



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-18

### *Bladed Tool Mishaps*

As spring transitions to summer, more service members are taking to outdoor activities, including camping, yard work and starting home improvement projects they have been putting off. As these activities increase, so does hand tool use, and with it, injuries. This dispatch focuses on bladed tools and where some of our Sailors and Marines went wrong using them.

- *♪“I’m a lumberjack and I’m NOT Okay”♪*

A Sailor and his son were participating in father-son bonding by cutting firewood with a chainsaw. The son was handling the chainsaw while the father held the log steady near where the cut was being made



*(because nothing bad could possibly happen with your arms near a running chainsaw, yikes!).* While the son was cutting, the chainsaw kicked and moved toward the father’s arm. The son immediately released the trigger, but not before the blade impacted the father’s arm in four places. They cleaned the wounds with peroxide and bandaged the arm... then resumed cutting wood *(you must appreciate their dedication).* When the father was changing the bandages later that evening, he couldn’t get the wound to stop bleeding. At that point, he decided it was time to seek medical help. —*It may seem like common sense, but we recommend that the operator be the only person who should be near a running chainsaw. Also, any chainsaw injury is probably worthy of a visit to medical. Please don’t put it off.*

- *A Hatchet Swiinging, and a Miss.* A Sailor was camping and collecting wood for a fire. He found a fallen tree branch and began cutting it into smaller pieces. The report noted the hatchet blade was dull and not effective. The Sailor was kneeling on one knee and holding the branch steady with his left hand while swinging the hatchet with his right. The hatchet bounced and lacerated the Sailor’s left arm, as he rotated the branch to make a fresh swing. —*A bladed tool should not be defined as “bouncy.” A sharp hatchet hews and a dull one bounces. Sharpen your tools.*

- *Electric Hedge Trimmer Juggling.* A Sailor was clearing shrubs away from her HVAC using an electric hedge trimmer. She donned protective goggles and even a face shield, but did not utilize any safety gloves *(Can you sense the foreshadowing?).* The Sailor used her right hand to keep the power trigger compressed and the left to hold the forward handle. At some point during the hedge trimming, she lost her grip with the left hand and instinctively reached out to catch the falling trimmer. She didn’t release the trigger, though, and the still-running trimmer contacted her index finger, causing a deep laceration requiring stitches.

—*Please say this with us, “I will not try to catch running power tools.” We understand human nature compels us to prevent something from falling, but we must consciously overcome that urge when using bladed tools. You can buy a new blade, you can’t buy new fingers.*

- *DOG-gone It!* When using a table saw, most people have a healthy fear of getting a finger caught in the blade. In this scenario, the Sailor did not have enough of this fear. The report simply read that he took his eyes off the table saw when his dog went by and the saw lacerated his index finger. —*The report’s author sagely identified woodworking has the potential to cause serious injury when not done correctly and to sanitize the workspace of all distractions. We can definitely get behind this advice.*

## Bladed Tool Mishaps



- **Getting Tired on the Job.** Keeping with the theme of table saw use, a Marine was cutting a board with a table saw in his twelfth hour of a woodworking project. He noted he was feeling fatigued but wanted to finish his project. The Marine reached over the blade to adjust the material and lacerated three of his fingers. —*If only he had talked to the author of the previous report about the hazards of woodworking. While we appreciate the Marine-like dedication to getting the job done, please try to recognize when it's time to call it quits for the day. Table saws require your full attention. Operating one while half asleep will likely earn you a painful wake-up call.*

- **You're Pushing Too Hard.** A Sailor was trying to remove a portion of his broken bumper hanging off his car. He used a hack saw to attempt the cut, but the dull blade got stuck. As he pushed to free it, the handle broke. His hand continued forward and struck the saw blade causing a laceration. —*Very often, brute force is not the answer, especially with blades. If the tool isn't getting the job done, it might be time to replace the parts or replace the tool.*

- **So, Throwing Machetes Is a Thing.** We will wrap this dispatch up with a real doozy. The report starts with, "Service member was throwing a new machete at a tree" ... *Sigh.* The butt end of the handle hit the tree instead and the machete bounced back, striking the Sailor in the leg. The report specified the Sailor had 30 years of experience throwing bladed objects (*apparently, he didn't have enough experience to stand further back*). The distance was not far enough for the blade to fully rotate. —*There are machetes made for throwing (that's a new one for us), but the report didn't state if the machete at hand was of the throwing type. All we can say here is to conduct a thorough risk analysis when using—and if you must, throwing—blades.*

### Key Takeaways

All tools pose a potential hazard, but the risk of injury is understandably higher with the bladed types. Please take a moment to commit these critical takeaways to memory to avoid some of the above incidents the next time you break out your bladed tools. These takeaways should look familiar if you saw the Naval Safety Command's 101 Critical Days of Summer brief. If not, you can see the presentation on our public website here: [2023 Critical Days of Summer \(navy.mil\)](https://navsafecom.navy.mil/2023-Critical-Days-of-Summer).

**1. Use the right tool for the job.** Using the wrong tool is a recipe for malfunction, which is a recipe for injury. Be smart with your tools.

**2. Make sure the blade is sharp.** Dull blades require more force, increasing the chance of injury.

**3. Cut on a stable surface.** Unpredictability is not your friend when you are handling a bladed tool. Don't let the balance of your tool or the object being cut be uncertain.

**4. Keep body parts away from edges, cutting blades, and moving parts.** This takeaway seems like a "gimme," but when a blade is stuck, needs adjustment, cleaning, or whatever, people routinely reach for the blade first. Blades are meant to cut things, don't be that thing.

**5. Utilize guards and safety devices and follow the manufacturer's instruction manual.** There is a right way to use tools and there is a way that increases your risk of injury, i.e., the wrong way. User manuals and safety features exist for a reason; use them appropriately.

**6. Do not operate bladed tools if you feel tired or unwell.** When using tools that can cut your fingers off, or worse, you should be at mostly peak performance and alertness. If you feel particularly fatigued, please save the job for another day.

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