



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-35

### *Winter Sports Mishaps VI*

*"I don't know if I ought to go sailing down no hill with nothing between the ground and my brain but a piece of government plastic."*  
—Cousin Eddie

With the Winter X Games only weeks away, we thought it'd be a good time to check up on our naval warriors to see how we've fared since our last edition of winter sports mishaps a year ago. As we suspected, our Sailors and Marines are still getting hurt out on the slopes and rinks. As is the case each year, snowboarding was the leading cause of injury in FY 2024 with 27 mishaps; followed by a handful each from skiing, ice skating, and hockey, totaling 45 winter sports-related mishaps. We probably could've produced a dispatch solely about snowboarding, but – in the spirit of competition and education – read on and learn from the varied and cringeworthy examples of our "winter warriors."



- **Squirrel!** Our first example takes the gold medal for the most injuries in a single fall. A Sailor was distracted and looked at something behind him while snowboarding "at speed," according to the report. While not looking forward, he caught an edge and immediately fell on his back. He broke multiple ribs, suffered a pulmonary contusion (bruised lung), and received a hemothorax (bleeding in the thin cavity surrounding the lungs). He received eight weeks of light duty to contemplate the importance of whatever he was looking at behind him instead of the slope in front of him. —*Snowboarding takes skill, coordination, and your full attention. Stay focused on the slopes and save yourself weeks in pain.*
- **The Double K-lutz.** Coming in a close second in the single-fall injuries category, a Sailor fell awkwardly while ice skating, striking the back of his head, fracturing his fibula and tibia (both bones of the lower leg), and dislocating his ankle. He was admitted to the hospital for surgery on his broken leg and released on 14 days of restricted duty until his follow-up appointment. With those injuries, we suspect his light duty continued for several more weeks. —*We've mentioned in earlier works that there's a way to fall while ice skating. According to U.S. Figure Skating.org, fall to one side, not forward or back on your tailbone. Lower your center of gravity, slide onto one hip, and protect your head by tucking in your chin. It'll save you from a concussion, broken bones, months of physical therapy, etc.*
- **The Hockey Stop.** A Sailor was skiing with a friend when he tried to come to a sliding stop (AKA the "hockey stop"). In the process, his ski caught on a mogul, which he didn't see due to freshly fallen snow and fog. He caught the mogul, lost a ski, and tumbled about 20 yards down the mountain. He got up, reattached his ski and continued down the slope, but his friend noticed something was "off" with him. The friend escorted him to the ski patrol hut, where they recommended that he go to the hospital for an evaluation. There, he was diagnosed with a concussion and was sent home. The Sailor was wearing all the appropriate PPE, including a helmet, which was later found to have a crack from the fall. —*Well done for wearing the helmet. It likely reduced a serious traumatic brain injury (TBI) into a minor concussion. The helmet cracked, but his skull didn't. Another good way to avoid a head injury includes slowing down if the weather and snow conditions aren't favorable.*
- **♫Got Your Six!♫** —*Five Finger Death Punch.* While snowboarding for the first time and on the beginner slope, a Marine fell and hit her head **six times** within 48 hours (Yes; 6 separate times). She doesn't recall having any loss of consciousness, but she saw a medical provider two days later (*no, don't wait!*) where she was diagnosed with a concussion and given 14 days of light duty. In addition to wearing pads, she wore a helmet. Much like the earlier case, the helmet probably saved her from more serious injury.

## Winter Sports Mishaps VI

— Marines are (unfairly?) stereotyped as being “hard-headed”, but this Marine’s two-day misery on the slopes wins the gold medal for persistence (and for reinforcing that stereotype in multiple ways). If you hit your head that many times, we recommend learning how to fall correctly or choosing another winter sport, like curling or sipping hot cocoa in the lodge.



- “Going For a New Amateur Saucer Sled Land Speed Record.” —Clark Griswold. In our lone sledding event, a Sailor was sledding downhill on partially frozen snow. On the way down, evidently with pretty good speed, he put his leg out – and his leg got caught in the snow, breaking his fibula. The report is mum on his lost work time, but the average healing time for a broken bone is about six weeks. —*This relatively senior Sailor wins the gold for engaging in good old-fashioned sledding on his*

*well-earned time off. It was probably a fun family outing...except for his broken leg. The internet recommends putting both feet out and close to the sled when trying to stop, but who are we to judge such an unpredictable and sometimes sketchy sport. When you’re looking down that steep hill, carefully consider how you’re going to stop. Hint: the single-leg, chicken-wing maneuver isn’t it.*

- Sailor Snowboardski. A Sailor was snowboarding (and using ski poles) down an intermediate trail. At some point during the hybrid board-ski run, his left pole dug into the snow, causing his shoulder to dislocate. The report didn’t note any lost time, but we find it hard to believe he didn’t receive some light-duty time with a dislocated shoulder. —*The judges are split on whether this Sailor should be disqualified from our competition for illegal pole assists while snowboarding, or if he should receive a gold medal for originality. Snowboarding experts generally agree that ski poles aren’t a good idea while snowboarding except in certain snow conditions or skill levels, and we agree. If you insist on using ski poles, be sure to practice on a slow hill first, otherwise just choose one sport at a time.*
- Comin’ in Hot! While snowboarding approximately an hour and a half after sunset, nearing the bottom of a crowded slope, a Sailor swerved to avoid running into a child but collided with the father instead. The Sailor fell backward and his “head bounced off the ice,” according to the report (Yow!). Wisely, he was wearing a helmet. The Sailor and his buddies decided to call it a day and returned to the base. On the drive, the Sailor began to feel nauseous and dizzy. The next day, he had blurry vision, headache and dizziness, but waited yet another day to seek medical attention. At the emergency room, he was diagnosed with a concussion and strained neck and placed on light duty for 10 days. —*We implore you, please don’t wait to seek medical attention if you’re nauseous or dizzy after a head injury. It could be a sign of a severe TBI, which could lead to permanent damage or death. Skiing at night on a crowded slope adds to the risks of this slippery sport. Slow it down when the slope is busy or dark.*

### Key Takeaways

1. **Learn how to fall.** When you’re on the slopes, falls are going to happen – even to the most seasoned athletes. Plan for the inevitable by learning to do it correctly, so you’re less likely to suffer serious injury. Just head to “them internets” for tutorials of how to fall properly in your favorite winter sport
2. **Ski, Snowboard, and Sled according to the conditions.** Ski resorts and sledding hills can get more crowded throughout the day and snow conditions can change with temperature changes. Consider these conditions and adjust your speed to keep you on the slopes and out of the emergency room.
3. **The pros wear PPE, so should you.** Have you ever seen a helmetless X Games snowboarder? Didn’t think so. As you read here, helmets don’t make you indestructible, but they do lessen the severity of a head injury. Wear them, they work.
4. **Don’t be hard-headed.** Go see the Doc if you smack your head on the ground (even if you had a helmet). And don’t wait a day or two, especially if you are nauseated or dizzy. Those are bad signs.

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