NEWS RELEASE

Ash Grove, Mo; September 11, 2014: Missouri, where it all began!

“The scene will speak to you; you must listen for the sake of prevention.” (Rod Slings, Iowa DNR, Retired)

Investigating a hunting related shooting incident can be likened to finding a needle in a haystack. Fifty-one wildlife officers from 15 states participated in a 40-hour specialized hunting related shooting incident investigation training at The Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center at Ash Grove, Mo; Sept. 7-11, 2014. Officers attending as students came from as far west as Washington and Utah, to Vermont and Florida. The academy was taught by a highly experienced cadre of instructors from 6 different states with over 300 years of combined experience, with over 1425 incidents investigated, reviewed and examined.

The Missouri Department of Conservation and the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) hosted this Hunting Incident Academy. The academy, the only one of its kind; provides skills, knowledge, techniques and confidence to state and federal wildlife officers in hunting related incidents. The IHEA-USA is keenly interested in the proper collection, documentation, and analysis of this important data. Wildlife law enforcement officers who are already experts in investigations in outdoor landscapes improve their investigative techniques. By adding this additional training, improved collection of facts is crucial in keeping hunting safe.

The academy is designed to train commissioned wildlife officers on how to properly investigate and document hunting related shooting incidents. State hunter education administrators then review and analyze the data collected for curriculum development and media outreach efforts to aid in the prevention of hunting incidents. Through hunter education courses volunteer instructors provide students with the needed knowledge and skills to avoid becoming a statistic.

The materials, curriculum, methodology and techniques found in the Hunting Incident Investigation Academy have been developed through a collaborative effort of the late
Homer Moe (Wisconsin DNR), Bob Staton, retired (Missouri Department of Conservation) and Rod Slings, retired (Iowa DNR), now consulting, in conjunction with Central Missouri State University beginning in 1993. Dr. Leanna DePue facilitated and assisted in further development of the academy from 1993 - 2005. Additional personnel from conservation agencies were involved: Mike Van Durme, retired (New York DEC), now consulting, Keith Byers, retired (Georgia DNR) now consulting, the late Texas Game Warden Mike Bradshaw and Tim Lawhern, retired (Wisconsin DNR). Curriculum development has been provided unselfishly by those listed above who are dedicated to the mission of the academy.

In 2004 a second-generation of instructors was recruited and trained to bolster the instructor ranks of this academy. Currently there are 15 active instructors that make up the instructor cadre. Requests and responses from conservation agencies have been overwhelming and the academy continues to grow its list of graduates that now reaches nearly 800 wildlife officers. Many of these graduates have gone back to their agencies and provided localized training sharing knowledge and techniques necessary to conduct factual and impartial investigations. Based on evaluations collected at the conclusion of each course, many officers stated that this was the best training they have received throughout their career.

Special thanks goes out to Robert L. Ziehmer, Director, Missouri Department of Conservation, Larry Yamnitz, Protection Division Chief, and Kyle Lairmore, Missouri Hunter Education Coordinator -- who deserve the credit for promoting this training and bringing this training back to Missouri where it all began in 1993. The “point-man” at this year’s academy was Mike Brooks, Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center Supervisor, who was instrumental in helping with the logistics and arranging the academy, held at Dalton Shooting Range and Bois D'Arc Conservation Area. This location provided both inside and outside venues needed to present this intensive curriculum. Future states that have requested to host the academy include Georgia, New York, Florida, and Washington.

As a result of the Hunting Incident Investigation Academy, past academy attendees have been able to collect detailed facts that have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of fatalities and injuries from hunting-related shooting incidents. Data gathered from their investigations have clearly demonstrated the main causes of hunting incidents. The curricula developed for basic hunter education programs have been molded to better target contributing causes in an effort to continue to reduce hunting related shooting incidents. A national clearinghouse database has been created to store data collected from each IHEA member jurisdiction. Standardized reporting forms have been developed so that complete and uniform data can be analyzed. The IHEA has also adopted a standardized definition of a hunting related shooting incident.

IHEA-USA Hunting Incident Investigation Academy Mission Statement:
“Training investigators to properly collect and document the facts of hunting related shooting incidents – ensuring that proper methodology and techniques are utilized for the purpose of research and curriculum focus on hunting incident prevention.”

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Outcomes:
The academy offers the opportunity to study, reflect, apply and improve professional practice based on the most recent investigative techniques and research related to hunting incident investigation strategies. Wildlife officers attending gain confidence and enhance professional skills. Examples of specific steps covered in the academy included but were not limited to:

• Acquisition of a set of analytical tools
• Scene protection and integrity
• Posing of questions, making observations, and recording facts
• Prioritization
• Assembly of an investigative team
• Preliminary evaluation
• Collection and evaluation of evidence
• Interpretation of evidence
• Organization and presentation of findings
• Lessons learned in the mission of prevention

Action:
Upon completion of the academy, wildlife officers will now return to their respective jurisdictions equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to further aid in the mission of reducing hunting related shooting incidents. However, it is paramount that they receive the support of their agencies. Agencies can do so by providing their newly trained investigators with the necessary equipment to conduct these types of investigations.