

**The Third**  
**Wild Turkey Hunting**  
**Safety Task Force**

**—Final Report—**

**The Wild Turkey Center, Edgefield, S.C.**

**January 11-13, 2005**

## Task Force Summary

The National Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force was hosted by the National Wild Turkey Federation at its headquarters in Edgefield, S.C. Jan. 11-13, 2005 to chart the course of turkey hunting safety across North America. Turkey hunting is one of the safest forms of outdoor recreation, and the goal of the meeting was to make it even safer.

Attending the meeting were specialists from a broad range of backgrounds including wildlife agency administrators, hunter education coordinators and instructors, International Hunter Education Association representatives, hunting/shooting industry experts, biologists, educators, wildlife law enforcement officers and NWTF volunteers and staff.

The National Wild Turkey Federation has a long-standing commitment to hunter education, and has taken that responsibility to heart and organized all three meetings of the National Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force.

The first Task Force met July 1991, and featured 35 dedicated hunting experts. They came together to develop an 18-item action plan to complement the hunter safety efforts of state wildlife agencies, NWTF chapters, the National Rifle Association and the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

The second Task Force, which met in September of 1997, identified additional steps to reduce turkey hunting incident rates. One of the 1997 Task Force achievements was the Turkey Hunting Incident Report Form, which was developed by the NWTF and the International Hunter Education Association. It has helped wildlife agencies and the IHEA standardize incident reporting and maintain better records of turkey hunting incidents. The NWTF funded the creation of templates to standardize incident reporting.

### Turkey Hunting: A Safe Way to Enjoy the Outdoors

When the National Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force met in January 2005, members were reminded just how safe turkey hunting has become. Though the Task Force is unable to gauge how much influence their actions have had in reducing incident numbers, spring turkey hunting incidents have decreased from 8.1 per 100,000 participants in 1992 to a low of 2.95 per 100,000 participants today. This decrease is phenomenal considering that the number of spring turkey hunters increased by 60 percent during that time.

Many believe publicity given to turkey hunting safety contributed to the incident rate decline. That's hard to argue when you consider over a million pieces of hunting safety information, developed through the Task Force, have been produced and distributed by the NWTF.

Members of the most recent Task Force learned that while turkey hunting has become increasingly safe, those incidents that do occur share common variables.



For example, research shows the average age of someone involved in a shooting-related hunting incident was 39 to 42 years old. In addition, fully half of those involved in an incident had passed a hunter education course. The data also shows that 68 percent of the incidents occurred because shooters failed to identify their target and 66 percent of incidents occurred on private land.

### Education and Awareness: Key to Safety

The data made it clear the need to focus efforts on education and training to further reduce turkey hunting shooting-related incidents. The Task Force agreed on the need to tell hunters that the best way to kill a bird, which is using a shotgun to place number 4 or smaller shot in the head and neck at 40 yards or less, is also the safest way. The NWTF is committed to distributing safety messages through every means possible.

While this most recent meeting resulted in several important recommendations (see pages 6 and 7), participants discovered a need for more information about turkey hunting shooting-related incidents. More detailed and consistent incident reporting is needed to understand how factors such as distance between the shooter and victim, shot size, clothing worn by both parties, use of decoys and more were involved in the incident. It is the hope of the Task Force that those agencies responsible for reporting turkey hunting incidents will join us as we work towards the goal of better reporting.

In addition, at the Task Force meeting, NWTF officials unveiled a draft wild turkey hunting safety curriculum to participants to get their feedback. When completed, this curriculum will be a great tool for hunter education instructors as well as anyone who teaches turkey hunting safety for youth and adults. Using the latest technology, this curriculum will be a fun and hands-on way to teach people to become better and safer hunters.

For more information about the curriculum, contact Tammy Sapp at [tsapp@nwtf.net](mailto:tsapp@nwtf.net) or Tom Hughes at [thughes@nwtf.net](mailto:thughes@nwtf.net).

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## Task Force History

### Task Force One

The first Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force was initiated by the NWTF in 1991 to address growing concerns about turkey hunting safety. As turkey populations exploded in many areas of the country in the 1980s, turkey hunter numbers also greatly increased, with many new hunters attracted to the sport. Along with increased popularity came more turkey-hunting-related shooting incidents. In preparation for the first meeting, members of the Task Force surveyed state wildlife agencies and found that the incident rate for turkey hunters was about 8.4 per 100,000, not high when compared to other sports, but still a matter of great concern. Robert E. Eriksen, then with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and member of all three Task Forces, summed up the concerns of the group as follows:

“When one considers the number of hours spent in the woods and the number of people involved, the extent of the problem begins to come into perspective. A relatively small number of turkey hunters are injured in accidents annually. While accidents are relatively uncommon, that fact does not diminish the serious nature of each accident. Turkey hunters are being hurt by these accidents. The lives of both the shooter and the victim are forever changed the instant the trigger is pulled. Wildlife managers have a responsibility to monitor and, if possible, to reduce the incidence of accidents.”

Prior to the formation of the first Task Force, numerous turkey hunting safety projects and programs were implemented through state hunter education divisions, the NWTF, the National Rifle Association (NRA) and others. These efforts produced results, but as turkey hunter numbers increased, the need for a coordinated, nationwide turkey hunting safety program became apparent. The NWTF recognized this need and initiated the first Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force in February 1991. The concept was simple—bring together a group of experts representing the best thinking in the country on turkey hunting and turkey hunting safety to chart a course for this nationwide program.

Among the most notable outcomes of the first Task Force were:

- An analysis of the behaviors that lead to incidents
- Strategy guidelines for reducing incidents
- Identifying target audiences for turkey hunting safety education
- Action plan to achieve the identified goals of the including:
  - A code of ethics for turkey hunters
  - Developing a turkey hunting incident fact paper
  - Developing a set of turkey identification teaching

materials

- Developing proper use of camouflage guidelines
- Developing turkey hunting simulation (shoot/don't shoot) safety and ethics teaching module
- Produce a turkey hunting ethics/safety video
- Specific recommendations discussed
  - No mandatory use of blaze orange
  - Restricting turkey hunting to shotguns only due to the disproportionate number of fatalities where rifles are involved in incidents
  - Restricting shot size to #4 or smaller
  - Creating stiffer penalties for hunters causing incidents

### Task Force Two

The second Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force was assembled at the Wild Turkey Center in September 1997. The primary purpose of this Task Force was to review and continue turkey hunting safety efforts begun by the first Task Force. As in the previous Task Force, this group was comprised of a diverse mix of industry professionals, including a number of members of the first group.

One of the first reports of the second Task Force was that turkey hunting was much safer in 1997 than it was in 1991, with the incident rate among turkey hunters down to 4.64 incidents per 100,000, about half the 1991 rate. Building on the success of the first Task Force, the second group made specific recommendations to continue to improve turkey hunting safety, including:

- Recommended against the mandated use of blaze orange for turkey hunting
- Replace the term “turkey hunting accident” with “turkey hunting incident” to more properly illustrate the negligent, reckless, careless or intentional acts that could have been prevented.
- Replace the term “mistaken for game” with “failure to identify the target” to emphasize the responsibility of the shooter.
- Develop or adapt a standard turkey hunting safety course
- Recommended the use of shotguns for hunting wild turkeys because:
  - The most effective method to harvest a turkey is at 40 yards or less using small shot in the head or neck.
  - Statistics show that a disproportionate number of human fatalities occur when rifles are involved in an incident.

In addition to the specific recommendations, the second Task Force made the following suggestions:

- Develop advance turkey hunting safety training, including the use of simulators
- Improve hunter injury incident investigation and reporting
- Communicate recent improvements in turkey hunting safety

### Task Force Three

The Third Wild Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force met at the Wild Turkey Center, Edgefield, South Carolina January 11-13, 2005 to address issues affecting turkey hunting safety and education. Task force attendees represented diverse backgrounds and perspectives including conservation groups, legal experts,

state wildlife agencies, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) volunteers and staff, hunter education instructors and outdoor communicators. The goal of the group was to evaluate a new turkey hunting safety curriculum, assess turkey hunting safety issues and concerns, and continue the work begun by the two previous Task Force groups to make a safe sport safer.

#### Agenda

##### Jan. 11

- 8:30 Pledge/prayer/welcome to the Wild Turkey Center
- 8:45 Tour of the Wild Turkey Center
- 9:30 Welcome, introductions, overview of meeting
- 10 to Noon Meeting-discussions of turkey hunting safety-overview of incident data and other current issues
- 1 to 2:45 Meeting-continue discussions on specific issues-create suggested outcomes and/or position statements for each
- 2:45 to 3:15 Break
- 3:15 to 5 Meet—continue specific issues discussion

##### Jan. 12

- 8:15 Pledge/prayer
- 8:30 to 10 Meet-continue specific issues discussion with emphasis on any new issues
- 10 to 10:30 Break
- 10:30 to Noon Meet-finalize outcomes or position statements for each specific issue
- 1 to 2:45 Meeting—overview of draft turkey hunting safety curriculum  
Best way to get curriculum accepted/distributed.  
What states require turkey hunting safety education now?  
What does the component consist of? How is it delivered?  
Can it be improved?
- 2:45 to 3:15 Break
- 3:15 to 5 Meet—Continue hunter safety curriculum discussion

##### Jan. 13

- 8:15 Pledge/prayer
- 8:30 to 10 Meet— Wrap up. Have we made positive headway in turkey hunting safety since 1991? How? Why?  
How safe is turkey hunting?  
Comparisons to other types of hunting.  
Trends we need to be looking at, what's on the horizon?  
How to spread the word that turkey hunting is safe and how we're working to make it safer.  
What messages do we need to send?
- 10 to 10:15 Break
- 10:15 to Noon Review what we accomplished at this meeting  
Adjourn

## Incident Statistics

To gain up-to-date information on turkey hunting incidents today, NWTF staff studied all turkey hunting incidents reported to the IHEA from 2001-2004. These 158 incidents are compiled on the IHEA web site, and the data they contain were downloaded and analyzed using an Excel spreadsheet. The summaries based on these analysis, detailed in *Appendix 1*, provide a good overview of current incidents, including:

Most common cause .....	Failure to Identify Target, 68%
Average age of shooter .....	42 Years
Average age of victim .....	39 Years
Hunter ed certification .....	Shooter:
	50% Yes, 31% No
	Victim:
	56% Yes, 19% No
Severity of injury .....	28% Minor
	41% Moderate
	22% Severe
	1% Fatal
Firearms in incidents .....	94% Shotgun
	6% Rifle
Landownership .....	66% Private
	18% Public

## Issues

The following issues were examined in depth by the Task Force and are detailed in *Appendix 2*:

- Effects of Blaze Orange
  - Testing orange materials
  - Recent developments in blaze orange regulations
  - Pennsylvania turkey hunting incidents
- Youth Hunting
  - State statistics
- Long Distance turkey Loads
  - State summary of legal shot size
  - Shot material density
  - Shot penetration tests
  - New shot developments
- Decoys and Electronic Calls
  - State survey of use
  - State survey of legality
- Rifles
  - State survey of legality
  - Shotgun vs. rifle incidents
- Hunter Density vs. Safety
  - Incidents vs. hunter density
  - Incidents rates by state

## Task Force Recommendations

### Blaze Orange

- Reaffirm resolution from the 1997 Task Force to not recommend the mandated use of hunter orange clothing for turkey hunters.
- Passed by majority vote

### Youth Hunting

- The Task Force recommended the elimination of minimum age if accompanied by and controlled by a licensed mentor
- Unanimous consent

### Shot Size

- The best and safest way to kill a turkey is using a shotgun with number 4 or smaller shot to place a shot in the head and neck at 40 yards or less.
- Unanimous consent

### Decoys

- The Task Force recommends the following safety tips when using decoys.
  - A decoy should never be visible while being transported. Never carry an uncovered (identifiable) decoy any distance.
  - Whenever possible, set up by a tree, stump or rock that is wider than your shoulders and taller than your head. From your seated position, identify the clearest line of vision to your front. Establish a “sight line” that allows you 100 yards visibility. Then, set your decoy(s) approximately 20 yards from your position on the line.
  - Should you see another hunter, especially if they are close to your line of sight, call out to them in a loud, clear voice. Their presence has already compromised your location and a “soft” call may only confuse them, rather than alerting them to your presence.
  - If you are calling over decoys and elect to move to a new location, check carefully to ensure that no one is stalking your decoys before leaving your setup.
- Unanimous consent

### Rifles for Turkey Hunting

- Statistics show human fatality is more likely when a rifle is involved in a turkey hunting related shooting incident
- Unanimous consent

### Effects of Hunter Density on Hunter Safety

- Lower hunter densities appear to improve hunter safety, therefore the Task Force encourages agencies to expand hunting opportunity through changes in season length, hunting hours and access.

- These programs will help to improve safety by dispersing hunter pressure and may encourage hunter recruitment and retention by improving quality of the hunt.
- Unanimous consent

### **Other Recommendations**

- Have trained personnel that consistently investigate hunting related shooting incidents.
- Consistent data collection would allow better recommendations to improve safety
- Support the mandatory reporting of hunting related shooting incidents.
- More detailed and consistent incident reporting should include exact distance, shot size, gauge, caliber, complete list of clothing, presence of orange, involvement of decoys
- Promotion of hunter safety awareness through the following:
  - Outdoor media
  - Public service announcements (video, TV, radio, Web sites, print)
  - Press releases
  - Be Safe stickers
- When transporting firearm, they should be unloaded with the action open.
- While carrying a harvested bird over your shoulder, hunters need to use extreme caution when transporting a harvested bird from the field. Displaying a trophy over your shoulder must be tempered with local considerations and conditions
- The Task Force set a turkey hunting safety goal to reduce incident rates by half from the national average of 2.95 incidents per 100,000 hunters.
- Reconvene the Task Force every 5 years.

## **A Wild Turkey Curriculum for Safety and Success**

At the Task Force meeting, NWTF officials unveiled a wild turkey hunting safety curriculum to get participants' feedback.

This curriculum will be great tool for hunter education instructors as well as those who teach at youth programs such as JAKES, Boy Scouts, and other events. Through the latest technology via DVD & CD-ROM and a commitment to quality instruction, this curriculum will help people become better hunters and more importantly, help further reduce hunting incidents.

The curriculum will supplement the more than a million pieces of hunting safety information developed by the Task Force and produced and distributed by the NWTF since 1991.

### **Working Group Recommendations for Curriculum Development**

The group tried to answer two main questions:

- What makes a safe and responsible turkey hunter?

- How to teach safe and responsible turkey hunting with a fun, hands-on approach to ensure proper learning and student retention.
- It was determined that safe, responsible turkey hunters show safe firearm handling during all aspects of hunting including:
  - Entering and exiting vehicle
  - Walking alone and with other hunters
  - Loading and unloading
  - Setting up or entering blind
  - Retrieving game
  - Repositioning
  - Identifying target
- It was also determined that safe hunters should be able to estimate range and identify turkey habitat and sign.
- It was decided that a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on activities would work best. Some activities should be able to cross over into a classroom in the event a field day is not feasible.

### **Through the curriculum students will learn:**

- Patterning a shotgun under controlled conditions.
- Proper firearm handling.
- Estimating range to ensure a quick, humane kill.
- Proper retrieval of game.
- Elements for a proper set up including selection of a logical place for clear line of vision and safe back rest. Students also will demonstrate how to retrieve decoys for repositioning.
- Entering and exiting a blind safely.
- Proper handling while removing a firearm from a vehicle.
- Identifying turkey habitat and sign (tracks, scat, feathers, scratching)
- Safe firearm handling should be continuous and lifelong.
- Using turkey calls.
- Survival techniques such as making a fire.

## **Advanced Hunter Education— Successful and Responsible Turkey Hunting Core Learning Objectives for Knowledge and Skill**

- Safe firearms handling
  - Loading and unloading various actions
  - Field carries including use of sling
  - Removing and storing firearms in a vehicle
  - Checking for and clearing obstacles from barrels
  - Moving in and out of common turkey set up positions
- Preparing for the hunt— Students will be able to explain the following:
  - Firearm selection
  - Recommended shot size (#4 or smaller)
  - Choke selection
  - Patterning a shotgun at various ranges up to 40 yards using

- different turkey loads for density and point of impact
- Identify proper loads, chokes and distances to deliver one-shot kills
- The role of vision in turkey hunting success and safety
- The role of physical conditioning for success and enjoyment of the hunt
- Locating places to hunt and scouting
  - Know and be able to identify prime turkey habitat
  - Reading sign – identify feathers, tracks, dropping and dusting areas
  - Identify feeding areas, roosts and display areas.
  - Getting permission to hunt – locating landowners, use of maps, practice asking permission
- The role of hunters in conservation and as stewards of the land
  - History of restoration and funding
  - Modern turkey management techniques
  - Purpose of laws and regulations
  - Habitat improvement
  - Becoming ambassadors for hunting
- Equipment for successful turkey hunting
  - Camo
  - Calls
  - Decoys (optional)
  - Colors to avoid (red, white and blue, black)
- Spring Gobbler Hunt
  - Locating roosted birds
  - Moving into the woods in the dark
  - Set ups
  - Decoy use
  - Covering your back
  - Visibility
  - Alerting hunters to your presence
  - Calling
  - Relocating
  - Move and call/trolling techniques
  - Range estimating
  - One-shot kill – aim point/vital area
  - Finishing off a downed bird
  - After the kill – tagging and game care
  - Taking your bird from the woods
- Fall turkey hunt
  - Breaking up the flock
  - Set ups
  - Fall calls
  - Hunting during overlap seasons
- Full utilization of the bird
  - Meat care and usage
  - Mounts, feathers...
- Safe turkey hunting
  - 10 commandments review
  - Positive identification
    - Spring: See beard, see whole bird, beak to butt
    - Fall: See whole bird, beak to butt
  - Shoot/ don't shoot scenario practice
  - Regulations: Customized by state/province
  - Personal safety
  - Issues with hunter orange use
  - Tick protection and removal
  - West Nile protection
- Responsible turkey hunting
  - Safe
  - Legal
  - One-shot kills
  - Full utilization of bird
  - Hunt fair chase/challenge
  - Get involved: Join local clubs, NWTF, mentor a new hunter, volunteer to help teach hunter education, be an ambassador for hunting and conservation.

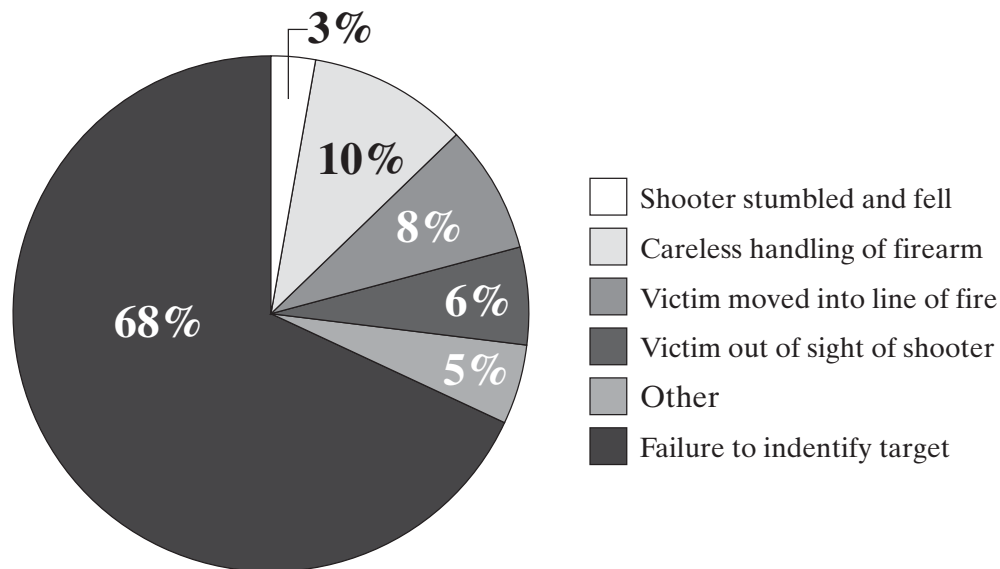


# Appendix 1: Incident Overview

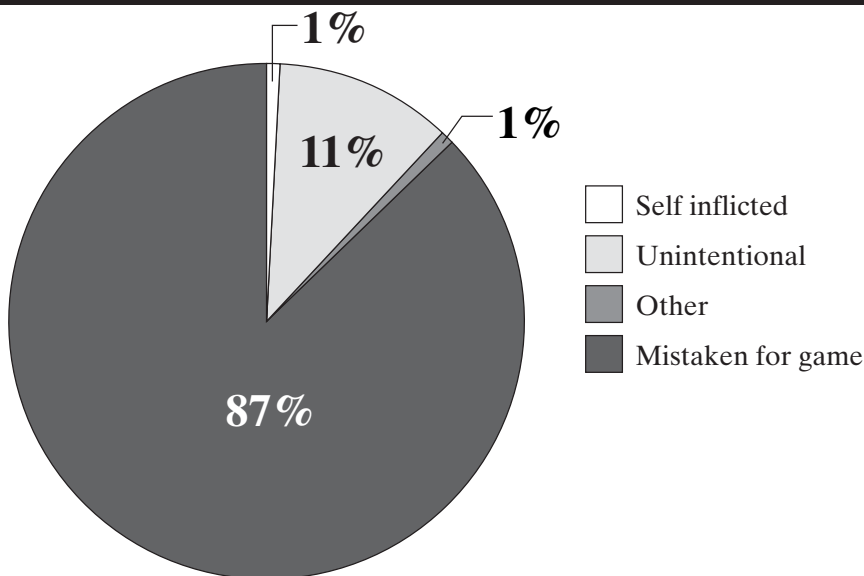
## Incident Overview from 2001-2004 IHEA data

- Most common scenarios?
- Average age of shooter/victim?
- Hunter education?
- Public land or private?
- Severity of injury?
- Firearm involved?

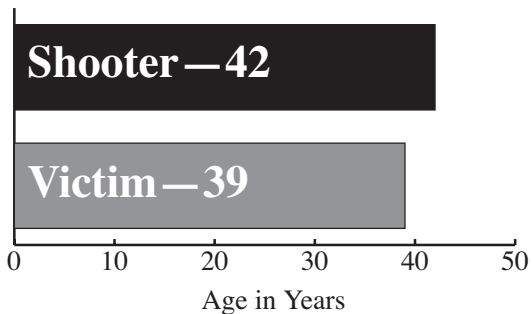
## Incident Factors, 2001-2004



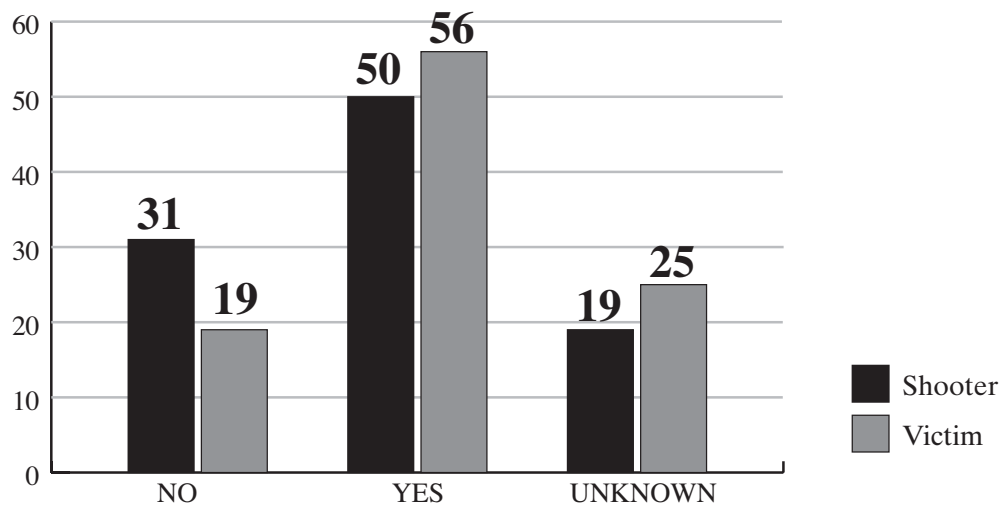
## Spring Incident Causes, 1985-89



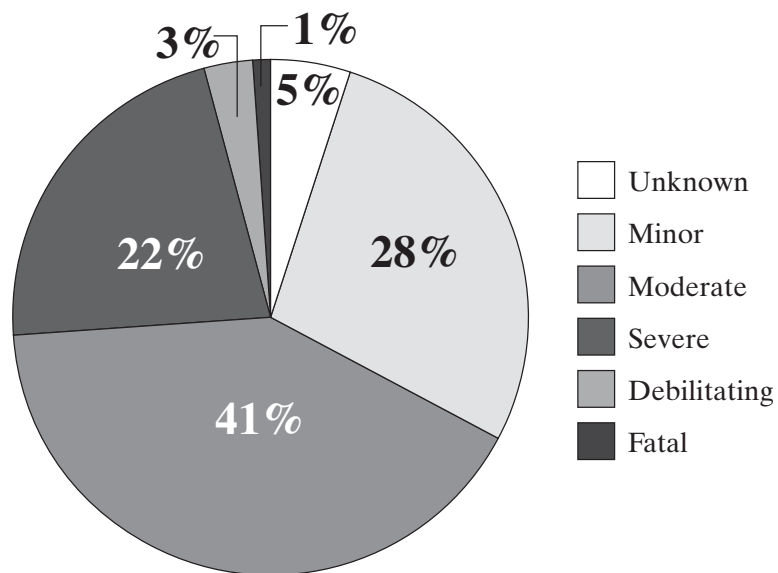
## Average Age of Shooter and Victim



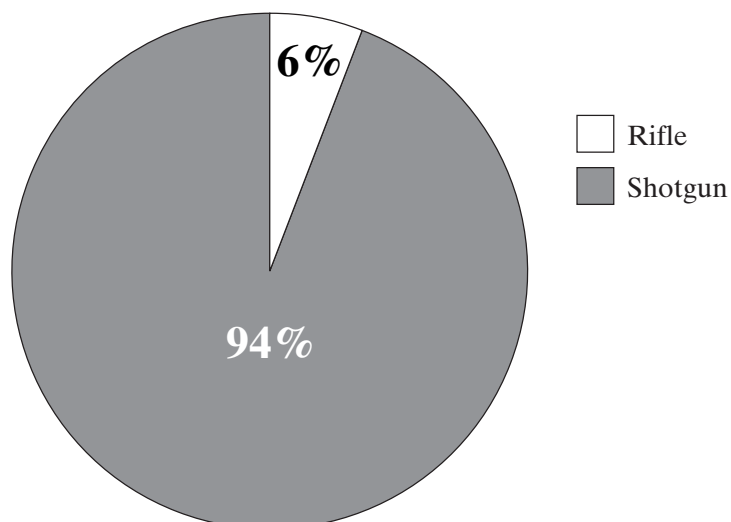
## Hunter Education Certification



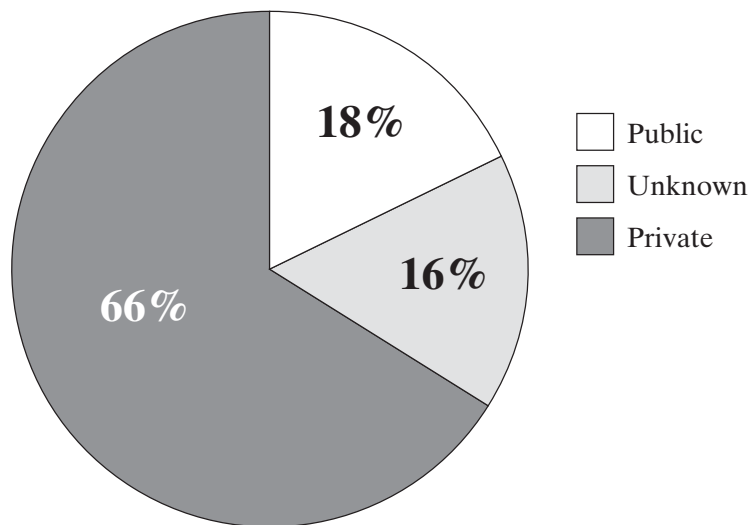
## Severity of Injury



## Firearms in Incidents



## Incident Occurrence by Landownership



## Appendix 2: Issues

### Issues

- Effects of Blaze Orange
- Youth Hunting
- Long Distance Turkey Loads
- Decoys
- Rifles
- Hunter Density vs. Safety

### Orange Materials Were Tested

- In Missouri in 1981 (unpublished)
- In New Jersey in 1981 and 1982 (Hunter Alert Marker)
- In Virginia in 1982 (Camo Orange Vests)

### Study Objectives

- Test the impact of hunter orange materials on hunter success
- Observe the effect of orange on wild turkeys being called to hunters' location
- Ascertain potential for hunter acceptance

### Results in New Jersey, Virginia and Missouri were Remarkably Similar

- Average hunter effort was greater among those wearing orange
- No weather factor appeared to influence success
- Presence or absence of orange was the only variable that affected success

### Recently Blaze Orange Has Been an Issue Again

- Pennsylvania and Indiana proposed changes in orange regulations for turkey hunters in 2003
- Only one state currently mandates wearing or displaying orange while turkey hunting
- Orange regulations are unpopular with turkey hunters
- Orange regulations do not appear to have permanently decreased incidents

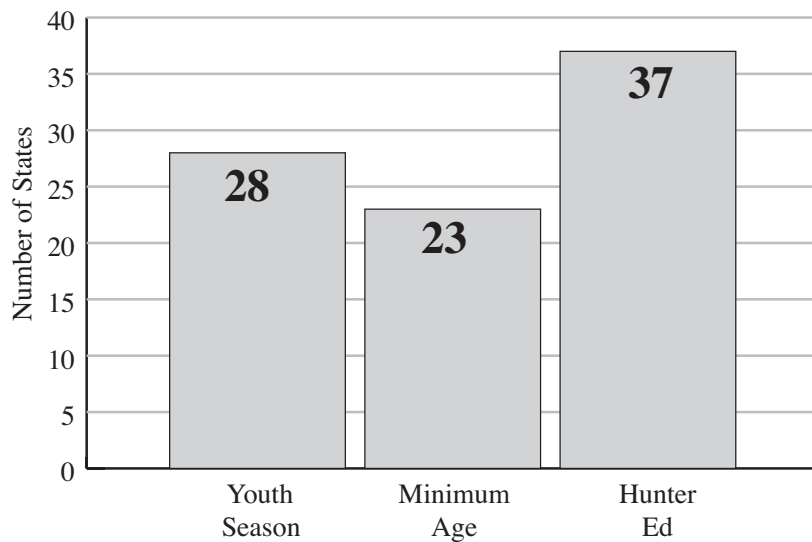
## Pennsylvania Turkey Hunting Incidents

Year	Fall Turkey Hunters	Number of Incidents	Rate per 100K Hunters	Spring Turkey Hunters	Number of Incidents	Rate per 100K Hunters
1985	298,055	17	5.7	214,331	8	3.7
1986	336,225	25	7.4	246,039	10	4.1
1987	282,761	25	8.8	206,039	8	3.9
1988	300,055	21	7.0	226,008	8	3.5
1989	296,139	19	6.4	234,138	4	1.8
1990	234,911	38	16.2	191,442	8	4.2
1991	252,210	37	14.7	179,202	16	8.9
1992*	212,104	6	2.8	186,738	8	4.3
1993**	222,780	6	2.7	201,060	5	2.5
1994	244,095	7	2.9	224,405	9	4.0
1995	261,395	14	5.3	239,521	16	6.7
1996	250,377	11	4.4	241,613	12	5.0
1997	249,934	14	5.6	233,287	12	5.1
1998	199,696	8	4.0	194,819	11	5.6
1999	244,638	16	6.5	237,984	14	5.9
2000	222,765	10	4.5	224,241	10	4.5
2001	228,564	13	5.7	230,115	7	3.0
2002	217,099	15	6.9	218,931	8	3.6
2003	?	2	.09	?	7	3.2

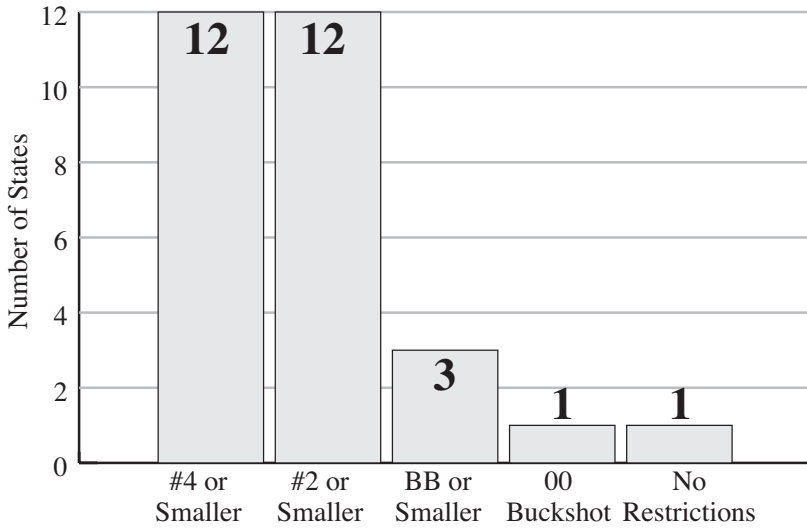
\*Hunter orange required for fall hunting.

\*\*Hunter orange required while moving for spring hunting.

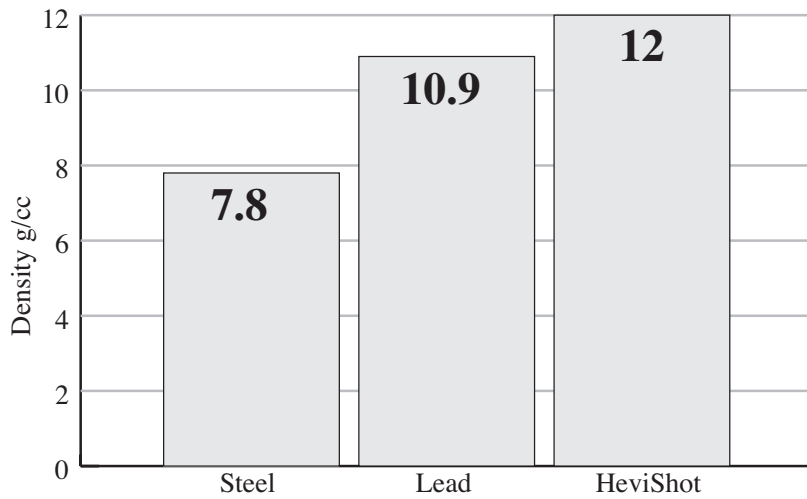
## Youth Turkey Hunting



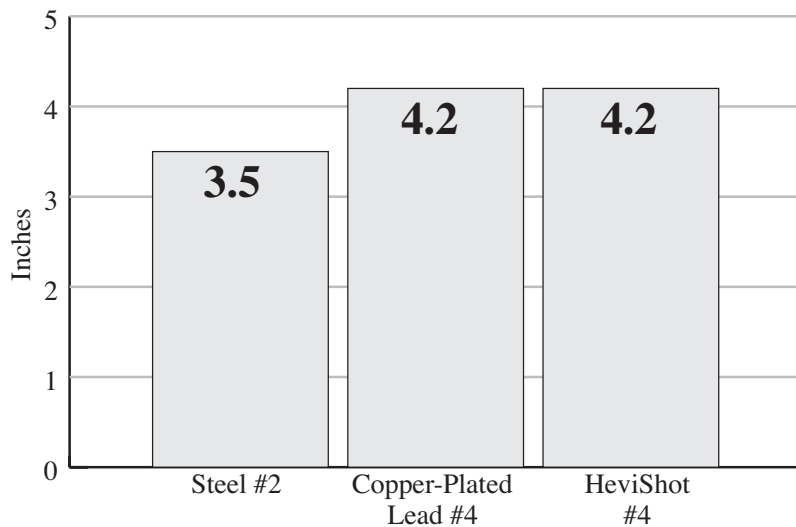
## Legal Shot Size, 2003



## Shot Material Density



## Shot Penetration into Gelatin



## New Shot Developments

- HeviShot has a new shot size
- Size “B” shot is 0.017
- Range touted as “unlimited”
- Computer modeling shows this shot is lethal to waterfowl at over 90 yards

## Decoys

- Reported as involved in 5% of incidents
- Estimates of use range from 50% to 90% of hunters
- Mass-produced decoys now much more realistic than in the past
- Legal in all states now that Alabama regulations have changed

## Survey of States

- Electronic Decoys
  - Legal or not prohibited in at least 18 states
  - Illegal in at least 17 states
- Electronic Calls
  - Legal or not prohibited in at least 5 states
  - Illegal in at least 34 states

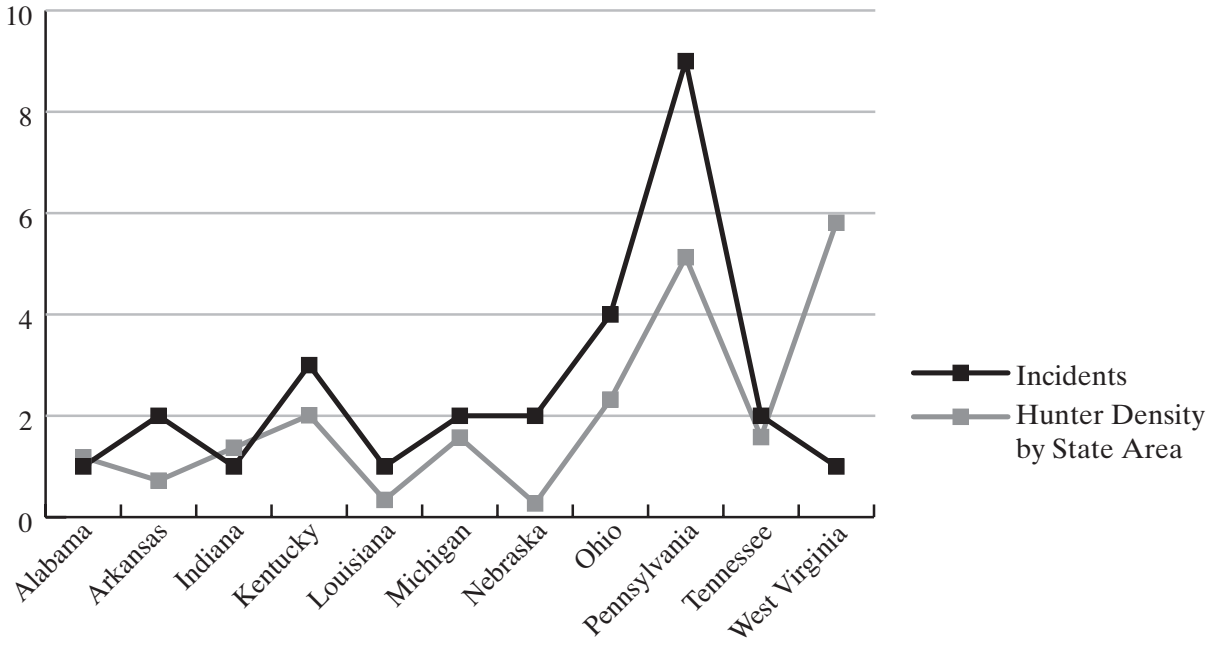
## States Allowing Rifles

States	Seasons Allowed	Percent Use
Arizona	Fall	<15
Colorado	Fall	Unknown
Florida	Spring and Fall	Unknown
Maryland	Fall	<12
Mississippi	Fall	<5
Montana	Fall	Very Few
Oklahoma	Fall	Unknown
Pennsylvania	Fall	12
South Dakota	Spring and Fall	Unknown
Texas	Spring and Fall	Unknown
Virginia	Spring and Fall	<15
West Virginia	Spring and Fall	Unknown
Wyoming	Spring and Fall	Unknown

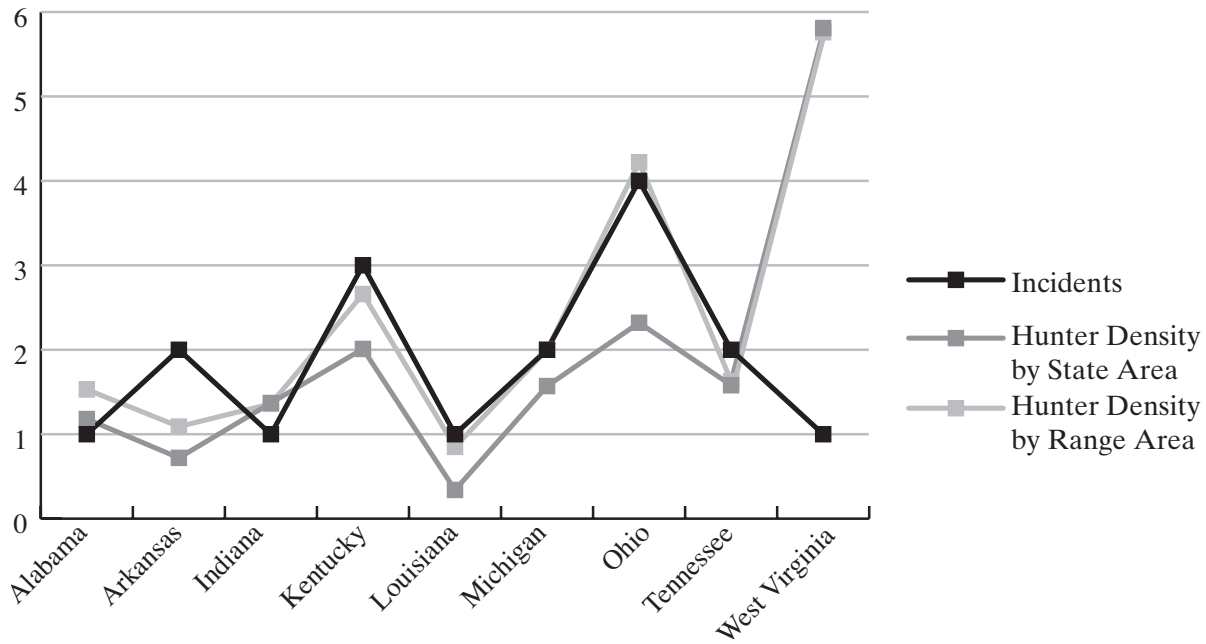
## Shotgun and Rifle Incidents, 1985-89

Range (yards)	Shotgun		Rifle	
	# of Incidents	# Fatal	# of Incidents	# Fatal
<35	26	2	1	0
35-50	34	4	2	1
50-100	31	0	22	9
>100	0	0	3	2
Unknown	122	0	10	3
	<b>213</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15</b>
		<b>2.82%</b>		<b>39.47%</b>

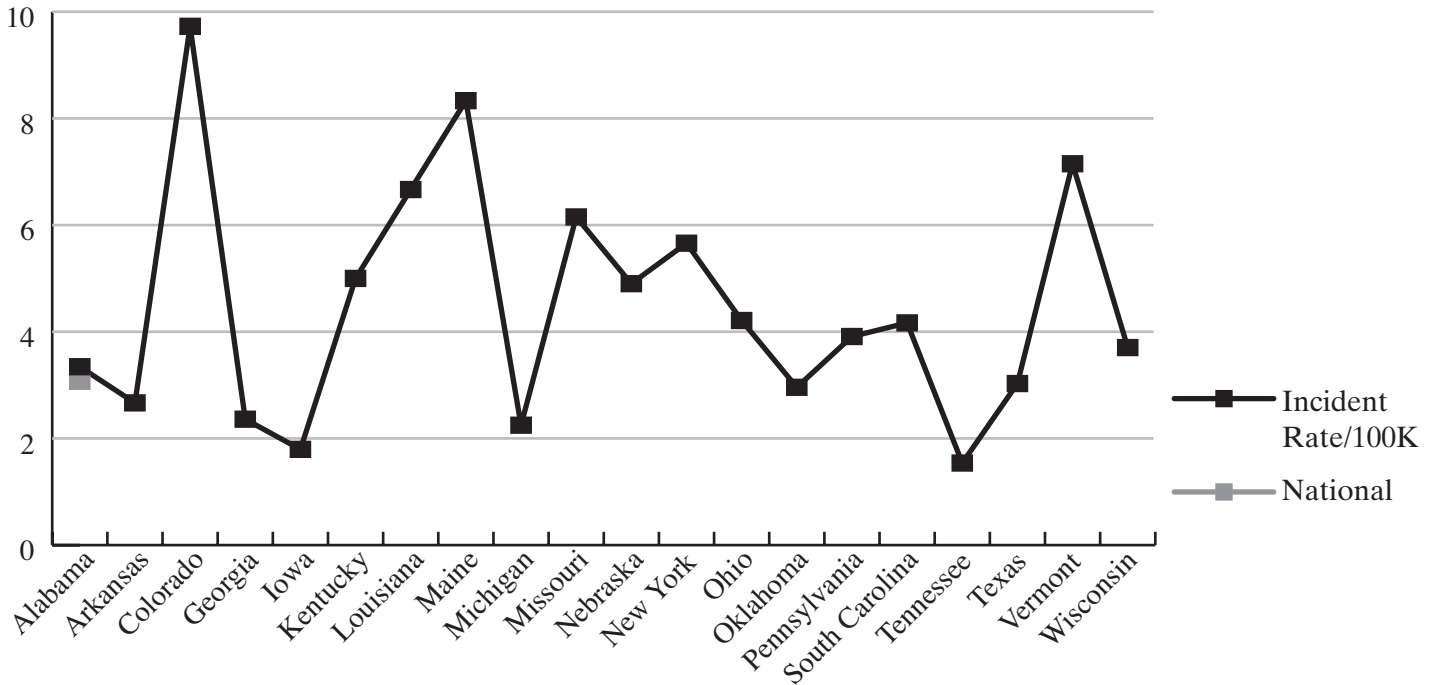
## Incidents vs. Hunter Density, 2003



## Incidents vs. Hunter Density, 2003



## Incident Rates per 100,000 Hunters, 2003



## Turkey Hunting Incidents Rates for Various States

State	Number of Turkey Hunters	Spring 2003 Incident Rate Per 100K Hunters	Fall 2002 Incident Rate Per 100K Hunters
Texas	74,000	2.4	2.7
Pennsylvania	230,000	4.3	6.9
New York	300,000	3.0	1.4
Wisconsin	168,700	0.0	2.7
Missouri	125,000	3.2	0.8
Michigan	98,300	2.0	0.0
Virginia	60,800	3.3	1.6
Georgia	42,181	2.4	---
Nationwide		3.07	2.5

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