

Staying Connected: A Guide to Tree Stand Safety



You hear about it every year. A hunter falls from a tree stand and is either killed or seriously injured. Most of the time, these accidents could have been avoided if the proper steps had been taken before the hunter approached the tree. This publication will help hunters stay safe and healthy the next time they head to the woods.

There are several different types of tree stands on the market today. These stands have one common goal: to get you high enough so you can see the animals, but the animals cannot see or smell you. Most are made of metal and are locked around the tree. Some are self-climbers, meaning you go through the motions of sitting down and standing up to move the stand up the tree with your arms and legs until you reach the desired height. Permanent, or “lock on,” stands often have a metal ladder leading to the seat. In either case, the hunter is leaving the ground and assuming that the equipment will function properly. This is the first mistake a hunter can make.



Whether the stand is new or old, it needs to be inspected periodically. Check for parts that may be loose and straps and cables that need to be replaced. Stands that have been left outside since the previous season pose a significant danger. Always check welds and connection points (screws and pins) to make sure they are not broken or loose. If you have a wooden stand, shake it and inspect it

for signs of deterioration because of rot or insect damage. Steps on the ladder can become loose and fall out, and platforms can have the same issues. Rodents sometimes chew on nylon straps and seats left out over the year, so check for damage.

Be sure to check the tree you intend to climb to be sure it is healthy and not at risk of falling once you add your weight to it.

Safety belts were once unheard-of in deer stands, but now they are common and varied as the stands themselves. Most tree stand manufacturers include a safety belt with their stands. These safety belts are called full-body harnesses because they attach at the shoulders and legs. In case of a fall, you are suspended upright, not looking down at the ground.

Some full-body harnesses include a suspension relief strap. If you are suspended out of the stand and can't get back in, you can place this strap on your foot and attach it to the harness. You can then put weight on the strap to avoid tissue damage in your legs from pooling blood due to gravity.



After inspecting your gear, you are ready to climb into the tree stand. Remember to allow enough time to make your way to your desired height slowly. Being in a hurry climbing 20 feet can be careless. Putting a pin in your stand cable only halfway can result in disaster that you can avoid by checking, rechecking, and slowing down.

Proper use of the safety equipment means that it fits according to the manufacturer's guidelines and that you use it correctly. The harness will not do you any good if you have it on backward.

Now, step up to your stand and get off the ground. You must stay connected to the tree at all times. Yes, this means even when you start climbing at the base. A fall from five feet off the ground can cause injury just like a fall from 15 feet off the ground. Do not, for any reason,



disconnect, even to get around a limb or other obstruction. Disconnecting means risking a fall. The only time you should take off the safety strap is when both feet are on the ground and you have finished hunting from that stand.

From a climbing stand, staying connected can mean taking your climbing strap or tether and moving it up the

tree as you climb. Having two points of connection is ideal. The second point of connection is usually a lineman's belt. If a lineman's belt did not come with your harness, you can make your own by checking YouTube for tutorials. The lineman's belt is not meant to hold you indefinitely but just to help you recover your original climbing position if you do fall.

If you hunt out of a ladder-type stand, you can use a piece of climbing rope with a Prusik knot tied in it. You connect the harness to the knot and then climb up the ladder, sliding the knot up as you go. If you fall, this knot seizes tight and keeps you from hitting the ground.



You may also want to practice climbing in and out of your stand and going up and down trees before hunting season begins. We practice with our bows and guns, so why not with other equipment? It can be a little scary trying to climb 20 feet in pitch-black dark on those first few hunts of the season, so you should practice during the off season. By the time hunting season rolls around, you will be ready to get connected and hunt safely.

You have checked your equipment, looked over your stand, and put on your safety belt. Now, go out there and enjoy your view of the great outdoors!



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