



Safety Tips for **Field Workers** **During Hunting Season**

Precautions to take when working in active hunting areas

BY CRAIG LUDRICK



According to information released by the International Hunter Education Association, 1,000 people are accidentally shot during hunting accidents in the U.S. and Canada each year. Approximately 10% of those accidents result in fatalities. These statistics are personal for me; I had a friend who was killed in a hunting-related accident and have another who lost one of his legs after he was accidentally shot by a hunter. As a right of way agent, part of my responsibility is to provide a safe environment during hunting season for survey and construction crews in the field. Below is a list of safety tactics I used to keep myself and the survey crew safe during a recent project in southwest Louisiana just as deer hunting season was getting underway. This infrastructure project had a proposed 30-mile route through remote timberland with over a dozen different hunting clubs with hunting leases.

Tips and Best Practices

The best safety tip is to avoid going on properties where people are hunting. On a recent project, I encountered hunters who were not authorized to be on the property. These were remote properties, and in several cases, the landowner had never seen the property. The recommendations below will help minimize the risk.

Find out the dates for the various hunting seasons at the properties where your project is located. This information can easily be found online at the website of the state agency that issues hunting licenses. You can also pick up a booklet with the hunting season information where hunting licenses are sold. Keep in mind that most states are divided into zones that may have different hunting season dates. Be aware of the dates for the different zones and species in your area. Often, there will be a season for archery, primitive firearms, youths and veterans before the opening day of the regular rifle season.



Be aware that it's open season on some animals such as feral hogs. It's legal to use automatic weapons to hunt hogs in many areas. Some feral hog hunters prefer to walk the woods as opposed to sitting and waiting. In fact, our crew met one of these hunters during our project, which is why it's a good idea to always wear hunter safety orange vests and hats when you're in the field.

Avoid high use times such as opening day and early morning hours. I put together a suggested schedule for the survey crew so that they could survey the tracts before opening day of rifle season where there were known authorized hunters. We would then survey the tracts where there were no authorized hunters after hunting season began. Again, we would assume there were hunters in the area.

In order to avoid going onto the properties in the early morning hours, the survey crew would survey the points they needed along the adjacent highway instead. While the survey crew completed this task, I searched for hunters by driving the access roads on the tract scheduled to be surveyed that day. When I found a parked vehicle, I left my business card with a note on it to call me. I cannot stress this enough: do not venture into the woods to try and find the hunters. When the hunters called, I let them know that our survey crew was working in the area that day and for the next few days. They were all thankful and told me they would avoid the area for the next few days. During this time, I would also try to stay ahead of the survey crew by a day or two and drive the access roads of the tracts in advance looking for parked vehicles.

"Are there any hunters on the property?" is not as simple a question as it seems. During my initial contact with landowners, I would ask if there were any hunters on their property. Many landowners own multiple properties, so it's important to make sure they know exactly which property you are referring to. Provide a map and a legal description. Several times when I would ask a landowner that question, their reply would be, "There's not supposed to be, but it's like the wild west out there and anything goes." Several landowners would tell me they've had problems with poachers and illegal hunting on their property. I later changed the question to, "Are there any

authorized hunters on your property?" What I would tell the survey crew is that there are no authorized hunters on this property, but there has been trespassing and illegal hunting in this area, so assume there are hunters on the property. The other challenge was that some of these tracts had multiple landowners, and some of these landowners on the same tract didn't know each other. One of the landowners told me that he hadn't authorized anyone to hunt on the property, but he didn't know if any of the other landowners had.

In addition, there were six different timber management companies that managed not only the timber, but also hunting leases along this proposed route. I recommend asking the timber management company or landowner for the name and contact information of anyone with a hunting lease so you can communicate with them directly regarding when you or your crew will be on the property. Hunting clubs are also a good source to provide you with the name and contacts of other hunting clubs in the area. The leaders of the hunting clubs were all very appreciative when I would reach out to them and keep them informed of when our crew would be on the property.

Open gates and lack of signage make it tempting for some hunters to trespass and hunt illegally. I was concerned about one area in particular that didn't have any no trespassing signage, and the gates had been left open. I contacted the timber management company and told them I had seen unauthorized hunters on the property. He said he was working on getting no trespassing signs and fixing the gates so they could be locked. On another property, I found a fresh pile of corn that had been placed near a makeshift ladder on a tree with a perch. It wasn't there two days prior. This landowner told me he's had a problem with illegal hunting on his property. I called him and told him about the corn, and he was very thankful that I had alerted him. He called the sheriff's department to investigate, repaired the fence where the trespassers broke in and put up no trespassing signage.

Closing Thoughts

Make sure there is someone you check in with who knows what property you are going on and when you will be entering and leaving the property. Because many right of way infrastructure projects are in remote areas, it's a good idea to invest in a booster antenna to extend your cell phone range. Have an emergency list to summon help if needed. I also recommend having a first aid kit with you while in the field.

If you encounter a hunter while in the field, be courteous and avoid confrontations. Be professional as you represent your company and your client. 🙏



Craig Ludrick is a senior right of way agent with experience in pipeline and electric transmission line projects in Texas and Louisiana.