot by his hunting partner who mistook him for game. Many of the shooting incidents involved self-inflicted wounds. Several involved long time hunters with a vast amount of experience - including the hunter who killed his partner. We have more work to do, and enforcing and teaching safety is never done, but I am proud to be one of the NYS DEC Hunter Safety Educators who is helping make our sport safer every year. For more on this story, see that attached PDF report of the 12 and 13 year old hunting pilot program which was prepared for the NYS law makers, or read about the safest year we've had in hunting on the DEC website here > <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/124802.html>

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