



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-22

Autumn Injuries

“Calculated risks are part of what you do, but the idea that something completely crazy will work just because it’s completely crazy is completely crazy.”

— Bill Walsh, Late NFL head coach

As we bid adieu to the longer, warmer days and activities of summer (*in the northern hemisphere*), the hazards around us are always present. Whether we’re transitioning from jet skis to ATVs or from the beach to our favorite hiking trail, the dangers are similar - and so are the injuries. Mayhem doesn’t care if you’re wearing board shorts or flannel; or having a lemonade or a pumpkin spice latte, it’s always present, waiting for the opportunity to ruin a *gourd* time – *Sorry, that was bad.*



- **Putting the “Gore” in Gourd.** A Marine was carving a pumpkin when the knife slipped and cut his pinky finger to the tendon, requiring surgery — *The tendon! Ouch! While Marines may reach for their trusty Ka-Bar for all their cutting needs (a marlinspike knife for our Sailors), there are unique (though not as cool-looking) carving sets made for pumpkins. They’re inexpensive and less likely to slip and lacerate a finger. Please try them, and leave the weaponry in a safe place.*
- **“Lend me Your Ear.”** A Sailor was driving an ATV on his family’s property “at slow speed and turned sharply, resulting in the vehicle rolling onto its side.” The Sailor doesn’t remember exactly how it happened, but he lacerated his ear (*we have an idea; hint: It rhymes with “He wasn’t wearing a helmet.”*). The Sailor stated he “didn’t think it was necessary since the ATV had a roll cage” (*sigh*). His ear would say otherwise, as the injury was severe enough to require plastic surgery. — *Roll cages protect you from being crushed; they are no substitute for a helmet. Always wear your helmet.*
- **An En-Deer-ing Ride.** A Marine was riding his motorcycle with his spouse on the back when a group of deer ran across the road. One deer struck the Marine, knocking him and his spouse off the motorcycle. Then, like an episode of “When animals attack,” the deer attacked the Marine’s spouse! (*Perhaps this was the opportune scenario for using a Ka-bar*). Weaponless, the Marine dove to shield his spouse with his body until the deer ran off. — *Fortunately, the Marine’s spouse escaped uninjured, while our chivalrous Marine suffered a broken collarbone and strained ankle. This example is a reminder of the increased hazard of deer on the roads during fall. Dusk and dawn are the most active times for deer, which is also when our vision is most impaired.*
- **Quality Father-Daughter-Reptile Time.** While walking through the woods with his daughter collecting lizards and insects, a Sailor was bitten by a cottonmouth snake. He received medical attention resulting in a tetanus shot, anti-venom treatment, and an overnight hospital stay for observation. — *All this poor dad wanted to do was collect some reptiles and bugs with his kid (get that man a “Best Dad” coffee mug!). Along with the deer from our previous story, snakes – especially cottonmouths – are active in both spring and fall. Take care where you place your hands and feet when out in the woods. Try using a walking or hiking stick for checking under logs and rocks; it will be much less painful.*
- **Follow The Trail, Lest Ye Fail.** A Sailor went hiking (*alone*) on a local trail. As she returned to her starting point, she had to climb a steep embankment of soft dirt (*which she did not encounter on the way in*). As she attempted to set her right foot to start the climb up the alternate route, her foot sank into the dirt, causing her to lose balance and roll her ankle. She was able to return to her vehicle and drive to urgent care (*which*

Autumn Injuries

*we're sure was no small **feet** — pun intended), where she was diagnosed with a severe sprain and given 14 days of light duty followed by physical therapy. — Hiking is best done with a buddy, especially when the terrain is challenging or off well-traveled trails. It helps to have a second set of eyes to identify hazards on the trail and to assist if one of you gets hurt. Alone in the wilderness with a severe injury is not a fun way to enjoy nature.*

- **Doing The Right Thing Wrong.** An off-duty Sailor recognized his smoke detectors needed replacing (*excellent!*). He got an a-frame stepladder (the *right tool for the job*) and climbed up to do the work. The report doesn't provide much detail about "how" or "why" the job went wrong, but he lost his balance and fell, tried to break his fall with his right hand, and broke his wrist instead of breaking the fall. — *Well, it's possible to do the wrong thing while doing the right thing. We commend the conscientious Sailor for doing the right thing, fire-safety-wise, but something obviously went wrong in the execution. A-frame stepladders are relatively stable on a flat surface (like an interior floor), so we hazard a guess that he was standing near the top step (past that warning sign that says "Do not stand above this line") or was over-reaching to get to the detector. The report cites that the Sailor "failed to utilize another person as a spotter when on the ladder." OSHA guidance doesn't require a holder/spotter for stepladders (because they are more stable than extension ladders), but a ladder-holder is never a bad idea, especially the higher up you go.*

- **Gas What Happens Next.** A Sailor poured gasoline on wet wood and cardboard in a burn pit and lit it. — *Close your eyes and imagine. As the title suggests, we're sure you know what happened. If you guessed the gasoline ignited – violently – and caused second and third-degree burns to the Sailor's face and right arm, you are correct. We long for the day when there are no new mishaps in our database about using gasoline to start fires, but today isn't it. The report says the Sailor routinely dispensed materials via his burn pit. A dumpster would have been a better choice for wet material, but either way, gasoline is **NOT** a good choice for starting a fire. Please help make this story the last one in our database.*

- **Please, Don't Axe.** While chopping wood, a Sailor's axe slipped and chopped his shin instead (*yeesh!*). According to the report, the Sailor thought it was just a flesh wound and didn't seek medical attention until the wound re-opened a week later from wearing his boots. — *The lessons here are twofold: 1) Swinging an axe in an arc is asking for trouble. A straighter downward motion and a squared-off stance will keep your legs away from the axe's path in case you miss (source: [Scouts.org](https://www.scouts.org)); and 2) Please seek medical attention immediately if you suffer such an injury, because embarrassment is much less painful than gangrene.*

- **Should've Ordered Out.** A Sailor was watching TV when he heard his wife call for him from the kitchen in a panicked voice. As he entered the kitchen, he saw two-foot-high flames rising from a grease pot on the stove. He grabbed the half-full pot of burning grease by the handle (**No!**) and headed for the back door. In his rush, he successfully opened the patio door, but forgot to open the screen door. The ensuing bump and splash caused flaming grease to spill out onto his left hand and right foot. He was treated at the emergency room for a third-degree burn to his left hand. — *The ever popular – but wrong – "grab and run" is not the proper response to a grease fire. Covering the pot or using a dry chemical fire extinguisher is much safer.*

Key Takeaways

This dispatch reminds us that safety hazards await us no matter the season. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Do one thing each day that scares you." Sometimes a healthy dose of fear is a good thing; it's that "danger" alarm inside that helps keeps us safe. As you head out for the great outdoors, your backyard, or enjoying holiday time at home, stay attuned to the hazards around you and manage the associated risks. We're not saying to not enjoy the season, but to do it safely and responsibly so you can enjoy many more trips around the sun.

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