



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-32

Outdoor Fires

When the lower temperatures of fall settle in, many of us will enjoy the warm glow of fire pits, bonfires and campfires to celebrate the season. There is something peaceful and entrancing about a warm outdoor fire... but you know that's not what this dispatch is about. It's not about gathering around the flickering flames and sharing stories while making smores or sipping hot cider. No, this dispatch is about how poor decisions get us burned—*literally and figuratively*. Every year, several Sailors and Marines mismanage outdoor fires and end up in the Emergency Room (ER). So, take a few moments to read about their choices before stacking your next fire so you may feel the warmth of a cozy fire, but not the 750-degree part.



- Caught Red Handed. In a report with frustratingly little information, we learned of a Sailor who burned his hand at a campfire. The report simply stated he “reached into the fire and grabbed a burning log (we have some questions, primarily “Why?”). The report did state the consumption of alcohol impaired the Sailor’s judgment (*this seems an understatement*). —*We can only assume the Sailor was trying to adjust the log and, in his inebriated state, did not realize the part of the log he grabbed was on fire. We are sure he quickly realized his mistake as his hand started to burn. There is a simple tool that could have prevented this mishap: firewood tongs. They’re worth the investment.*
- A Hot New Olympic Event. A group of Marines got together for a day of off-roading followed by a campfire in the desert. After bouncing around in their various four-wheel drives, they backed their vehicles up to their intended campfire location. One Marine had a fuel can mounted to the back of his SUV, which he took off and set down while unloading. The Marines, being Marines, wanted a massive fire, so they piled a large amount of brush and a wood pallet in the designated pit. Upon lighting the dry brush, an ember or a burning leaf must have floated out of this pile toward the fuel can because right after lighting the fire, the fuel can was seen with flames along its side. The owner ran and picked it up on the move, intending to spin and throw it like an Olympic hammer throw (*adding a whole new layer of suspense to track and field events*). When he picked up the can, vapors escaped a worn seal, causing a flash fire that engulfed the Marine. He dropped and rolled and managed to extinguish the flames. With his skin hanging off his arm, he initially rejected the need to go to the hospital (*adrenaline in action*). Fortunately, his friends had common sense, and they took him to the ER, where he was treated for second- and third-degree burns. —*Gasoline isn’t a thing to be nonchalant with. Its low flash point makes it extremely dangerous around open flames. Keep it somewhere safe, ideally a minimum of 50 feet away from fire.*
- ♪ You Put Your Left Foot In ♪. In another brief report, we learned of a Sailor who burned his foot while clearing a fire pit. The narrative simply said the Sailor used “appropriate caution in extinguishing the fire and picking up the fire pit, but didn’t consider that the sand under the pit would be hot. He stepped on the hot sand and burned the sole of his left foot.” —*Hmm. Not to disagree with the author of this elaborate report (“elaborate” is sarcasm), but we don’t see “appropriate caution” here. One would argue it is simply common sense to put out a fire before moving the fire pit. And if this Sailor burned the sole of his foot, it sounds like he didn’t have shoes on, which is definitely not being appropriately cautious. We didn’t think we’d have to say this, but please wear shoes when working with and around fire.*

Outdoor Fires



- 🎵 *Round, round, get around; I get around.* 🎵 A Sailor was attending a bonfire on the beach with some friends when he decided to get up and move to the other side of the fire. Instead of taking the two extra steps to walk around the outside of the others sitting around the fire, the Sailor opted to slip between the people and the fire by walking on the lip of the fire pit. He was not as agile as he thought, though, and his foot slipped into the fire, resulting in blisters. He didn't think he needed medical attention until the next day when he realized the blisters had grown and he lost feeling in his toes (Yikes!), prompting him to get proper care. — *The shortest distance between two points isn't always the*

safest. Given the choice between walking a little further and a balancing act on a fire pit, we suggest going around.

- **Going Long.** A Sailor was at the beach playing football and was apparently unaware of a lit firepit in the vicinity (*seems like a pretty big thing not to be aware of, but that is what the report said*). He was passed the ball and, while looking in the opposite direction, ran straight toward and tripped into the firepit. He got several burns on his hands and arms for his lack of situational awareness. — *This problem seems less about being smart with fire and more about just knowing it's there. We suggest choosing a safer area of the beach to have your football game, preferably without fire.*
- **GASOLINE IS NOT A SMART WAY TO START A FIRE!** The title gives this story away, but we can't drive this point home enough. There are too many examples in our database to ignore it. A Marine had some friends over for a bonfire. The firepit and logs were set up and shortly after everyone arrived, the host went outside to start the fire. He didn't know somebody had put gasoline on the logs. He put the lighter in and—FOOM!—the fuel blew up in his face. The Marine asked his friends to take him to the hospital, where he was treated for minor burns. — *Okay, listen closely. The moment gasoline is poured onto logs, it creates vapors. These vapors are highly combustible, and this is why they make a big fireball when you light gasoline. We don't know anyone who wants to be engulfed in a fireball, so stop using gasoline like it's lighter fluid! Rant, over...for now.*

Key Takeaways

Sitting around a fire is a great way to spend time in the fall. But if you don't respect the fire, it's going to burn you. We ask that you take a moment to plan out your next bonfire and ensure you take the appropriate precautions to enjoy your outdoor fire safely.

1. **Prepare your site.** Pick a site that is far enough away from anything you don't want to catch fire. Clear a ten-foot diameter area around your pit of anything that could catch fire, e.g., leaves and sticks, and emphasize that gasoline and other combustibles should also be out of this ring.
2. **Know how you're going to put the fire out.** Keep an ample amount of water and a shovel nearby as a minimum. We also suggest having a fire extinguisher ready if the fire gets out of hand or escapes the fire area in the event somebody doesn't follow takeaway #1.
3. **Extinguish the fire properly.** Smokey the Bear would want us to harp on this point. When you're done with a fire, it needs to be completely extinguished before leaving or going to sleep. Ideally, let the fire burn down to ashes, then pour water all around it. Stir everything with a shovel, then test it for heat. The pit should be completely cooled.
4. **Don't get drunk and play with fire.** We have to say it: Having an adult beverage around the fire is one thing, but please keep your wits about you when you're near fire. If you don't, you're just asking to have an accident like falling in the fire or crossing into the realm of the ridiculous where people grab burning logs with their bare hands.

And remember, "Let's be careful (with fire) out there."