

# ELEVATED HUNTING INCIDENTS

## 2023



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

		2021	2022	2023	5yr avg.
<b>Total Incidents</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10.2</b>
<b>FATAL</b>	No full-body harness	1	3	0	1
	With harness but not attached to tree	0	0	0	0
	With harness attached to tree	0	1	0	0.2
<b>NON-FATAL</b>	No full body harness	8	8	5	7.2
	With harness but not attached to tree	0	1	2	1.4
	With harness attached to tree	0	0	1	0
<b>Type of Stand</b>					
Climbing tree stand		1	1	0	1.6
Hang-on tree stand		1	6	4	3
Ladder stand		6	3	3	4
Tower/tri-pod stand		0	1	1	0.4
Home-made tree stand		2	2	0	1.2

### PREVENT TREE STAND FALLS

There were eight Elevated Hunting Incidents (EHIs) reported in 2023, none of them fatal. Fortunately, there is something hunters can do to prevent severe injuries if they fall from a tree stand or elevated platform – wear and properly use a fall-arrest system (FAS). A FAS will keep you attached to the tree from the time you leave the ground until you get back down. A harness alone does not protect you if it isn't attached to the tree the entire time you are off the ground.

A FAS includes:

- A vest style full-body harness with shoulder, chest, and leg straps.
- A strap that attaches to the tree when in the stand.
- A tether strap that attaches the harness to the tree strap.
- A “lifeline” to keep a hunter safe while climbing and descending.
- A suspension relief strap to be used in the event of a fall.

**Other important safety tips:**

- Select a healthy, straight tree.
- Always maintain three points of contact (one hand and two feet or two hands and one foot) when climbing up to or down from the stand.
- Inspect all your equipment before using it. Replace stands, parts, harness, straps, and lifeline as necessary.
- Harnesses have an expiration date. Replace if expired.
- Once secured in your stand, use a haul line to raise and lower your UNLOADED gun, bow, and cocked but unloaded crossbow, pointed down, into the stand. Do not tie the haul line around the trigger or trigger guard.
- Carry emergency equipment (knife, phone, flashlight, whistle) in your pockets at all times, not in your pack.
- Tell someone exactly where you will be hunting and when you will return.



## Description of EHIs:

This summary contains preliminary descriptions of EHIs as of 1/16/2024. Some incidents are still under investigation. This summary may not include every EHI that occurred as DEC is not always notified when an EHI occurs. Fatalities, if any, are listed in red.

### Thanks to our Environmental Conservation Officers for thorough investigations of each incident.

**10/18** - Columbia. Wearing a harness and attached to tree. Tower stand. Victim fell from elevated stand while attempting to adjust. Safety harness engaged but they sustained a minor puncture wound to the knee. Age 73. Hunting experience: 30 yrs.

**10/20** - Essex. Wearing a harness but not attached to tree. Hang-on stand. Hunter slipped on metal steps while ascending and fell approximately 15 feet. The hunter broke bones in their shoulder, ribs, vertebrae, and wrist. Age 53. Hunting experience: 45 yrs.

**10/28** - St. Lawrence. Not wearing a harness. Hang-on stand. Hunter fainted while in the stand and fell 20 feet. They fractured several vertebrae and sustained extensive injuries to their spinal cord. Age 21. Hunting experience: 6 yrs.

**11/2** - Ulster. Not wearing a harness. Hang-on stand. Stand failure caused the hunter to fall approximately 20 feet. They sustained a severely sprained ankle. Age 25. Hunting experience: 13 yrs.

**11/5** - Genesee. Not wearing a harness. Ladder stand. Hunter lost their balance and fell from the ladder while descending. They sustained a fractured hip. Age 74. Hunting experience: 59 yrs.

**11/11** - Sullivan. Not wearing a harness. Hang-on stand. Hunter was using pine tree branches to ascend to the stand when a branch broke, causing them to fall 20 feet. Hunter sustained a vertebrae fracture. Age 69. Hunting experience: 55 yrs.

**11/12** - Livingston. Wearing a harness but not attached to the tree. Ladder stand. The upper strap holding the stand to the tree broke, causing the stand to fall. The hunter was wearing a harness, but it was attached to the stand, not the tree, causing the hunter to fall with the stand. The hunter fell 20 feet and sustained a brain injury. Age 62. Hunting experience: Unknown.

**11/17** - Livingston. Not wearing a harness. Ladder stand. Hunter loosened the top strap to adjust the stand, causing the support arm to twist under stress. Hunter fell and sustained a broken back. Age 75. Hunting experience: 61 yrs.

Facts: The International Hunter Education Association estimates that there are 300 to 500 tree stand fatalities annually in the U.S. Additionally, there are approximately 6,000 hunters injured in falls from elevated hunting stands. Of those injured, 80% required surgery, 30% involved spinal fractures, and 10% caused permanent disability or paralysis.

International Hunter Education Association U.S.A. (2023). Elevated Hunting Stand Accidents. *Hunter Incident Database*. Retrieved January 26, 2023. [www.ihea-usa.org/hunter-incident-database/](http://www.ihea-usa.org/hunter-incident-database/)

**New York** is among many other states that have drastically reduced deaths during firearms seasons due to a hunter safety curriculum that stresses firearm safety. Recently however, deaths from tree stands and elevated stand falls have begun to increase.

Treestand safety has become a regular part of the hunter education course required of first-time hunters in New York. Elevated hunting incidents are becoming a major cause of hunting related injuries. The proper use of tree stands, and tree stand safety equipment, will help to prevent these injuries and fatalities.

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