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Youth hunters practice firearms safety during annual event



RATON – More than 100 youth from across New Mexico took part in the New Mexico Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC) earlier this month at the Whittington Center near Raton, displaying ethical-hunting and firearm-safety skills they learned from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish’s hunter education courses.

“The YHEC is the culmination of what the participants have learned from participating in and passing a hunter education course,” said Jennifer Morgan, hunter education coordinator for the department.

The 120 participants, who ranged between 8 and 18 years of age, and their 45 adult coaches took part in events that tested their marksmanship, firearm-safety fundamentals, responsibility, and ethics. Events included archery, shotgun, light rifle and muzzleloading challenges, as well as a responsibility exam, orienteering, wildlife identification and a hunter safety skills trail. Awards were given to the top scorers in three age groups in each event, as well as to the top teams in each age group.

“The highlight of the YHEC is the hunter safety trail, which combines safe firearms handling, ethics and responsibility in a field situation where the hunters are tested on all the skills they learned in hunter ed,” Morgan said. “A lot of it has to do with following rules and regulations and making sure they have the right licenses, they understand New Mexico’s hunting rules and ethical shot placement.” Major emphasis is placed on safe handling and storage of firearms during this challenge, which helps remind participants of the importance of these practices when using a firearm in the real world.

“One of the key points we teach in hunter education is the safe and responsible handling of a firearm, whether it’s out in the field in a hunting or shooting sports situation, or proper and safe firearms storage in a home or vehicle,” she added. “We definitely highlight proper and legal transportation of a firearm – that’s in our manual and covered in our curriculum to ensure that everyone who is participating in the shooting sports, are responsibly and safely handling firearms.

The proper handling and storage of firearms is a particularly valuable lesson for aspiring hunters to learn at a young age, as it enables them to practice proper safety measures for decades to come – as well as to share them with future generations of hunters to follow.

Visit the [New Mexico Hunter Education Program’s webpage](#) to view courses available to people of all ages to improve hunting and firearms-safety skills and learn more about the YHEC by visiting the [New Mexico Youth Hunter Education Challenge’s webpage](#).

Learn more about gun violence prevention and safe firearm storage in New Mexico by visiting www.safestoragenm.org.

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