



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-05

Knife Mishaps IV

"Whosoever cuts a bagel in thy palm will suffer great wrath." —Ancient safety proverb

The tradition of Sailors (and Marines) carrying knives dates back centuries. Rooted in the practical needs of maritime life, and occasionally warfighting, a knife can serve many critical uses from cutting lines to freeing someone in an emergency or preparing food. Knives are very efficient at their purpose—cutting things—whether that “thing” is the intended target or not. A knife symbolizes readiness and resilience, but it doesn't look resilient or ready when you accidentally stab yourself or your friend.

In the year since our last edition of knife mishaps, there were more than 125 reported knife-related mishaps, and we think that number is **way** low. Regardless of the incident reporting, too many of our Sailors, Marines and civilian employees are needlessly slicing and jabbing themselves. The most common knife-to-flesh activity occurred during food prep, e.g., cutting vegetables, bagels, and the like. Tied at second were cutting boxes and zip ties. The two top reasons for the unintended slices and stabs were cutting toward the body and choosing the knife as the wrong tool for the job. Now, without further *dull* stats, let's *cut* to the examples of our “knights of the knife” and *learn by reading, not bleeding*.



- Double Digits. Here are two examples of similar cutting techniques yielding the same result. In our first story, a Sailor was attempting to cut an unripe avocado while holding it in the palm of her hand (*Noooo!*). The avocado was difficult to cut and when she tried to remove the pit, the knife slipped and sliced her finger, requiring several stitches. In our second knife-to-the-hand incident, an employee was cutting a bagel with a serrated knife. In a brief moment of inattention his hand slipped and the knife sliced into his left middle finger requiring five stitches. —*See the safety proverb. Both examples show your fingers are no match for a blade. Don't hold an avocado (or bagel) in your hand while cutting it or removing the pit. Put it on a flat surface to cut; and for the avocado pit, try a spoon to remove it instead.*
- It's All in the Wrist. In a classic “wrong tool for the job” moment, a Sailor was chipping paint with his knife. As you might have already guessed, the knife eventually slipped and stabbed the Sailor in his wrist. The Sailor's wrong use of his knife cost him five stitches. —*We're a bit concerned that, not only did the Sailor use the wrong tool, but the report made no mention of it, noting only he didn't “don the proper PPE.” Even with proper eye protection and gloves, only wrist gauntlets would have protected this Sailor while chipping paint with a knife. A paint scraper, chipping hammer or the like would make more sense. Give your people the right tool for the job, please.*



- Getting the Point. A civilian employee was attempting to cut a zip tie from an air hose when the knife slipped. The momentum carried the knife into the employee's opposite forearm causing a deep laceration. The report is lacking on the number of stitches required, but the pain alone should be enough to deter him from cutting toward his body again. —*Knives aren't the best tool for cutting zip ties. They're actually some of the worst. They don't cut plastic well and they dull very quickly. The report recommended side cutters for cutting zip ties and we agree (See photo at left). The cutters are inexpensive too, so consider issuing them to anyone who*

needs to cut zip ties. They'll do a better job and will save a trip to the emergency room. If you are using the wrong tool (which we don't condone), cut away from your body parts.

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- **Cutting the Cheese.** To reinforce our “*point*” about cutting away from yourself, a Sailor was at home preparing dinner, which involved cutting up a block of cheese. With a standard kitchen knife in hand, he proceeded to slice the cheese block—toward his body! (*Why, oh why?!*) The knife slipped causing a ½” deep by 1” long laceration in his left thumb. His ill-advised cutting method earned him five stitches and he was placed on 14 days light duty. —*We repeat, do not cut toward your body parts, or anything else you don’t want to slice or jab!*
- **The Iron-y Chefs.** An employee was using a kitchen knife to chuck food into a trash can, hereafter known as the “Knife-Holding Food Chucker” (KHFC). He was using his left hand and his knife-holding right hand to chuck the food while one of his colleagues was standing close behind him. In a painful twist of irony, KHFC called out “be careful,” which we presume to mean, “Look out; I’m going to throw stuff away with a knife right behind you.” Unfortunately, he said it too late and the colleague behind him had no time to respond before turning around and getting sliced by the KHFC from his little finger to his palm. (*Yeesh!*) —*Use the knife for the job it is designed for and put it down when you’re doing something else. Knives aren’t food launchers.*



- **“A Shrubbery!”** A Marine was assigned as a machine gun team member for a field exercise. In an effort to create a firing position, he began removing surrounding shrubbery with a knife. During the “de-shrubbing” process (*and while cutting toward his body*) he stabbed himself in the leg. Our landscaping specialist received an unknown number of stitches and was released back to full duty. (*Oo-rah!*) —*We don’t expect Marines to have pruning shears in the field, but (here it comes again) if he **didn’t cut toward himself**, he would have had a more productive and stab-free machine gun exercise. Aim the sharp end toward the shrub (and the enemy), not yourself (See photo at left). It’s not a real marking, but it illustrates our “point.”*

Key Takeaways

If you’ve read our earlier editions of knife mishaps, these takeaways will be a bit familiar – and for good reason. If we’d adhere to these two principles, we’d eliminate most human error-related knife mishaps.

1. **Knives aren’t chipping hammers, zip tie cutters, or [insert tool here].** We understand a knife may be the only tool you have on you at the time. If you would take a moment to grab the correct tool for the job, we’d *cut* our knife mishap rate by nearly one-third. If that isn’t an option, be careful and don’t cut toward your body parts. If you find yourself having to force the blade or you’re sawing away at something, the knife is probably not the right tool.
2. **Respect the blade.** Knives don’t seem to command the respect they deserve. There’s no training or licensing required, and they usually don’t come with an owner’s manual. Perhaps they should, given the injuries they cause when misused. Treat your knife like a highly effective cutting tool by practicing good blade safety. As with firearms, always point (cut) in a safe direction. Be aware of what you are cutting and what is behind it (cut away from your body parts.)

And remember, “Let’s be careful out there.”