



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 20-31

WINTER BLUNDERLAND

♪ "To face unafraid, all the plans that we've made, walking in a winter [blunder]-land" ♪

With the days getting shorter and temperatures dipping, winter is on the way with all the activities and holiday celebrations that come with the season. Nobody wants to spend the holidays in the emergency room or be on light duty for weeks with a winter-related injury. Unfortunately, more than 1 million Americans are injured annually by falling on ice or snow, with more than 17,000 resulting in fatalities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adding to the misery, accidents like decorating falls account for another 6,000 injuries, and winter driving accidents add another 117,000 annually. To avoid becoming one of these (*and other*) winter mishap statistics, have a read. Please learn, so our "Warriors of Winter" will not have failed, or fallen, in vain. Take a moment and consider what you would have done differently to avoid repeating these blunders of winter.



◆ Break on through to the other side. A Sailor was skiing on holiday leave and hit a small mogul. Instead of going over the mogul, the Sailor's ski went **through** it like the Clark Griswold saucer scene in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. Her knee snapped violently to the right (*Yikes!*), and she then laid in the snow for approximately 45 minutes (*probably contemplating her life choice*) until ski patrol arrived and took her to the emergency room. Two torn ligaments (ACL and MCL). — *That sounds like a sketchy ski slope to us. Our best advice is to check the snow conditions before you hit the slopes, and keep your tips up.*

◆ Learning to fly. A Sailor was snowboarding to the ski lift when he lost his balance and, according to the report, "flailed out with his arms to attempt to regain control." Apparently, the "flail" maneuver was unsuccessful because the Sailor fell with his arm outstretched, resulting in a fractured right elbow and earning him three and a half months on light duty. — *Now that we've established that the flail method doesn't work, a quick web search will show how to fall correctly (on your bottom or side -- not the flail). Learn from our unfortunate "Flailor," who's only run that day was in a rescue sled.*

◆ Ice ice baby. A Sailor was shoveling snow off of his back porch when he lost his balance due to ice that had formed underneath the snow. As he fell, the Sailor grabbed the railing (*which should hold the average person's body weight, right?*), but it broke off (*guess not*), causing him to slide down the stairs on his back. After what were likely some creative Sailor verbal works of art, he was taken to a medical facility with a left shoulder injury and received 48 hours sick in quarters (SIQ) and seven days of light duty. The Consumer Product Safety Commission found that approximately 11,500 snow shoveling-related injuries are treated in emergency rooms each year, with more than 100 resulting in fatalities (*mostly heart attacks*). — *Shoveling snow isn't just a potential slip risk, it's a workout too. Go easy if you haven't shoveled in awhile. Perhaps those kettlebell swings have more benefits than we thought.*

◆ Knocking on heaven's door. Here's our annual decorating fail example. From the report, "A Sailor sustained trauma to the head resulting in a loss of consciousness while attempting to remove a Christmas tree stand from his attic." He recalls "coming to" following the incident and contacted the unit's medical chief, who, along with the Sailor's wife, had to "coax" our Clark Griswold to visit the emergency room. — *Unconsciousness is your brain's way of saying, "Dude! You need medical attention!" Listen to your brain. And keep a good grip on those heavy items to avoid that head knock.*

◆ London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down. Quoting from the report, "an employee stepped on a child-sized chair and then onto a child-sized computer desk to hang decorations in the classroom" (*sigh*). The employee lost her balance and fell to the floor, but not before hitting her right leg, rear, back, and neck on the child desk and child chair on the way down. — *With two lost workdays*

WINTER BLUNDERLAND

due to her injuries, we hope she didn't miss the class party. Chairs and desks are not ladders, folks...especially child-sized ones.

◆ Burnin' down the house. (See if you can find all the errors lining up in this one). On a crisp January day, a Sailor cleaned his fireplace, putting the ashes in a cardboard box. According to the report, the Sailor checked that the ashes were cold (*but apparently not well enough, as you'll see*). He placed the box outside on the patio next to a woodpile, immediately adjacent to the house (*how many holes did you count?*). Later that night, the Sailor was awakened by his dog (*good dog!*) and went to see what was wrong. He noticed flames outside his window and smoke coming into the house because (*drum roll, please*) the woodpile was on fire! The Sailor dialed 911, then ran back outside and used a garden hose to spray water on the fire. His rapid response quelled the fire long enough for the fire department to arrive and save the home, but not before he learned some hard lessons about fire (and ash) safety. — *The dog earned some extra treats for sure, but we can't all depend on Lassie to sound the alarm. Put the ashes in a metal container. Store the box away from other flammable material. Pour water on the ashes to make sure they're out. And, for good measure, don't put the woodpile next to the house.*

◆ A hard day's night. A Sailor arrived at a family member's home at 0300 after more than 19 hours of traveling (*let's hope it wasn't all driving*). He settled in for rest with a small twin-sized bed and a space heater for warmth. The report states, "the heater was placed the required distance away from any surfaces." At some point, while the Sailor was sleeping, he rolled over and fell off the bed (*apparently, the hosts didn't account for falling guests when they placed the heater*). On the way down, our Willie Winkle hit his left side on the heater, knocking it over and onto his left thigh. He quickly assessed his injuries, decided he was fine, and went back to sleep (*on the floor...with a heater leaning on him*). A few hours later, he awoke to a five-inch, second-degree burn on his leg. — *Fortunately, that's all that happened. Space heaters account for 43% of all home-heating fires and 85% of home-heating fire deaths, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Please make sure your space heaters have the auto-off tip over protection.*

◆ I don't wanna stop. A Sailor was driving on fresh snow. As he approached a stoplight, it turned red and, "everyone was stopping," according to the report. He attempted to stop but was "too late and too fast." When he hit his brakes, the car began to slide, and he locked up the brakes even more. Seeing an imminent collision, he turned the wheel to the left in an attempt to avoid the car in front of him, but to no avail. The Sailor's car turned slightly left, but he hit the other vehicle. — *He wasn't familiar with driving in the snow, but we bet he'll slow down and give more time and distance to stop in the future. Please do the same.*

◆ Bad decisions. A Sailor attended the holiday party and had also booked a room to stay the night so she wouldn't have to drive home after consuming alcohol (*great job, but you're reading about it here, so...*). The Sailor took a taxi from the party to the hotel, but then decided she was fine to drive home (*ooh, so close to doing the right thing!*). On the way home, she lost control of her vehicle and crashed into the water barrier on the side of the road. — *Don't drink and drive, folks. Just don't. Fortunately, this Sailor received no injuries, but she had a blood alcohol content higher than .08 (the legal limit), so she probably spent the night in a cell instead of a hotel. If you've been drinking, stay in the room, get some sleep, and maybe order room service. You'll live longer, have less jail time, save legal expenses, etc.*

Key takeaways / Lessons Learned

Winter has its unique challenges and hazards, as demonstrated by the misfortunes of our winter warriors. The shorter days, freezing temps, ice, and snow add to the everyday hazards we navigate, but with a little planning and extra care, you can remain pain-free and out of our database.

For tips on a variety of winter safety topics, check out the 2020 Fall and Winter Safety Presentation on our public website at <http://navalsafetycenter.navy.mil> in the [Safety Promotions](#) section.

From the CNO's Holiday Leave Planning message to the Fleet, "Safe, healthy, and ready is how we want to enter 2021. Together we will make this happen."

This product is posted on the NAVSAFECEN CAC-enabled website <https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/nsc/Pages/default.aspx>, and on the public website <https://navalsafetycenter.navy.mil/Safety-Promotions/Lessons Learned>.

And remember, let's be careful out there...