



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-01

Winter Sports Mishaps V

With a New Year and winter season upon us, and some of us coming home from the holidays with new winter toys, the time is ripe to take a few moments and examine some winter sports-related mishaps from the past year. In 2023, more than 70 of our Marines and Sailors skied, skated or slid into some type of winter sports accident—and those were only the reported mishaps. We've selected a variety of incidents from our database, but it's worth noting that more than 80 percent of the total mishaps involved either skiing or snowboarding. So, if you're an avid skier or boarder, or received either of those as a gift this year, you might want to pay particularly close attention. With that said, grab a cup of hot cocoa and settle in for our fifth edition of winter sports mishaps, aimed at telling stories (*and they're all real*) that we hope you'll remember when you're out on the slopes and rinks.



- “Classes? We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Classes.” A Sailor and his girlfriend went to a winter resort to try snowboarding (*what better way to impress your partner than with some daring athletics?! Spoiler alert, things did not go well*). They rented the necessary gear and were encouraged by resort staff to attend the learner’s course and stick to the beginners’ slopes. They heeded the advice about the beginners’ slopes but decided they could manage without the lessons (*oh, the overconfidence of youth*). To their credit, they did manage the first four hours without incident before stopping for lunch—and then things went “downhill.” After returning to the slopes full of food and confidence, the Sailor ventured to the highest point of the beginners’ slopes. He began down the hill in an upward stance, with the nose of the board facing straight forward, an angle/stance he had not performed previously, and gravity took the reins. The Sailor quickly gained more speed than he was comfortable with, and when he tried to stop, he promptly fell on his face, tumbling and separating his shoulder. —*Some of us may think snow is soft, but it certainly isn’t when you hit it at speed. Don’t risk injury by figuratively ‘running before you can walk’ on the slopes. If you’re new to the sport, take lessons if they are available and stick to the simple moves until you gain some proficiency.*
- A “Trip” to the Emergency Room. In our next scenario, we journey to the world of ice hockey. We all know this is an aggressive sport with inherent risk, but this risk is magnified when players don’t follow the rules. A Marine was participating in a recreational hockey league. During a game, a fellow player trying to get the puck tripped him, causing him to slam headfirst into the wall, rendering him unconscious for about 20 seconds. The Marine was wearing a helmet and pads but still was diagnosed with a concussion at the emergency room. —*This incident is a rare case where we find no fault with the injured person; the other player’s desire for the puck was the issue. While we commend the tenacity, there is such a thing as overzealousness. Nobody is going to lose a pro-sports contract in these games, but you might lose a fellow Marine or shipmate if you cause an unnecessary injury. Play smart and safe.*
- “Watch Out For That Treeeee!” A Navy unit was conducting various cold weather training. The first day was reserved for acclimation and recreation, so the team elected to go snow tubing—*what’s the worst that could happen?* The report noted there was no site survey or safety brief conducted for this event, and one of the Sailors must have done a poor individual scan because it wasn’t until **after** he departed the hilltop that he realized that trees were going to be a factor. Inevitably, he clipped a tree, fracturing his hand and cutting his training short. —*This Sailor learned “firsthand” (see what we did there 😊) that a snow tube has minimal steering capability. Whatever your downhill transportation, scope the slope **before** you start the run and plan your route to avoid the pain obstacles can inflict on you.*

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- **Unintentionally Stopping on a Dime.** A Sailor was spending free time at a local ice rink. He rented skates and was provided a pair with a toe pick (the saw-like edge on the front of the blades), which he had never used for stopping before. The Sailor went onto the ice and attempted to test the toe pick/“brakes,” which must have been more responsive than he expected because he immediately fell forward. He tried to brace his fall by holding out his arms, which resulted in a fractured wrist. —*Ice is an unforgiving surface to fall on, so don't make it easier to hurt yourself by sacrificing your arms. As we mentioned earlier, “crawl-walk- run.” If you're using new equipment, seek guidance, and then practice before you*

take it to the next level. Falling tip: Whether on the ice or anywhere else, holding your arms straight out in a fall is a recipe for broken wrists. Tuck your arms and try to land on your side, not your face. If you missed this tip from our Holiday Hazards SA dispatch, SA 23-34, here's the link to falling tips from a pro stunt performer: [if you have to fall on ice, here's how not to hurt yourself \(nbcnews.com\)](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/fitness/fitness-12345678)

- **Minding One's Own Business.** Here, we have another case of the mishap victim being less at fault than the other person involved. A Sailor with considerable experience was skiing in the slow lane on the way back to the ski lift. Meanwhile, a snowboarder with considerably less experience was coming down the hill and picking up speed (*hmm, maybe he knows the guy from the first scenario*). The snowboarder lost control and crossed into the slow lane, colliding with the Sailor on the skis and inflicting a temporary back injury. —*Trees and terrain aren't the only hazards on the hills. Many ski slopes are crowded with people of varying experience levels. Just because you know what **you're** doing doesn't mean the people around you do. Keep an eye on your surroundings so you aren't surprised by a snowboarder with a braking problem.*
- **The Return of the Tree.** We'll finish with another example of close encounters of the tree kind. A Marine was near the end of a snowboard run and decided to take a small trail to finish the run. This trail was iced over, though. He hit an icy bump and became airborne, then fractured his shin on a tree (Ouch!). The report noted the mountain resort offered daily snow and trail reports. Had this Marine seen them, he might have avoided this accident and finished his run on his board instead of on a medevac toboggan. —*Take advantage of the available resources, like condition reports. Winter sports pose unique risks, particularly skiing and snowboarding, so minimize the risk by being as prepared as possible when you hit the slopes.*

Key Takeaways

While the mishaps are new, the general theme of winter sports hazards remains the same. We encourage you to review our previous four installments (on the NAVSAFECOM website) for more examples and takeaways. For now, here are the big three for this year:

1. **Plan and pay attention.** Risk mitigation should be a constant goal, even in recreation. Check out your surroundings before you begin your activity, and pay attention to changes. You want to avoid surprises when you're speeding down the mountain.
2. **Don't overestimate your abilities.** Just because you feel good on the bunny slope doesn't mean you're ready for the black diamond. And if you haven't done an activity since last season or since you were a kid, you can be a little (or a lot) rusty. Make realistic judgments on what you're ready to do and work your way up the skill ladder.
3. **Nobody is too cool for PPE.** PPE exists for a reason; wear it. You'll regret it if you find yourself in one of our future Safety Awareness Dispatches.

And remember, “Let's be careful out there”