

Hunting Safety: Check the Plan Before You Leave

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

An off-work hunting trip needs clear locations, communication and suitable equipment. Make the plan before leaving and revisit it when conditions change. This discussion does not replace hunter education or teach firearm or elevated-stand operation.

Objective: Confirm the trip contact, group movement plan and source of equipment-readiness criteria.

Key hazards or failure points

Unknown companion locations; an unidentified target or background; uncertain access rules; damaged stand or harness; assumed phone coverage; an overdue person with no response plan.

Practical controls

- Check current state wildlife rules, landowner permission and required hunter education. Agree boundaries, visible-clothing requirements and how the group will communicate any movement.
- Follow hunter-education firearm-safety practices: safe muzzle direction, trigger-finger discipline and positive identification of the target and beyond. Do not hunt impaired or take a shot when people or the background are uncertain.
- Use equipment only within its instructions and your training. For elevated hunting, use the specified fall-protection system and connection method. Leave the location, return time and overdue action with a responsible contact.

Verify It in the Field

Show the actual area and boundaries on a map. Have the contact repeat the destination, check-in time and overdue response. Confirm the communication method and plan for places without service.

Inspect stand, harness and attachments at ground level using their actual instructions, including condition and recall checks. Keep damaged, unidentified or unsuitable equipment out of use. Do not climb to prove it works.

Ask each participant to explain where others will be and how a change is communicated. Reestablish the plan when someone moves or contact is lost. Keep private trip details with the chosen contact, not on a workplace sign-in sheet.

Stop and reassess

Stop the activity for uncertain people, target or background; missing required instructions or training; damaged equipment; or conditions that defeat safe access and communication. Reassess worsening weather, fatigue or impairment. Get emergency help when needed without creating another exposure.

Ask the crew

1. Who knows our location and overdue action?
2. Which instructions establish that the stand and harness are suitable?
3. What happens when someone changes position?

Before leaving: verify the people, equipment and check-in plan.

Sources: Virginia DWR hunting and treestand safety guidance; current state rules and equipment instructions.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.