

Virtual trap shooting shown to improve scores

By Larry Polenske
Contributing Writer

Fredonia, Wis. — Skeptics might say virtual trap shooting is just a glorified video game with no value that translates to the real thing.

However, Dr. Carrie Scheel, a professor at Concordia University, has shown that electronic shooting dramatically improves the performance of novice trap shooters. Scheel, president of Ozaukee Scholastic Shooting Sports, and head trap-shooting coach Doug Klinski started using virtual trap shooting as a teaching aid after a colleague saw it in use at a national shoot in Illinois.

They are conducting the program at the Ozaukee County Fish and Game Association facility. There are 60 students in the program.

"It's a relatively new technology that was developed in England," Klinski said. "It aids shooters and lets them become more proficient without having to shoot targets. We were one of the first groups in the state to have this technology."

The software with the virtual shooting package is flexible and

can be programed for singles, doubles, and even Olympic style trap shooting.

"We piloted it with some of our seasoned and novice shooters to start out with," he said. "We really realized a benefit to the kids who had not shot before."

With virtual trap shooting, a light-emitting device is mounted in the muzzle of the participants' guns. A tube from the transmitter leads to a pressure switch on the trigger that activates the light-emitting device.

A two-headed laser device projects a landscape onto a flat, vertical surface. When the shooter says "pull," a coach activates the projector and a dot of red laser light travels across the landscape the way a clay target would fly from a conventional trap house.

The shooter activates the pressure switch, and there is immediate feedback for a hit or miss. The shooter can see if the shot was high, low, left, or right. This allows the shooter to make an adjustment for the next shot.

Klinski said a shooting history is developed for the shooter.

"It tells how fast it took to hit the target and the estimated range when it hit the target," he said.

Klinski said virtual trap shooting allows participants to focus on form and fundamentals without being distracted by the noise of the shot or the kick of the gun. It is done indoors so weather is not a factor, and it saves students a lot of money because they don't have to buy as many shells.

Younger students are partici-

Scheel and Klinski hope to do a larger study of the benefits of virtual trap shooting.

"We would like to do a state-wide or multi-state study," Scheel said. "We have approached the Kettle Moraine trap-shooting high school conference. I would really like to work with the National Rifle Association since all of our coaches are NRA-trained."



Cedarburg's Nels Marston, 11, on the "virtual" trap line.

Photo by Larry Polenske

"As they shoot their 25 targets, it records today's case history and next week's and the week after. That will be able to gauge their improvement or, if they have issues, we can then re-evaluate what they are doing."

Practices are conducted with the same format as conventional trap shooting. Five participants shoot at five targets each from five positions on the line. A coach is behind the shooters to give

pointers on stance, hand placement, lead technique, and more.

After shooting a round of virtual trap, the students go outside to the range to shoot a conventional round of trap with live ammunition.

Scheel and Klinski saw the benefits of virtual trap shooting, but Scheel wanted proof it improved performance.

She set up three groups that shot for six weeks. One shot only virtual trap. A second group shot only conventional trap, and the third group shot one round of virtual followed immediately by a round of conventional. All of the groups shot a round of conventional trap at the start of the study to set a base score.

The results were conclusive.

"The outside (conventional) group improved about 20 percent," Scheel said. "The inside (virtual) group improved about 40 percent, and the combined group about 60 percent from start to finish."

pating this year.

"We have sixth-graders starting this year," Scheel said. "In the past we started high-schoolers first and now we have added the middle-schoolers."

At Concordia, Scheel specializes in research related to work injuries. Virtual trap shooting delivered an unexpected benefit for injury rehabilitation.

John Leach, now 20, suffered a severe head injury from an accident his senior year in high school. The injury caused his eyes to involuntarily move erratically, resulting in impaired vision.

The club let Leach take the virtual trap-shooting system home, and he practiced with it for three months.

"Slowly but surely, my eyes came back," Leach said. "My score improved. When I actually came out to shoot my first round of trap I was ahead of a lot of the other kids who had taken the summer off."