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McMillan's Best, Most Important Hunting Tip: Treestand Safety

By: Lynn Burkhead



What's the most important hunting tip that hunters like Tom McMillan can pass along? To always practice proper treestand safety

 procedures, including wearing a safety hunting harness or vest. (Photo courtesy of Tom McMillan)

Self-taught in the whitetail woods, there is one glaring mistake Tom McMillan knows he's gotten by with far too often, and because of that, he's determined to pass along a tip near and dear to his hunter's heart

Over the years, Tom McMillan (<http://deerweek.com/hosts/tom-mcmillan/11204>) has become a pretty fair deer hunter and then some.

It's an occupational hazard when you film a Sportsman Channel television hunting show for a living, not to mention spending time in the woods as a hunter and as an outfitter on some of Kansas' best whitetail ground.

But for all of the woodsy lessons that McMillan – a co-host of #DeerWeek (<http://deerweek.com/default>) along with his deer hunting pal Michael Waddell (<http://deerweek.com/hosts/michael-waddell/11203>) – has learned, there is one that still causes him to shake his head in disbelief, a truth that took him far too long to put into practice.

"I tell you what, as far as dangerous moments when talking about a whitetail hunt, I don't have a lot of them," said McMillan. "But there were times growing up as a teenager, and basically being self-taught as I found my way through the whitetail woods, where there were things that I shouldn't have done."

Like?

"Well, there wasn't even the awareness (of the need for) safety vests back then like there is now," said McMillan. "Tree harnesses and safety harnesses weren't on people's minds (back then) like they are – thank goodness – today."

Before you roll your eyes at another safety sermon, consider that various reports each year indicate that as many as one in three deer hunters will suffer a treestand fall or accident of some sort during their hunting career.

And also consider that a report earlier this year from safety harness maker Hunter Safety Systems (HSS) and SEOPA (Southeastern Outdoor Press Association) painted an even grimmer picture.

That's because the HSS/SEOPA story indicates that according to the Treestand Safety Awareness Foundation (TSSA), there are "... about 4,000 emergency room visits per year due to treestand falls. Of those visits, an average of 23 result in a death each year."

Such terrible and tragic numbers make hunters like Tom McMillan shudder.

"I remember thinking back about trees that I've climbed or standing out on a limb in a storm, an ice storm, just to maybe get a different shot at a deer trail, just things that you think about today and just cringe," he said.

"You think 'Why was I so dumb, to put myself in harm's way like that?'" he added. "Just to get a shot or maybe see a good deer or whatever."

"So thank goodness that everybody has become a lot more aware of safety, in treestands especially."

While McMillan knows that an accident can still happen, it won't be because he doesn't put safe hunting practices into play each time he climbs a tree.

"The good thing is that I've come a long ways (from where I used to be) to where I can help promote (safety considerations now)," he said.

"Especially to my son," he added. "I've probably dodged enough bullets growing up that I might have used them all up for him too. So we're going to keep him safe."

No matter how big a bruiser Kansas whitetail buck might be that comes walking down the trail.

Editor's Note: With Tom McMillan's safety comments above in mind, here are 10 safety tips, courtesy of Summit Treestands, for hunters who will be climbing in and out of treestands this deer season.

10 Treestand Safety Tips: Safely Climb and Descend

Source: Summit Treestands (<http://www.summitstands.com> (<http://www.summitstands.com/>))

"Unfortunately, statistics have shown that treestand accidents are currently the number one cause of hunter-related injury every season.

In fact, it's estimated that one out of every three deer hunters who hunt from elevated stands are likely to experience a fall at some point in their lives that will result in serious injury. In order to avoid these senseless and often tragic accidents, follow these important safety tips when hanging, climbing, hunting or descending from a treestand this fall. Remember, always follow your treestand's owner's manual before taking your treestand into the woods.

Tip 1: Be sure to select the proper tree before hanging a fixed-position stand or using a climbing stand. The tree should be alive and healthy without any noticeable rot or damage. Your tree should also meet the size specifications and restrictions set by the treestand company.

Tip 2: NEVER hunt from a treestand without a secure and high-quality safety harness (<http://www.summitstands.com/harnesses>). It only takes one fall to suffer a serious injury or permanently end your hunting career.

Tip 3: A strong and sturdy safety rope (or strap) should be attached to both your harness and the tree to prevent you from falling more than 12-inches.

Tip 4: Continuously monitor and inspect your safety harness and treestands before and during the season to check for wear and tear or possible damage.

Tip 5: When hunting from a fixed position or hang-on stand always inspect the ladder steps and treestand attachments to make sure everything is tightly secured to the tree.

Tip 6: Always use a haul line to pull-up your gear, bow or unloaded firearm. Never climb with anything in your hands or attached to your back. Before climbing down, utilize the haul line to safely lower all of your equipment on the opposite side of the tree.

Tip 7: Be sure to let family and friends know the exact treestand location that you're currently hunting. When at all possible, hunt with a buddy and always carry a communication device like a cell-phone or walkie-talkie that can easily be reached on your body at anytime.

Tip 8: Follow the 3-Point rule, which says always have 3-points of contact to your steps or ladder when climbing or descending from your stand.

Tip 9: Be aware of slippery and hazardous climbing conditions that may result from rain, sleet, snow or ice and take the appropriate precautions.

Tip 10: When using a climbing stand, make slow, steady and even movements of no more than 12 inches at a time. You should also make sure the climbing section and platform of your stand are attached together by some type of safety cord or rope.

Follow these treestand tips and you'll return safely home to your family and loved ones after each and every hunt. Good luck & good hunting!"

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