



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-28

Motorcycle Fatalities

We are writing our second motorcycle safety awareness dispatch of 2023 because our Sailors and Marines are dying on motorcycles at an alarming rate! Between June and mid-September, Navy and Marine Corps motorcycle fatalities more than doubled from 11 to 28 (since publishing SA 23-15 Motorcycle Mishaps III in June). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, motorcyclists are 28 times more likely to die in a crash than other motorists on the road. We are seeing motorcycle mishaps reported almost daily, with a death almost once a week. Please don't add yourself to these numbers! This summer's mishaps continue to prove that most motorcycle mishaps were avoidable and resulted from poor decision-making. Five of the six top causal factors in motorcycle mishaps were decision-making errors, with speeding and improper maneuvering as the top two. Below are some avoidable and gut-wrenching examples (*there are many more, but we think you'll get the point*), along with key takeaways that will be useful for serious discussions with your motorcycle riders about their riding habits.



- **Speed Kills.** A Sailor was riding a motorcycle at excessive speed, heading eastbound on a four-lane road (two lanes in opposite directions). Another vehicle was traveling westbound, preparing to turn left into a business parking lot. As the Sailor sped into the intersection, the other vehicle turned in front of him (probably didn't see him). With no time to react due to his high speed, he collided with the vehicle, ejecting him from the motorcycle into a tree. The fire and rescue department arrived and pronounced him dead at the scene. Witnesses and video analysis revealed the Sailor was traveling at a high rate of speed, well above the posted speed limit. He had all his PPE, but at that speed, it didn't matter. — *Your reaction time is near zero when you're riding at excessive speed and you're placing your life in the hands of other drivers who may not even see you. Give yourself a chance to live and slow it down.*
- **Just Pull Over!** One afternoon, a state trooper witnessed a motorcycle riding recklessly in and out of traffic at a high rate of speed – *her first mistake was reckless riding and speeding*. When the trooper attempted to pull her over, she sped up – *her second mistake, evading the police*. As the Sailor attempted to depart the interstate at an off-ramp, still at high speed and evading, she collided with a vehicle. She was transported to the hospital, where she later succumbed to her injuries. — *Not only should you not speed or weave through traffic, but don't run from the police! Your life is way more important than a ticket or even a night in jail.*
- **Out of Control.** A Marine was riding on the interstate at speeds exceeding 100 mph and weaving between cars. As he attempted to overtake vehicles at alarming speeds, he crashed into a semi-truck's trailer, ejecting him from the bike onto the interstate. The reckless maneuvering proved fatal for the Marine, who was pronounced dead at the scene. — *This tragic and avoidable incident highlights the importance of (we'll speak plainly) not being foolish. Remember, you don't own the road. If you want to race, go to a supervised track. The police report and witnesses confirmed that the Marine was speeding and riding recklessly without proper licensing. Although he wore the correct PPE, it was no match for his excessive speed and recklessness. We'll say this as often as we need to: Please (PLEASE!) slow down and ride responsibly.*
- **A Deadly Place to Learn to Ride.** A Sailor's spouse gifted him a motorcycle and intended to teach him how to ride it. They decided (*wrongly and tragically*) to use the sixth (*top*) floor of a parking garage that was empty of vehicles for the lesson. As the inexperienced Sailor was riding the motorcycle, he inadvertently engaged the throttle, causing him to lose control and impact a perimeter wall. He was ejected from the

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motorcycle, went over the wall and fell approximately 60-70 feet to the ground. Fire and emergency crews attempted unsuccessfully to revive the Sailor and he was pronounced dead at the scene. —*Parking garage roofs are no place to practice riding. The Navy and Marine Corps provide free, supervised rider courses in safe areas. Leave motorcycle training to the professionals. It may save your life.*

- Another Tragic and Avoidable Loss. A Marine was riding through an intersection – at approximately 90 mph in a 35 mph zone (yes, *90 in a 35 zone*) – when he impacted an oncoming SUV that was making a legal left turn. Video of the Marine’s brake lights indicated he was only able to brake for one second before impact and he struck the SUV with enough force to spin it around! His motorcycle was broken into multiple pieces and he was pronounced dead at the scene. The police report noted the Marine was also likely under the influence of inhalants. —*We are nearly speechless about the speed of this incident. Riding under the influence of any mind-altering drugs or alcohol is going to end badly. Inhalants are dangerous enough (and illegal!) without riding under their influence. Don’t do it!*

Key Takeaways

Riders, take these brutal mishaps to heart. Every one of these deaths was needless and completely avoidable. Most fatalities are driven by high speeds and foolish decisions. If you want to be less than 10 to 28 times more likely to die, then don’t speed, weave through traffic or run from the police. If you skip those three things, your chances of staying alive go way up.

Command leaders and motorcycle safety representatives, please read and share these real-life stories and lessons with your riders. Use this dispatch as an engagement tool to have serious discussions with them about their riding habits – because we can’t afford to lose any more Sailors or Marines.

1. **Slow Down!** Speed limits exist for a reason, to keep **everyone** safe. It’s not just about you. We don’t want you to die by going 90+ mph into a tree or for you to kill someone else you hit. If you’re going way faster than the traffic flow, other drivers won’t see you coming. You’re already difficult to see in the mirror (see LL 18-18 Why We Don’t See Motorcycles). Maintaining a reasonable and smart speed gives you more time to react to unexpected events. If you do crash or wipe out, the faster you’re going, the worse it’s going to be.

2. **Curb your aggression.** If you’re one of our riskier riders (*you know who you are; if you don’t know, ask your friends*), stop the aggressive maneuvers, like weaving through traffic or tailgating. Riding recklessly will end badly, as we’ve shown in these narratives and multiple previous motorcycle mishap safety awareness dispatches. We’ve said this before and it warrants repeating: It’s not a video game, you don’t get a “respawn” in real life.

3. **Ride within your skill level.** Don’t attempt maneuvers or routes beyond your riding capabilities. Gradually build your skills and experience over time; but no skills give you the license to speed or weave through traffic. While you’re at it, always wear a helmet and other protective gear (gloves, boots and jackets). Very little can save you at 100+ mph, but if you drive smart, safety gear can significantly protect you from injury.

4. **Don’t ride impaired.** Sadly, we need to keep repeating this takeaway. We are shaking our heads. Never ride a motorcycle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (*it’s illegal for a reason!*). Impaired riding severely impacts judgment and slows reaction time. It’ll kill you or someone else. Please, don’t do it.

For more on motorcycle safety, check out the link to our website and social media QR codes below: Our website has a motorcycle safety section under the stand-down tab.

<https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil>



And remember, “Let’s be careful out there.”