

LEGAL BULLETIN

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TREE STAND SAFETY *By Emily Hawk Raley*

I must admit -- hunter safety was never a top priority for me until a family member was seriously injured in a tree-stand accident. That made me acutely aware of the danger of some tree stands. I have learned that hunting in Alabama is a very popular activity providing an estimated 5.8 million man-days of recreation per year for approximately 360,000 hunters. That would lead me to believe that there are a lot of hunters using tree stands which may be defective or used improperly.

In Alabama, hunter education is mandatory for anyone born on or after August 1, 1977. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries presents hunter safety classes in all 67 counties. Hunter Education is helping to reduce hunter injuries, and as a result, firearm injuries in this state continue to decline. However, the number of **tree-stand accidents is rising**. Falls from tree-stands are a leading cause of injuries for Alabama hunters. Every year 36% of all reported hunting injuries and 20% of hunting-related deaths are the result of the use of tree stands. Each time a hunter climbs a stand, they face certain risks and need to take precautions. My family member was one of the lucky ones. Although he was severely injured, he survived. I have listed below some things you can do to make sure you are safe when using a tree stand. There are other tips listed on our website: www.alabamatortlaw.com.

- ❑ Always inspect the stand before using it. Metal fatigue, wood rot, poor construction, rust, cracks, cuts, and loose nuts and bolts can cause a stand to fail. If you doubt a tree stand's safety – do not use it.
- ❑ Avoid leaning. Many self-climbing stands can flip to the side if the weight is unevenly distributed.
- ❑ Use a safety harness – one that you will actually wear. Safety belts should be tied off and harnesses secured as you get in and out of your stand.
- ❑ Read, understand, and follow factory recommendations when installing commercial stands. Not doing so could cause injury or death. It could also prevent you from being able to recover for a legal claim against the company.
- ❑ Do not climb higher than you feel secure.

- ❑ Never climb or use a stand on a dead tree.
- ❑ Do not fall asleep in the tree stand.
- ❑ Take a phone, radio, or a loud whistle with you.
- ❑ Let someone dependable know where you will be and when you will be returning.
- ❑ Carry a flashlight and a first aid kit.
- ❑ Make sure guns are unloaded when raising or lowering them.
- ❑ Wear boots with non-skid soles because steps on platforms can be slippery in the rain.
- ❑ As a precautionary measure, remove all upturned logs and sharp rocks below the stand.

Good hunting. **Be safe!**

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