All-terrain vehicles are gaining popularity as a valuable tool for hunters. The industry is building bigger, faster and potentially more dangerous models, and injuries and deaths are increasing significantly. Between 1993 and 2001, the number of injuries caused by ATV-related accidents more than doubled to 111,700. From 1993 to 2000, ATV-related deaths increased 159 percent from 211 to at least 547.

Research on ATV injuries to children in Arkansas reveals that children under 16 suffer a disproportionate share of injuries, do not wear helmets and fail to receive formal training. Although Arkansas requires automobile drivers to pass written and driving tests to be licensed, ATV operators are not required to be licensed or trained, even though statistics show ATVs to be as, if not more, dangerous than automobiles.
Efforts to improve safety have failed

In 1988, Congress passed a bill banning the sale of three-wheel ATVs, which were prone to tipping or flipping over. However, four-wheel ATVs have been shown to be unsafe as well. By 2000, four-wheel ATVs were involved in 74 percent of fatal ATV accidents.

Although manufacturers place warning labels on their ATVs and in their manuals in an attempt to inform consumers, studies show that most Americans do not read their manuals. In addition, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission found that more than half (53 percent) of all injured riders either did not know if their ATV had warning labels or stated that it did not.

If you own an ATV, it’s up to you to obtain the knowledge and training to operate it safely. Ask your dealer about ATV safety training courses. You may also contact the ATV Safety Institute through its Web site (www.atvsafety.org) to learn about classes in your area. Educational brochures are available from this site. Be sure to read your owner’s manual carefully, paying special attention to warnings.

ATV safety tips

• An ATV is not a toy. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that no child under 16 be allowed to operate ATVs under any circumstances. If you allow your child to operate an ATV, make sure it is the appropriate size – check the manufacturer’s recommendations – and make sure your child receives ATV safety training.

• Wear appropriate clothing when you ride, including gloves, over-the-ankle boots, long sleeves, long pants, eye protection and an approved helmet.

• ATVs are not designed to carry multiple riders. Never ride with a passenger on your ATV.

• Added attachments affect the stability, operating and braking of your ATV and may increase your risk of being injured. Hauling large wildlife can interfere with your control. If you add attachments or transport game on your ATV, special care should be taken with handling and speed.

• Always transport firearms unloaded and secured in a case or rack mounted to the ATV. A case will protect your firearm from damage while being transported.

ATVs can greatly enhance your hunting trips, or they can be the source of serious or even fatal injuries. Equip yourself with the proper training and use them wisely to ensure many years of enjoyment.