



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH SA 26-17



Backyard Blunders

When it comes to summertime safety mishaps, “backyard blunders” will rank as some of the more ... interesting events negatively impacting Sailors and Marines. We say “interesting” because of unusual incidents that force Sailors and Marines to change their plans from fun at home to unfun at the ER.

Let’s face it: any unsafe action we take, whether on or off duty, can result in lost man-hours, permanent injury or even the death of a family member, teammate or ourselves. These losses directly increase the workload of those around us if we do something that takes us off the schedule for any amount of time. Let’s take a moment to look at some of the more unusual backyard blunders:

Prying Minds Want to Know

While performing spring cleanup around his house, one “handyman” used a pry bar to remove a nail from a piece of wood while working in the backyard. Not only was personal protective equipment missing from the “job site,” any common sense of how to safely perform the task was absent as well (*i.e., what will happen when the nail comes loose from the board?*). As he held the board down with one hand and pulled the pry bar with the other, he had positioned his face closely in front of the nail. The report said the nail came out with such force that it knocked the not-so-handy service member’s left front tooth out. – *After a trip to the ER, a course of antibiotics and a root canal, our intrepid worker returned home to consider how to get real, get better (with the rest of his teeth intact) in future handy efforts.*



File photo, not associated with a mishap

Sneaky Heat Stroke

Summertime heat index can sneak up on you when you least expect it. A report told the story of a service member who passed out in his backyard while mowing. When asked what happened, he didn’t know how long he was unconscious but remembers breathing heavily then waking with “greyish vision, headache, chest pain and a tingly feeling in his body.” He took corrective action by going inside, drinking water and cooling down. When his fiancé returned, they went back outside (*What!?!?*) and the uncomfortable body tingles returned along with tunnel vision and chest pain, thus a trip to the ER was determined to be warranted. Doctors began treating him for a heart attack until blood tests indicated the real issue was heat exhaustion with early signs of heat stroke. *Even mundane tasks can prove hazardous in certain conditions. Waiting for a cooler time of day is the best answer to avoid heat-related issues. Hydrating is always key. Keeping an eye on the thermometer is merely the first step to surviving the summer heat unscathed. Checking the heat index as well is the best way to know exactly how best to proceed doing anything outdoors (or not) when things are cooking.*

Keep Hands and Feet Clear at All Times

While we’re talking about mowing lawns, let’s point out something obvious – we should probably watch out for the 21-inch blade spinning at over 150 mph. The problem is simple: if you’re not careful, the blade won’t distinguish between grass or anything else entering its sphere of influence. One service member found this out the hard way. While mowing his lawn, grass clogged the mower’s discharge chute. Our industrious groundskeeper attempted to clear the blockage by kicking the plastic flap WHILE THE BLADE CONTINUED TO SPIN. (*Let’s take a moment to consider the potential problems with this idea ... now that we’ve internalized this, let’s see what happened.*) His foot ended up going under the discharge flap and straight into the path of the spinning blade. As one might expect, the sneaker was no match for the weaponized steel. His big toe and second toe were cut to the bone. His wife rushed him to the ER where doctors cleaned and stitched the wounds until additional surgery could fully repair the damage and thoroughly clean the foot. – *The errant groundskeeper received 16 days of convalescent leave to consider better ways to get the job done AND keep his body parts intact. Can we all agree there was a severe level of overconfidence at play here? Taking a few seconds to shut the mower off would have been a better course of action. When it comes down to machines versus body parts, body parts always lose. Fortunately, this individual didn’t lose any appendages, but that’s not always the case.*

Grill Without the Burn

Looking to take advantage of the good weather, an avid griller worked to ensure the best grilling experience. He checked he had everything needed, including charcoal, lighter fluid and foil. What he didn’t check, however, was the amount of fire-starting liquid he had used. When his spouse lit the flame, the accumulated vapor instantly ignited, sending a (*goodness gracious*) great ball o’

fire toward the griller. The Sailor reflexively threw up his hands to protect his face (*great call*), resulting in second-degree burns to his hands. — *We hope he used his 14 days of sick-in-quarters time to consider the previously provided Safety Stand Down presentation information discussing this specific hazard before he decides to grill again. Perhaps his pain can save others from making the same mistake, so read and heed with care.*

How NOT to Get Rid of Bugs

Creepy crawlies found in the yard can cause all sorts of problems for homeowners. It isn't just a matter of damage to plants or foliage, as our next example demonstrates. This Marine was taking care of his usual yardwork tasks when he happened upon a local Japanese centipede of the venomous variety. (Actually, ALL centipedes are venomous, though humans mostly find their bites to be irritating.) Our industrious gardener had heard not to crush this type of bug, because doing so releases a chemical scent that can attract more centipedes. He also heard boiling water is a great way to kill the bug without releasing this scent. Perhaps what he hadn't heard, however, was that this method requires catching the bug with tongs and dropping it into boiling water. Instead, he grabbed a pot of hot water and went on the hunt. However, the target of his attack may have sensed something was afoot and went on the "Don't tread on me" offensive – crawling toward (*and up*) the pant leg of our gardener. Finding himself under assault, our aggressor-turned-victim mishandled and dropped the pot of hot water, scalding his hands in the process. — *We were guessing something was going to get burned, but hands were definitely not at the top of the list. Our gardener could've planned for other, less risky, extermination methods or at least found safer ways to protect himself while transporting hazardous material.*



Women and Children First

Our next example from the "managing outdoor creepy crawlies" category comes from a dad who was mowing the lawn while keeping an eye on his child playing nearby. He noticed the child had come across a snake and did what nearly any parent would do – run to protect his child. Unfortunately, his chosen method of "protection" involved picking up the snake to remove it from the child's vicinity instead of the reverse, (*you know, picking up the child to remove them from the snake's vicinity?*). The snake took umbrage to being manhandled and bit the father on the finger. While the report doesn't indicate whether the bite victim actually knew if the snake was venomous or not, he took the practical step of making a trip to the nearest ER. This turned out to be a very good call, since his vision turned blurry, he began sweating heavily and felt intensely nauseous. The ER team quickly transferred him to a nearby hospital, where he spent two days under observation for any additional symptoms. — *Avoiding snakes is an inherently human trait for most people – unless a parent's natural protective instinct overrides their sense of self-protection (just explaining it, not defending it). Choosing to move the snake rather than the child is an awesome example to learn from (to reiterate: move the **child**, not the **snake**) as the option with the LEAST amount of risk involved. Just sayin'.*

Key Takeaways

If there's a way to get injured, there's probably some safety guidance somewhere to help you avoid it (perhaps something like a Safety Stand Down or 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation available [here](#)). For some of the more unusual activities included in this dispatch, here are the core things to remember:

- **Think each task through thoroughly.** If the job involves anything sharp, heavy or requires high-force movement, calculate the "A + B = ?" equation. BEFORE you set things into motion, ask yourself, "If I do this and this, what will the result be?" Make sure there are no hidden variables in there. Think about what could go wrong, and work around that instead of through it.
- **Working outdoors requires an extra layer of situational awareness when it comes to the weather.** It's obvious you wouldn't mow your lawn during a thunderstorm, so you're already considering the weather. Now, simply add an extra level of thought and weigh the temperatures (and heat index) before starting a job to ensure you're completely prepared to take care of business.
- **No one plans to fail – they just fail to plan.** If you plan and prepare well enough, you won't have to rely on instincts to protect yourself or your loved ones. The whole point of having a backyard is being able to enjoy the activities you choose to participate in. Don't let poor planning or lack of preparation give you experiences you don't want to have.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"