



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-34

## Holiday Hazards

***"This is a full-blown, four-alarm holiday emergency here!" — Clark Griswold***

For many of us, the countdown to the holidays began as soon as the annual pumpkin spice blitz hit coffee shops everywhere. Whatever starts your holiday timer, be it the first snow, holiday ads on your social media or planning your holiday leave, the holidays—and the hazards accompanying them—are fast approaching. As is our process here in the Safety Awareness Division, we've collected a few examples from our database to tell stories (*and they're all real*) that we hope you will remember as you prepare for the upcoming holiday season—and avoid the badness that others suffered in holidays past. We've also sprinkled in a few stats for good measure.



- **Rookie Mistake.** A Sailor never experienced a snowstorm and wanted to go outside with friends to play in the snow (*aww*). At some point during his first snowy romp, the Sailor slipped on ice that was buried beneath the snow. His natural reaction was to extend his left arm to cushion the fall—*which it did*—by absorbing the full force of the fall, causing pain in his wrist. Staying in the moment's elation, the Sailor continued to play in the snow for several more minutes before returning to his barracks room, where he took ibuprofen. The following day, the Sailor still had severe pain and went to medical, where he was diagnosed with a fractured wrist. —*You don't need to be a newbie to the snow to be caught off guard by hidden ice patches, but knowing how to fall can help. According to professional stunt performers, apply these tips: 1) bend your knees if you're about to fall, so you're closer to the ground; 2) don't stick your arms out! Cross your arms in front of you; 3) tuck your head to minimize the chance of hitting the back of your head on the ground; 4) fall on your side. See the tips from stunt performer Femi Olagoke here: [If you have to fall on ice, here's how not to hurt yourself \(nbcnews.com\)](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/fitness/fitness-tips-how-not-hurt-yourself-when-falling-ice-12345678)*
- **You Had One Job.** A Sailor was helping a neighbor put up holiday lights on their house. The Sailor was on a ladder and the neighbor was holding the bottom of it (*great work! Almost*). The neighbor stepped away from the ladder and shortly after, the ladder fell to the ground with the Sailor holding on for the ride. The neighbor drove the Sailor to the Emergency Room (ER)—*we can only imagine the guilt/apologetic conversation on the ride*. The Sailor's injuries included a chipped tooth, broken rib and laceration to his forehead. —*Taking charge of your neighbor's outdoor decorating is a nice gesture; just make sure your helper understands the importance of actually holding the ladder while you're on it.*
- **A Shattered Moment.** On Thanksgiving day, a Sailor was trying to make room on the counter while cooking and moved the blender to the floor. In an attempt at a romantic holiday moment, the Sailor went to kiss his spouse (*how sweet*). However, the sweetness came to an abrupt halt when the door swung open for an unknown reason and shattered the blender, sending one of the slivers into the Sailor's hand. The base medical team determined that the Sailor had lacerated two tendons, requiring surgery and 30 days of convalescent leave. —*We've probably all been there when Thanksgiving meal preps take over the kitchen. Be careful where you put your extra kitchen appliances so your holiday kiss becomes a sweet memory rather than a trip to the ER.*
- **Not in My Job Description.** An electrical worker was tasked to shovel snow from the sidewalks of the building. Shortly after he started, the employee felt pain in his lower back. After returning to the shop and reporting his injury, the employee was sent home to be reevaluated the next day. He was diagnosed with a strained back and placed on 23 days of light duty. The report later notes that the employee had a history of back problems. —*Snow shoveling is responsible for thousands of injuries and as many as 100 deaths each year, according to the National Institute of Health, and most were due to heart attacks. Shoveling snow is strenuous work, so go easy if you're not in the greatest shape. The cold weather can increase your heart*

## Holiday Hazards

rate and blood pressure, increasing your risk of a heart attack. Check out the National Safety Council tips for safe snow shoveling here: [Snow Shovel Safety - National Safety Council \(nsc.org\)](https://www.nsc.org/snow-shovel-safety)



- **A Shocking Discovery.** A Sailor was on the quarterdeck of his ship when he smelled something burning. As he approached some Christmas lights set up onboard, he grabbed the ship's rail for support and ZAP! The Sailor was shocked with 110 volts. The investigation revealed that the lights had a short and essentially turned the ship's rail into an electric fence.  
—According to the Electrical Safety Foundation, nearly 60,000 home fires are caused by electrical failure and an average of 150 home fires begin with holiday lights. Please verify that your holiday lights are in top condition before you put them up. After reading these statistics, we're going to check ours ASAP!

- **We're Going Out to Dinner Next Time.** In an all-too-common cooking incident, a Sailor was cooking dinner on his stove when the oil he was heating up spilled out of the pan and caught fire. The fire shot up and caused first-degree burns to his face and arms. Further ruining this unfortunate Sailor's meal and his day, the fire set off the sprinkler system, promptly flooding his apartment. The Sailor was taken to the hospital, where he was treated and released. —More stats incoming! Cooking fires makeup 44% of all reported home fires per year and 18% of all home fire deaths, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Grease fires are responsible for one in five home fire deaths, but we're not trying to scare you...OK, yes, we are. Give cooking your undivided attention, please.
- **Be Careful up There, Clark.** A Marine was on his roof removing Christmas lights. One of the strands of lights was caught on a shutter, so he moved to the roof's edge to reach the strand—and missed his first opportunity to do some time-critical risk management. As the Marine knelt and tried to free the lights, he realized the strand was further than he initially thought. Passing up on a second opportunity to rethink his strategy, our Lance Corporal Griswold kept reaching, lost his balance and fell off the roof. He fractured a rib and spent 14 days on light duty contemplating his poor decision-making on that painful day. —In 2022, 11,465 people were injured due to holiday-decorating falls. Don't overreach, so you don't add to the statistics.
- **Trouble in The Dohyo.** A command decided to have sumo wrestling at the unit holiday party ("sumo wrestling" and "holiday party"...hmm)—the kind of tournament where they don inflatable sumo wrestling suits. During the "basho" (a sumo match), a Sailor was knocked down and hit the back of her head on the ground. The next day, she was feeling unwell and a friend drove her to the base medical, where she was diagnosed with a concussion. —We have a couple of observations: 1) If you have a headache due to trauma, don't wait until the next day to seek medical help; 2) Those inflatable suits are costumes, not safety gear like the big padded ones. We're not sure mixing improvised wrestling at a party with drinking is the best plan, but if you blow off some steam at the holiday party, invest in the legit padded Sumo suits with padded headgear. "Anata no chīmu wa anata ni kansha surudeshou." Translation - Your team will thank you.

### Key Takeaways

Whatever activities you have in store this holiday season, a bit of planning and common sense will go a long way toward escaping the fate of the unfortunate victims in this dispatch. In each event, there was an opportunity to recognize, avoid or mitigate a hazard. Alcohol may have also been a factor in some of the mishaps, so please drink responsibly this holiday season.

For more information about fall and winter safety, visit our public website and check out our 2023 Fall and Winter Safety presentation in the Stand Down section here: [Safety Stand Down \(navy.mil\)](https://navysafetycommand.navy.mil)

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