

MONTANA

Other accidents tied to Remington rifles

BY PERRY BACKUS
of The Montana Standard

DILLON — In less than two weeks, Remington Model 700 rifles have been involved in a pair of accidents where the rifle fired unexpectedly.

Friday, Robert Nase, 53, of Belgrade was shot in the arm after the Remington Model 700 .22-250 that Justin Sabol was unloading discharged unexpectedly. The bullet hit the rear floor of Sabol's truck before hitting Nase in the right arm, according to a Gallatin County Sheriff's Office news release.

Sabol, 26, of Bozeman rushed Nase to Bozeman Hospital, where he was treated and released.

Gallatin County Undersheriff Jim Cashell told the Bozeman Chronicle the incident remained under investigation Friday, but it appeared to be an accident.

A Remington Model 700 was also involved in the fatal shooting of nine-year-old Gus Barber of Manhattan on Oct. 23 in Madison County. The boy's mother was unloading a .243 caliber rifle when it discharged (see other story).

Over the years, other Montana hunters have had problems with the Model 700 firing unexpectedly.

■ On Nov. 12, 1988, 14-year-old Brent Aleksich of Butte was accidentally shot in the legs by

his 13-year-old brother Brock. According to a Montana Standard account of the shooting, the Aleksich brothers were hunting near Butte when Brent raised his .270 caliber rifle and it discharged unexpectedly.

The Aleksich family sued Remington in 1991 saying the rifle had a "propensity to unexpectedly discharge." The family sought \$6 million in damages. The case was settled out of court and a portion of the case was sealed by the judge. Aleksich's father told The Montana Standard he didn't wish to discuss the case.

■ Pete Noreen of Belgrade purchased a brand new Remington Model 700 in the fall of 1993. "It was a wonderful gun," he remembered. About three years ago, he was hunting with his 20-year-old daughter. They were watching a mountain meadow when a mule deer buck appeared. Noreen said he was watching his daughter as she reached down to release the rifle's safety. The gun fired.

"I was watching her and she didn't have her finger on the trigger," Noreen said. "It scared the hell out of both of us."

Noreen, who worked as a gunsmith for most of his life, said he's tried at length to duplicate the accidental discharge.

"I couldn't make it happen

again," he said. "It truly was a random situation. This rifle had never been touched. It was brand new, right out of the box."

The Noreen family still uses the rifle, but there is never a round in the chamber until it's time to shoot.

■ Bob Ekey of Bozeman had just killed his first elk ever in the fall of 1988. He'd hiked the two miles back to his truck when he decided to unload his Remington Model 700. When he began to open the bolt, the rifle fired into the ground.

Despite the fact that Ekey had hunted for years, shot competitively and had "gun safety drilled into me for years," he remembers he tried to blame himself for the accident.

"When your rifle goes off unexpectedly, it sticks in your mind," he said. "I remember the gun misfiring more clearly than I do getting my first elk."

The next year he was hunting with some friends in the South Madison Range. He didn't have a round chambered in the rifle. After the group spotted a fresh elk track, Ekey chambered a round and the gun fired again.

"I stopped carrying the rifle after the second misfire," he said. "It stayed in my gun cabinet."

After reading a 1994 Business Week story outlining

safety concerns over the Mod-700, Ekey sent the rifle into Remington to replace the trigger assembly. It cost him \$28 and he's begun to use the rifle again.

"The point is that I love carrying it now that it's fixed," said Ekey. "Would I carry a Model 700 with a pre-1982 trigger assembly? Absolutely not. Would I hunt with someone carrying a Model 700 with a pre-1982 trigger assembly? Absolutely not."

"It's not that I'm against Remington, but if there is a problem with their product, people need to know," he said. "In my mind, it's a time bomb just wouldn't want it around."

■ Al Jennings of Belgrade was hunting in Wyoming with his wife in 1989 when the Model 700 she was carrying fired unexpectedly.

"It went off about three feet from my head," Jennings remembers. "I lit into her ... and she sat there telling me that she hadn't touched the trigger. I didn't believe her."

Then a couple days later she went to pick the rifle up off a quadratrack. She bumped the bolt of the rifle and it went off.

Since then, Jennings said, he replaces the trigger assembly on every new Remington rifle he buys.

"I just don't think it's a great situation," he said.

House ...

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weeks. He says his grassroots campaign and media advertising have come together, so voters truly know him and what he's about.

"I think we've followed our plan pretty well," says Rehberg. "If I'm successful, and I believe I will be, it's because we built that organization in October and worked

it's much simpler. She says Montanans will choose her because they believe she will do the right thing.

"I hope they go into that booth asking that question — who do I trust to protect social security, who do I trust to keep funding kids' education, who has a proven track record on the integrity question and who do they want to represent them when it comes to the record," says Keenan.

Although the poll numbers have remained about the

cation. She's said he's beyond shame and will say or do anything to get elected.

Keenan says Rehberg has a reputation for going ugly and this U.S. House race is no exception.

"It wasn't Nancy Keenan who picked the fight here," she says. "It wasn't Nancy Keenan that went negative."

Rehberg, however, says the candidates are fighting it out on their records and he's just striving to be on the offense, rather than defense.

"If you are entirely on the

toned down the rhetoric a bit."

Wilson says the House race, unlike the bids for governor and Senate, has focused on a broader spectrum of issues. For instance, you won't hear Keenan and Rehberg focusing on just prescription drugs or the economy.

And the differences between the House hopefuls on the issues are broad.

Rehberg opposes abortion rights and favors across the board tax cuts, repealing the inheritance tax, providing a