

2022 Hunter Education Annual Report

Photo Credit: Ashley Van Egtern

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Division Of Public Safety and Resource Protection



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PROGRAM SCOPE

The mission of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Hunter Education and Bowhunter Education Program is to promote safety, conservation and Wisconsin's hunting heritage through a comprehensive educational program.

DNR Hunter Education Program goals:

- To develop, deliver and maintain standardized curriculum that meets or exceeds the
 recommendations and standards for basic and advanced hunter education programs established by
 the International Hunter Education Associations and the Association of Fish & Wildlife
 Agencies.
- 2. To enhance and sustain a progressive, professional, consistent, effective and efficient DNR Hunter Education Program.
- 3. To recruit, reactivate and retain safe, knowledgeable and responsible hunters.
- 4. To increase public awareness and understanding of the value and role of hunting in sound wildlife management and conservation.

One of the goals of the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection is to enhance public safety and enjoyment of outdoor recreational experiences through safe hunting in Wisconsin. The Division also strives to promote appreciation of our natural resources and the benefits they provide to everyone, lead by example in conservation, and pass on the conservation ethic to future generations through education and outdoor opportunities.

Hunting in Wisconsin is safe, as demonstrated by the continued downward trend in hunting incidents. Wisconsin has a strong tradition of safe hunting, and it is everyone's responsibility to continue this tradition.

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2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

2022 Focus Areas-What did we accomplish?

- Continuing education for adult hunters. Wisconsin continues to see a trend of adult hunters causing most of the hunting incidents. In 2022, the average age of the shooter in all incidents was 28. According to records, shooters, on average, graduated hunter education approximately 20 years ago and did so through a traditional course. To address this trend, the Hunter Education Program implemented "orange Friday" events to target safety messaging at adult hunters purchasing licenses at in-person vendors and initializing research on adult hunters.
- **Engage with our instructors.** As a program, we worked hard to develop innovative ways to engage with our instructors, provide resources, better training and promote in-person learning opportunities with increased class offerings.
- Recruit, retain and reactivate instructors. Part of our effort in 2022 was what we called "Instructor R3." We launched a concentrated communications campaign in the fall of 2022 that will continue through 2023, which involves social media, radio, print and Hunter Education Welcome Centers. We continue to seek new instructors and new instructor groups to carry forward our mission and we encourage all to reach out to our staff for more information. Find contact information for local Hunter Education Program staff on page 23.
- Innovate and explore pathways for graduates. We worked closely with the R3 Program to launch a webinar series and introduce a variety of workshops, including "Learn to Process Deer" workshops! We continue to promote Wisconsin's public and private shooting ranges for anyone interested in the shooting sports, whether that's hunting or recreational shooting.
- Explore new ways to engage, connect and reconnect with our customers. New in 2022, Hunter Education Program staff participated in "Orange Friday" events around the State where they were able to promote in-person courses, instructor recruitment and most importantly, safety, prior to the opening weekend of the nine-day gun deer season.
- Increase communication platforms with our instructors. As a team, we made the commitment to distribute the Bullseye Bulletin newsletter quarterly. This platform provided relevant and timely program content back to our volunteers, staff, and wardens. It is our goal for all to remain current with hunter education and R3 efforts.
- Provide quality services to all our volunteers and customers.
- Continue to verify and maintain an accurate inventory of distributed Hunter Education
 firearms. Thanks to instructors submitting their firearms inventory sheets and working with
 their local outdoor skills trainers (OST) to verify their inventories, staff were able to verify a
 majority of the Hunter Education Program assets.

2023 LOOKING AHEAD

What are we excited for? In addition to building upon our 2022 focus areas, here are some things we can't wait to roll out in 2023.

- **Hunter Education/R3 Welcome Centers.** Welcome centers are display booths led by DNR staff and volunteers that can be found at events, shows and places of interest for outdoor enthusiasts. We participated in these events in 2022 and plan to continue that involvement in 2023. The welcome centers are used to share information about Hunter Education and Learn to Hunt (LTH) Programs and to recruit instructors and students.
- Innovation and exploration of additional pathways and opportunities for our Hunter Education Program graduates. Current research demonstrates that not every student to graduate from the Hunter Education Program has the desire to hunt, but we still strive to engage all our customers to the best of our abilities. We are conducting research in this area to take a deeper look at license purchasing tendencies from Hunter Education and LTH graduates.
- Promotion of in-person trainings and learning. Through dedicated efforts on behalf of
 Hunter Education Program staff and with the assistance of the Office of Communications,
 we will promote the Traditional and Internet + Field Day course option offerings statewide.
 Additionally, through instructor recruitment efforts, we will also promote in-person training
 opportunities.
- Spread TAB-K. When it comes to public media contacts, social media, event attendance and news releases, we need to make sure that TAB-K is being utilized frequently and in its proper format.
- **Engage and connect with R3 efforts.** Through combined knowledge and understanding, we can provide better experiences and opportunities for our customers while being key components of conservation and wildlife restoration efforts.
- Increase instructor recognition and appreciation. Volunteer instructors are vital components of the Hunter Education Program and its success. We strive to connect with our instructors and make sure they know they are valued by the Program and the Department. We look forward to bringing our instructor appreciation events back in 2023.



HUNTER EDUCATION COURSES

Hands-on Training:

Traditional Course (In-person)

• Traditional courses typically entail multiple meetings that cover the topics in "Today's Hunter," the student manual, as well as hands-on training. These courses are no longer than 19 hours in total and last no longer than three weeks. This style of course is recommended for novice hunters and anyone with minimal to zero firearm handling experience and is one of two courses approved for anyone under the age of 18. This training offers a more hands-on approach to working with a certified instructor over a few days. Most students and families enjoy this option because they can participate right in their community. This option provides students with opportunities to handle hunting equipment, learn about safe hunting practices and shooting and many other topics. All age groups are welcome.

Internet + Field Day

• The Wisconsin hunter internet + field Day (I+FD) online course can be completed at no charge to students. Students are still required to pay the \$10 certificate fee to the instructor the day of the course. Traditional Hunter Education instructors may require that students complete the hunter I+FD course as a pre-requisite to attend a traditional course. This class is a good fit for a person that has handled firearms or is going to be hunting with someone that has more experience to help them build upon their hunting skills. This class includes 4-6 hours of firearm handling opportunities. All age groups are welcome.

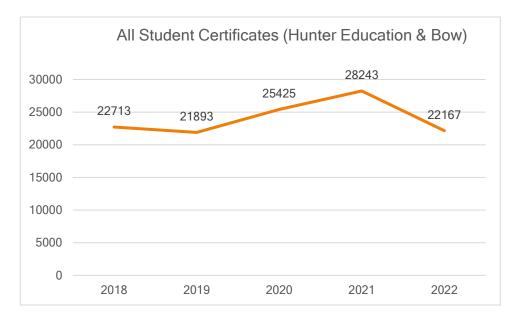
Online Only (18+)

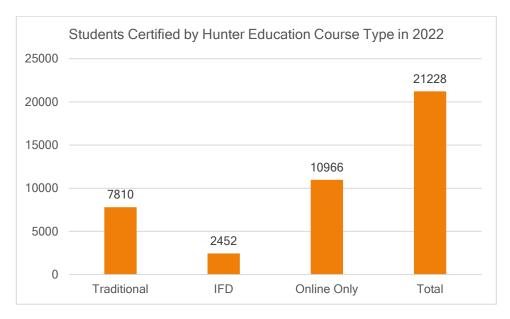
Adults (ages 18+) can complete their Hunter Education certification requirements entirely
online. The online course is ideal for individuals that have had exposure to firearm handling
already or will have direct access to a trustworthy mentor while handling firearms. This course
is offered through Kalkomey. Learn more about the online-only hunter education course.



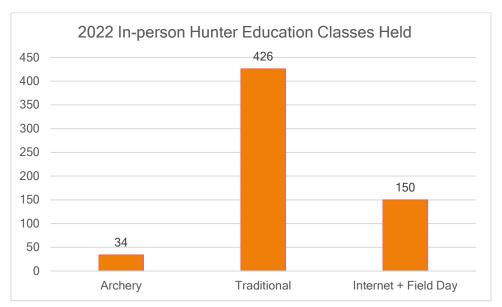
HUNTER EDUCATION CERTIFICATIONS

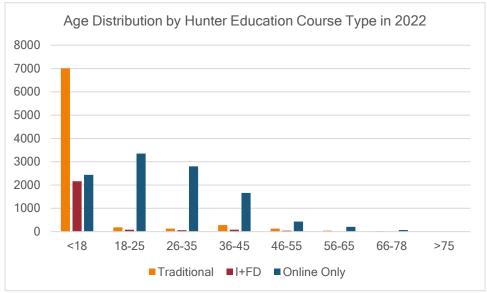
In 2022, 22,167 students were certified through Wisconsin hunter and bowhunter safety education courses. Hunter education safety certifications included 7,810 certifications through traditional hunter education courses, 2,452 through hunter I+FD courses and 10,966* through the online-only hunter education course. Archery education certificates were earned by 939 students through bowhunter education courses. (*Note: youth certifications included in the online-only course total through March 21, 2022, when the option had sunset due to the status of the COVID pandemic.)

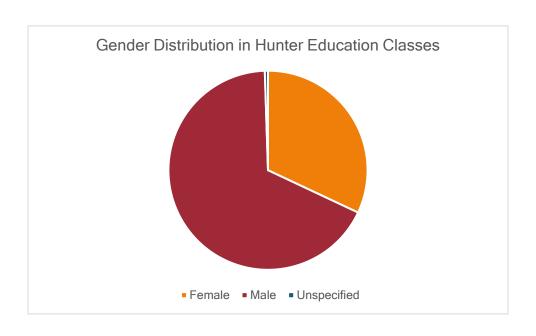




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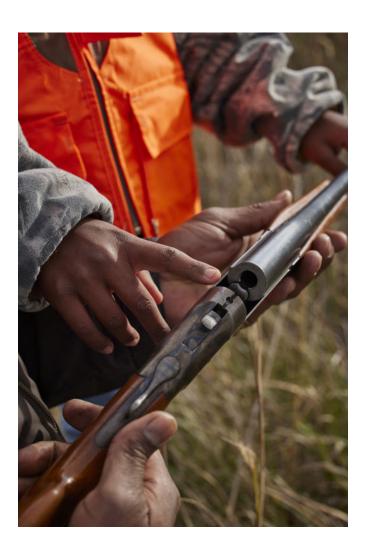






2022 reflected a 22% decline in student certificates issued from 2021. The online-only option that was previously available to students of any age expired in March of 2022. The Archery all-online certification is still available to those of all ages. Most students under the age of 18 enroll in traditional (multi-day, hands-on) courses. The online-only course, currently only available to adults (18+), saw an age range of ages 18-81 in the later parts of 2022 with approximately 33% of graduates being female. Overall, the Program saw an average of 30% of Hunter Education graduates being female and .04% being unspecified in terms of gender.

Hunting participation is determined by the number of Hunter Education graduates that go on to purchase hunting licenses. In 2022, 60% of graduates went on to purchase a hunting license in the state of Wisconsin. For 2023, the Program will continue to recognize that every student has different motivations when it comes to taking our courses. We will continue to ensure that post-graduation opportunities and pathways exist through R3 opportunities and other partnerships. Through these continuing connections and experiences, we may be able to build self-confidence in a new graduate to purchase a hunting license and find a safe place to hunt. We may be able to provide the recreational shooter with a foundation of firearm safety as well as a nearby range. We may also be able to instill a conservation ethic that is handed down through generations. Above all, we hope to spread lifelong awareness and safety practices to our citizens.

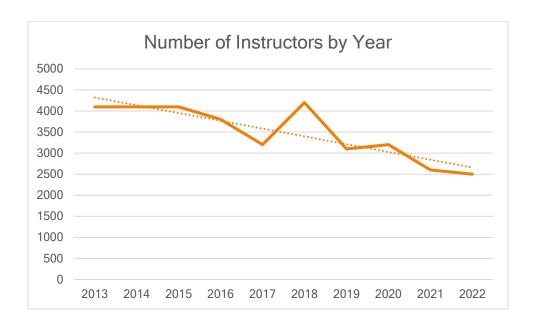


VOLUNTEER HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS

There are currently more than 2,500 active volunteer Hunter Education instructors, more than 1,270 active hunter I+FD instructors and approximately 650 active archery education instructors across Wisconsin's 72 counties. The Hunter Education Program welcomed 257 new volunteer instructors into its ranks in 2022.

Many thanks go out to our dedicated volunteer instructors. Without their hard work and determination, hunting in Wisconsin might not be nearly as safe as it is. 2022 was another safe year of hunting, staying below the 10-year average of 18.1 hunting incidents per year.

Our 2022 number of volunteers has declined 4% from our total instructors in 2021. Over the course of the past decade, our total number of volunteer instructors has declined 36%. Instructor recruitment, retention and reactivation is absolutely necessary to the success and vitality of the Hunter Education Program.



2022 Hunter Education Instructor Awards

Every year, the DNR recognizes Hunter Education Instructors and instructor groups that have significantly advanced the cause of safe hunting on a voluntary basis through exceptional service in training or education. We would like to thank all who nominated individual instructors and instructor groups by the annual Feb. 15 deadline. The following individual and group were selected to receive the 2022 Hunter Education Instructor Awards. A big **CONGRATS** to the following:

Instructor Of The Year – Richard (Rick) Heisler

Rick has taught Hunter Education for over 44 years. He has certified over 3,000 students through traditional and I+FD courses. He remains active in recruiting and mentoring new instructors and junior instructors. Rick is very active and engaged in his local community as well as with Hunter Education Program staff, which enhances his courses. He also serves as a mentor for local Learn to Hunt courses.

• Instructor Group Of The Year – Waupaca Hunter Safety

Instructors: Ross Bielema, Phil Blohm, Amanda Bronk, Steven Chase, Ryan Gulbrandsen, Joel Harris, Chris Hazen, Rene Lehman, Jim Machamer, Jim McCarthy, Andrew Minster, Tom Mitchell, Becca Parker, Jim Peglow, Chris Peters, Paul Piencikowski, Brenda Porrey, Jesse Schulz, Justin Stanke, Terry Stults, Jennifer Swenson, Michael Syphard, Don Wick, Jesse Wiegert, Scott Young, Rachel Zieglar Junior instructors: Mason Gulbrandsen, Traeh Ogle, Coltin Polifka, Cecilia Treadway

The Waupaca Hunter Safety group consistently provides year-round education opportunities in both the traditional and I+FD formats. They have a large and active group and are continuously recruiting instructors and junior instructors. The pride they exhibit in their community and their teaching shines brightly as they emphasize safety at every opportunity. Working closely with their regional OST, they have analyzed and implemented several enhancements to their program offerings to better the experience for both the instructor and the student.

2022 50 Years Of Service Award

The DNR Hunter Education Program is unique in that it is made up of a corps of volunteer instructors from across the state of Wisconsin. Year after year, volunteer instructors remain dedicated to promoting, encouraging and inspiring new generations of safe hunters. For 2022, we would like to congratulate and thank the following instructor for 50 years of service as a volunteer instructor:

• 50 Years Of Service Award - Paul Kellesvig

2022 Hunter Education/ R3 Professional Of The Year Award

It is our goal within the Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection to enhance public safety and enjoyment of outdoor recreational experiences through safe hunting in Wisconsin. We also strive to promote appreciation for our natural resources and the benefits they provide to everyone, lead by example in conservation and pass on the conservation ethic to future generations through education and diverse, inclusive outdoor opportunities. This award is designed to recognize and honor a department staff member's outstanding dedication, service, and commitment to the future of hunter education, shooting sports and/or R3 hunt/fish/trap related efforts.

• 2022 Hunter/R3 Professional Of The Year- Kimberly Cooley, OST-Southwest Region

PUBLIC OUTREACH

- Each year, in collaboration with the DNR's Office of Communications, we develop and implement a media outreach plan focused on hunting safely, the four basic rules of firearm safety, treestand safety and the promotion of Hunter Education Program courses.
- We used a multi-media approach, including radio interviews, radio ads, billboards, social media and news releases.
- Our organic social media posts had 689,141 impressions. Facebook ads garnered 10.5M impressions and 49.5K clicks to the website. We hosted four question and answer sessions on Facebook and Instagram and hosted five "Wanna Go Hunting?" Webinars.



Digital advertisements used for the 2022 Deer season in conjunction with KW2 advertising agency.

- For radio, we advertised with Packers Radio Network. Radio spots ran during 13 games across 50 radio stations. This led to 27M impressions.
- We also ran 18 billboards across the state. These billboards led to 7.5M impressions.



Billboard advertisements used for the 2022 Deer season in conjunction with KW2 advertising agency.

 Drive Sober Hunt Sober Campaign was a collaborative safety messaging effort between WDNR and Wisconsin State Patrol/Department of Transportation promoting safety during the gun deer season and busy Thanksgiving-Holiday travel. The Message: Hunters and drivers need to be safe, responsible, and sober while on the roads and in the woods.



Photo Credit: Wisconsin Department of Transportation-State Patrol

HUNTER EDUCATION PARTNERS

Collaboration with our partners is extremely important to the Program and the Department. Through these partnerships, it is our goal to continue to advance the Hunter Education Program into the future. We would like to recognize our partners:

The International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) is responsible for creating and maintaining a national standard for hunter education commonly used by every state to offer their hunter education programs. As a voting member of this association, we rely on them to review other countries' hunter education to meet our standards. IHEA created and maintains a database for hunting incidents and keeps the state administrator in communication with others on current laws and proposals to help with the sharing of information. The IHEA also provides information and a community to volunteer instructors as well as discounts on hunting equipment.

The **Wisconsin Hunter Education Instructor Association** (WHEIA) is an organization comprised of volunteer instructors who promote safe hunting in Wisconsin. We rely on the group to be the voice of our volunteer instructors. When this organization is out and about, they talk to instructors and provide valuable feedback. We also rely on them for financial assistance for things outside our capabilities as a government agency. We work collaboratively with the association.

The **Wisconsin Hunter Education Coalition** is a group that advocates for the promotion and provision of skilled and structured safe firearms handling practices, including in-person training and testing elements. The primary goal of the coalition is to generate a common bond with the department to promote various hands-on training opportunities for youth and adults, which would help maintain the integrity and credibility that the Program has achieved in reducing incident rates by 95% over the years. They work closely with the staff to enhance the current instruction and certification program now and into the future.









Hunter Recruitment, Retainment, Reactivation (R3)

The DNR has staff dedicated to promoting hunting, fishing, trapping and shooting sports in Wisconsin. The approach is commonly referred to as "R3" which stands for recruiting, retaining and re-engaging participants in each of those outdoor activities. R3 courses, programming and events compliment the Hunter Education Program by providing additional outdoor experiences that go beyond the safe handling of firearms taught in classes. Through participation in R3 events, Hunter Education graduates can learn and gain experience with all the other details of learning how to hunt, including equipment, methods and techniques, ethics and conservation, population and habitat management.

In 2022, the DNR and partners provided 85 Learn to Hunt programs for species such as deer, pheasant, waterfowl, bear and turkey. The DNR also provided a series of five webinars focused on how to get started hunting. The "Wanna Go Hunting" webinar series included information on getting started with a Hunter Education course, all the game species in Wisconsin, finding places to hunt and practice target shooting and finding an experienced hunter to learn from. The DNR and partners also provided four workshops focused on learning to butcher and process deer. These hands-on workshops taught participants how to field dress, skin, butcher and cook the venison from a harvested deer. The workshops were very well-received and will be continued in 2023.

A final component of the R3 Program is shooting sports. Shooting sports include the various archery, clay target, and firearm shooting programs and ranges. The DNR manages 11 public shooting ranges in the state that continue to see a high level of use, especially in the weeks leading up to the nine-day gun deer season. However, these ranges are increasingly used by non-hunters that enjoy shooting firearms and will be a focus in the future to continue to provide safe, quality shooting experiences. The DNR has a growing archery education program that supports the National Archery in the Schools Program, Scholastic 3D Archery, and various summer and physical-education courses that involve archery. The DNR has archery equipment that can be borrowed and provides technical support to schools, recreation departments and programming focused on introducing people of all ages to archery. The R3 Program is increasing awareness and support for the various high school clay target programs and intends to do more in the future.



HUNTING INCIDENTS

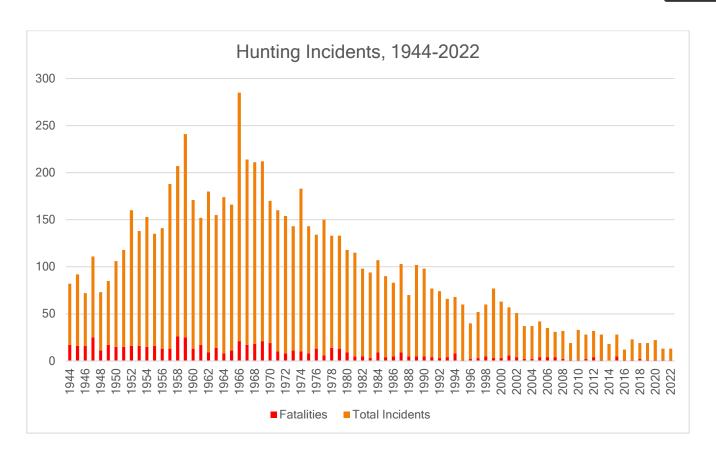
Each year, DNR conservation wardens conduct investigations of hunting-related shooting incidents. A reportable incident is any incident in which a person has been injured or killed by discharge of a firearm or arrow while hunting, fishing or trapping.

We use our historical data and inquiries into the circumstances of each incident to make effective modifications to the Hunter Education Program curriculum, regulations, media outreach efforts and trainings for volunteers and DNR staff. Keep in mind that incidents occur every year that are not reportable. Some of these incidents include death by natural causes and treestand-related injuries.

The Hunter Education Program is committed to teaching, developing and retaining safe, knowledgeable and responsible hunters whether they are novice or experienced. Before shooting, all hunters need to reinforce the importance of always identifying your target, what is before it and beyond it. Never shoot at sound or movement. Having a safe zone of fire and a safe backstop are equally as important as knowing your target.

In every Hunter Education course, DNR volunteer instructors stress the need to fully understand and follow the four basic rules of firearm safety. Protect yourself and fellow hunters by following these essential four rules of firearm safety by remembering the acronym "TAB-K."

- **Treat every firearm as if it was loaded** Never assume a firearm is unloaded and never treat it that way, even if you watch as it is unloaded. Make it a habit to treat all firearms like they are always loaded.
- Always point the muzzle in a safe direction A safe direction is a direction where the bullet will travel and harm no one in the event of an unwanted discharge. There are no accidental discharges with firearms, only unwanted discharges. A 10-year average reflects 36% of all hunting incidents are self-inflicted injuries. That means the muzzle was pointed at some part of the hunter's body at time of discharge.
- **Be certain of your target, what is before and beyond it** Positive target identification is a must. To shoot at something you only *think* is a legal target is gambling with human life. You must be certain and correct in judgment before deciding to shoot. Otherwise, it is reckless behavior. In addition to identifying the target, a hunter must know that a safe backstop for their bullet is present in every shooting situation. We don't always hit our target, and, in some cases, the bullet passes through the target. A safe backstop guarantees that no one will get hurt.
- **Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot** Your finger has no business being anywhere near the trigger until you intentionally want to shoot something.

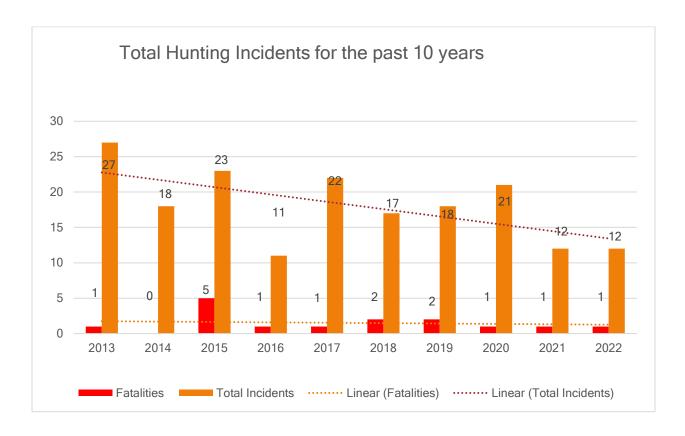


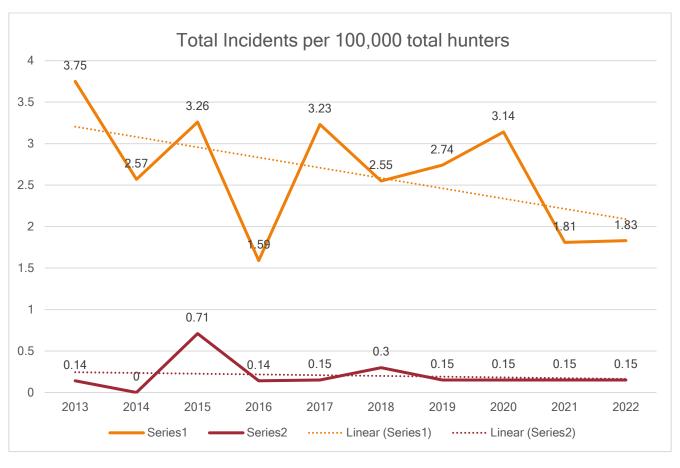
Important Dates In Wisconsin Hunter Education History

- 1967 Hunter Education Begins
- 1980 Mandatory use of Blaze Orange
- 1985 Mandatory Hunter Education Begins
- **2009 -** September Mentored Hunting Law Passed. Children ages 10 and up may hunt without hunter education
- 2012 Wisconsin ACT 168 Adult hunter education available in online format
- 2016 Wisconsin ACT 131 Blaze Pink introduced as acceptable alternative to Blaze Orange
- **2017 -** Wisconsin Act 62 erased the requirement that a person be at least 10 years old to hunt under the hunting mentorship program. The act also removed the restriction prohibiting a mentee and a mentor from possessing more than one weapon between them while hunting

2022 Hunting Incident Summary

There were 12 hunting incidents, including one fatality, during the 2022 hunting season. Hunting is a safe activity in Wisconsin and continues to be safe, with the number of incidents in 2022 well below the 10-year average of 18.1.

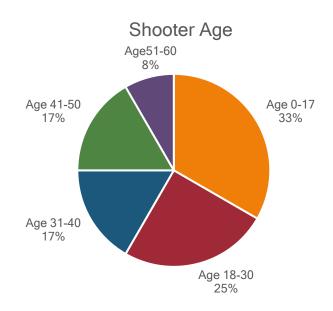




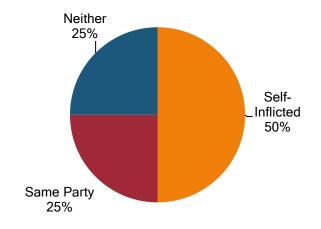
Shooter Age

In 2022, 33% of the shooters in hunting incidents involved juveniles (under age 18) and 66% were caused by adult hunters.

Historically, on a 10-year average, adults have contributed to 83% of the total number of incidents, while juveniles have accounted for roughly 17% of incidents.



Self-Inflicted vs. Same Party



Self-Inflicted vs. Same Party

In 2022, 50% of the hunting incidents were self-inflicted and of those, 16% of shooters had no hunter education safety certification.

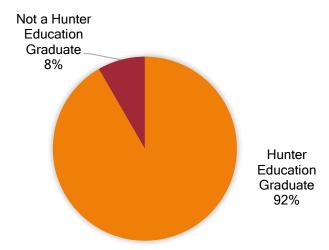
Four of 2022's 12 incidents, or 33%, involved members of the same hunting party. All the shooters involved in same party incidents had hunter education safety certificates.

Note: "Neither" is when an incident is unknown, under investigation, or unrelated parties.

Hunter Education Status

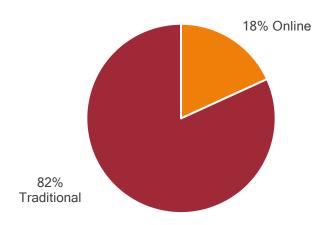
In 2022, just 8% (1) of the shooters involved in a hunting incident had not completed a hunter safety education course, and 92% (11) were graduates of the Hunter Education Program. The average age of the shooter in all incidents in 2022 was 28.

Hunter Education Status



Of the 92% (11) who were hunter education certified, 18% (2) were certified with the online-only option, while 82% (9) were certified by traditional, hands-on courses.

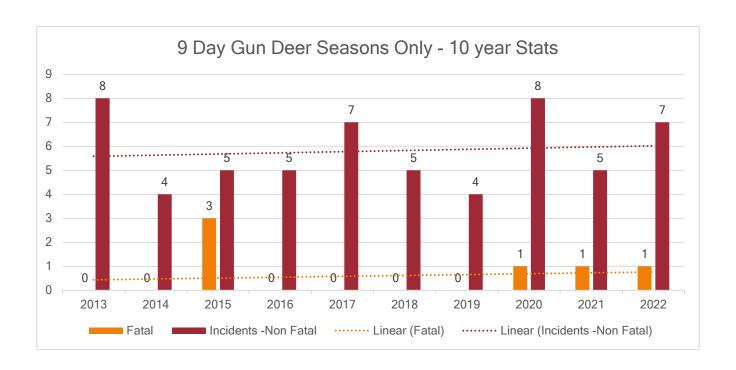
Hunter Education Type

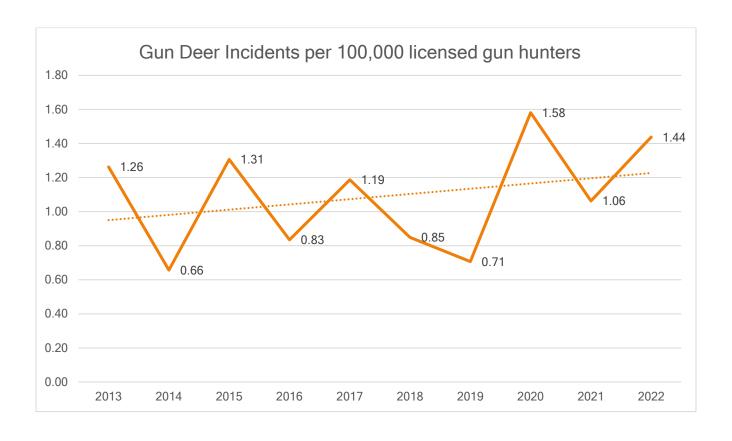


2022 Deer Season Summary

Nearly 600,000 hunters headed to the woods, fields and beyond for the opening weekend of the annual nine-day deer hunt in 2022. Conservation wardens investigated seven non-fatal hunting incidents and one fatal incident during the gun deer season. Two of the incidents occurred in Sauk County, and Forest, Green Lake, Iowa, Jefferson, Oneida and Marquette counties had one incident each. The average age of the shooter involved in these incidents was also 28 years old. Five incidents were self-inflicted, and all eight of the shooters involved in incidents were graduates of Hunter Education. One incident is always one too many, and our hearts go out to anyone impacted by a hunting incident.

Deer hunting in Wisconsin is safe, as demonstrated by our continued downward trend in hunting incidents. Six of the last 10 deer seasons were fatality-free, and 10 out of the last 10 deer seasons involved incidents in the single digits.

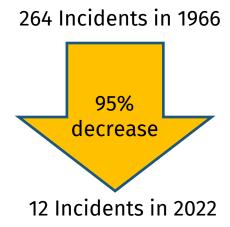




Decline In Hunting Incidents

In 1966, there were 264 hunting incidents in the state of Wisconsin. One year later, in 1967, Wisconsin's Hunter Education Program was established. Since then, the number of annual hunting incidents in Wisconsin has decreased by more than 95% to 12 in 2022.

Wisconsin requires anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1973 to successfully complete a hunter education course in order to purchase a hunting license, attributing that requirement to the decrease in incidents. Almost all hunting incidents in 2022 were caused by a graduate of a hunter education class. However, with our volunteer instructors, we will continue to adapt and strive for zero hunting incidents in Wisconsin. Additionally, we will continue to explore efforts to address demographics related to shooters involved with hunting incidents as well as amplify safety messaging to all, not just those that hunt.



OUTDOOR SKILLS TRAINERS

Outdoor skills trainers oversee the safety programs taught in their respective area. The OST team includes non-law enforcement safety specialists responsible for coordinating a recreational safety and educational program within their assigned area. Our OSTs recruit, train and monitor the services of volunteer safety program instructors and assist in the development of recreational safety course content. They are also active in urban areas, including at events such butcher seminars, and perform many roles which support safety in the field and on the hunt.

OUTDOOR SKILLS TRAINER MAP

