

II. Present Situation:

Current law requires that persons born on or after June 1, 1975, must successfully complete a hunter safety course, consisting of not more than 16 hours of instruction on competent and safe handling of firearms, conservation, and hunting ethics.¹ Any person who violates these provisions commits a noncriminal infraction under s. 372.83, F.S., and is subject to a fine of \$50.

Hunter safety education is available from a variety of sources. One such source is the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA)² IHEA is a leading organization representing the interests of 69 state, provincial, and federal hunter education coordinators, and 70,000 hunter education instructors who teach hunter safety, ethics, and conservation to approximately 750,000 students each year. This association offers on-line instruction through the *Introduction to Hunter Education* course, which can be part of any state's official hunter education course. The IHEA also provides a video series for training instructors, and publishes the *Hunter's Handbook* once a year for distribution to hunting education students throughout the country. Topics covered in IHEA's on-line instruction include:

- Modern Firearms and Ammunition;
- Firearm Safety;
- Shooting Skills;
- Hunting Safety;
- Hunting Skills and Advanced Hunting Techniques;
- Outdoor Skills and Safety; and
- Hunter Responsibility / Ethics.

Pursuant to s. 372.5717, F. S., the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has instituted and coordinates a statewide traditional classroom style hunter safety course that is offered in every county. Instruction is provided by FWC staff and approved volunteers. Topics covered in FWC's hunter safety course include:

- Ethics and Hunter Responsibility;
- Firearms, Marksmanship, and Modern Ammunition;
- Safety and Proper Gun Handling;
- Wildlife Identification, Conservation, and Management;
- Survival and First Aid;
- Black Powder Firearms; and
- Bowhunting Basics.

FWC's traditional course requires twelve hours of classroom instruction, a written exam and three hours of hands-on instruction at a shooting range.³ An alternative to the traditional classroom course is offered by the FWC that includes an on-line study course together with a four hour classroom segment, as well as the three hours of hands-on instruction at a shooting

¹ Section 372.5717, F.S.

² Please see www.ihea.com for further information.

³ <http://myfwc.com/huntered/program.htm>

range.⁴ The FWC issues a permanent hunter safety certification card to each person who has attended and successfully completed one of these hunter safety courses.

To be issued a license to take wild animal life in Florida with the use of a firearm, gun, bow, or crossbow, any person born on or after June 1, 1975, must have a FWC issued, permanent hunter safety certification card or have a hunter safety certification card issued by a wildlife agency of another state, or any Canadian province, which shows that the holder of the card has successfully completed an approved hunter safety course. FWC officials report that the commission is currently working with other states to develop a revised hunter safety course that would be used by all the participating states.

The FWC hunter safety course is offered without charge to participants.

All of the U. S. Armed Services provide some degree of small arms training for new recruits that includes small arms handling and weapons safety instruction. Services that engage in land combat conduct extensive initial small arms training as well as periodic refresher training. Services that engage in air and naval combat conduct a lesser amount of initial small arms training that nonetheless is sufficient to teach safe weapons handling skills. Additional weapons skill training and refresher training for these services is dependent on the requirements of the individual's military occupation specialty and potential for combat zone assignment.

Several states exempt active-duty military, National Guard members, or honorably discharged military from the requirement of completing a hunter safety education course. Alabama exempts active-duty military personnel and active members of the National Guard.⁵ Minnesota exempts a person who is on active-duty and has successfully completed basic training in the U. S. Armed Forces, a reserve component, or the National Guard.⁶ Oklahoma exempts persons honorably discharged from the U. S. Armed Forces, those currently on active-duty in the U. S. Armed Forces, and members of the National Guard.⁷

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This committee substitute provides that any Florida resident who is an active-duty member of the U. S. Armed Forces, or a current member of the U. S. Armed Forces Reserves, the National Guard, the U. S. Coast Guard, or the Coast Guard Reserve may fulfill the hunter safety education requirement under s. 327.5717, F.S., upon submission of a current military identification card and by successfully completing an online electronic hunter safety course that is approved by the FWC or a hunter safety workbook and a written test provided by the FWC.

The committee substitute provides for an effective date of July 1, 2008.

⁴ Id.

⁵ <http://www.ihea.com/hunter-education/hunter-education-requirements.php>

⁶ <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/licenses/military/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunted.htm>

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None. The hunter safety course program is funded by a federal grant and uses no state funds.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)**CS by Military Affairs and Domestic Security on March 18, 2008:**

This committee substitute clarifies that the section applies to active-duty members of the U. S. Armed Forces or current members of the National Guard, U. S. Armed Forces Reserves, U. S. Coast Guard, or the U. S. Coast Guard Reserve.

This substitute further clarifies that an eligible person may satisfy the requirements of this section by successfully completing an online course approved by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

B. Amendments:

None.