



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



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Bicycle Mishaps II

Whether it's for exercise, fun, or as an alternate means of transportation, riding a bike is something most of us can relate to. Hopefully fewer of us can relate to getting in a bicycle accident, but they do happen. Here are some examples of our fellow Sailors and Marines who might not agree with the idiom "easy as riding a bike." Please read and learn from them.

- **Bicycle vs Wall.** You can probably guess from the title where this is going, but this report honestly left more questions than answers. A Sailor was riding a bicycle to work and started riding down a hill. He made a sharp turn and lost control of the bike (*okay, why did he turn... was there something in the way?*). The report simply stated the Sailor then crashed into a cement barrier destroying his bicycle (*how fast was he going?!*). Not only did the bike lose in this game of chicken, but so did the Sailor. He was treated for shoulder and knee trauma and put on light duty for over a week. —*We have several questions, mostly why did he make that turn? Was there something less desirable to ride toward than a concrete barrier? The report's only causal factor was the Sailor was riding in unfamiliar terrain and suggested caution. That's a fair judgment, but we'll specifically add to slow down in unfamiliar terrain.*
- **Bicyclist vs Bicyclist.** A Sailor was commuting into town on his bicycle and came upon a fellow bicycle enthusiast. The Sailor deemed his speed faster than his compatriot and decided to pass him. That was fine, but he failed to give the other cyclist a warning of his presence or his intent to pass. The other bicyclist unexpectedly swerved into his path (*maybe he subconsciously didn't want to be passed*) and the two collided. The Sailor went home with minor abrasions (*and maybe a bruised ego*). —*Any experienced bike riders out there are probably cringing at this. Proper bike etiquette (and one might argue, common sense), requires bicyclists to announce when they're passing someone. Just like in Captain America, a simple "on your left" will suffice. If Steve Rogers does it, so should you.*
- **Bicyclist vs Tow Truck.** A Sailor was riding his bicycle to a friend's BBQ in the evening. He was riding on the sidewalk, came to a crosswalk and immediately entered it. At the same time, though, a tow truck was turning onto the same street. The Sailor didn't have lights on his bike or reflective clothing, and as such the driver didn't see him until the truck struck the Sailor. The Sailor wasn't wearing a helmet, so he was lucky to only receive a leg injury. —*The obvious guidance here is to use lights and clothing to improve other's visibility of you.... and a helmet! The not-so-obvious guidance is to not ride on the sidewalk. This may seem counterintuitive, but the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) advises bicyclists to not ride on sidewalks because of cases like this. Bicyclists move faster than pedestrians and drivers don't look for them as readily when backing out or turning. Drive predictably and visibly. Don't assume the traffic sees you. Even if you have the right of way...the accident hurts you more than the truck.*
- **The Road Warrior.** A Marine was riding in a foreign country known for more aggressive drivers who don't heed traffic laws (*let alone a lowly bicyclist on the road*). The Marine was riding in a narrow bicycle lane when a car began to pass him on the left. The driver unwittingly drifted into the bike lane sideswiping the Marine on his bike. He was forced hard to the right causing the front tire to hit the curb, sending the Marine flying over the handlebars. His injuries were limited to cuts and scrapes, but he might hesitate before riding in this country again. —*There's a reason Mad Max didn't ride a bicycle. It can be the wild west out there in some other cultures' driving. You can't do anything about the drivers around you, but you can make a mental note to be exceptionally aware of them and ride defensively, especially when in a location where motorists are known to drive dangerously. You can hope drivers in cars are looking for you on your bike, but that doesn't mean they're going to.*



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- **Learner's Permit.** A Sailor who wasn't taught to ride a bike growing up managed to learn how to ride after joining the Navy. Still being new to the act, he decided to practice one day (*wise choice*). He started by doing circles in the parking lot of the gym ("*Excellent, Smithers*"). With his confidence up, he then moved onto the road and then... down **DEAD MAN'S HILL!** (*okay, it wasn't called that, but it was a slightly steeper hill than this novice was ready for*). As he picked up speed, the bike began to wobble and he lost control, falling to the side and spraining his wrist. —*We jest lightly, but we genuinely commend this Sailor for deciding to learn to ride and trying to slowly gain experience. The lesson he learned the hard way (and we'll hope you'll learn from him) was to know his limitations. This advice applies to any rider, new or experienced. There are plenty of trails and roadways even practiced riders should be wary on.*

- **Working Up a Sweat.** A Sailor went for an evening bike ride to exercise. He was putting in a decent effort on the outbound leg and was starting to perspire (*you'll see why this matters soon*). On the return leg, the Sailor was riding on the sidewalk (*okay, we told you that's not the best idea*) and approached a crossing side street. The Sailor sensibly decided to slow

down. The report says he "pressed" the brake levers, but what follows makes it sound like he slammed them. The report said the sudden decrease in velocity and excessive perspiration of his palms (*see, we told you it would come up*) caused his hands to slip off the handlebars. He apparently was then launched over the handlebars hitting his palms and knees on the sidewalk. —*The author of the report suggests the rider use gloves in the future to provide better grip on the handlebars. We agree with that advice, but we also suggest slowing down more gradually if possible. As mentioned earlier, avoid sidewalk riding, when possible, especially if riding at higher speeds.*

Key Takeaways

Our takeaways mirror a previous dispatch on this subject. Before you ride, it's important to note the obvious (*but often overlooked*) fact: You've got a higher chance of injury when you get in a bicycle accident compared to just being on two feet. A bike lets you attain high speeds without the benefit of many protective barriers. With that in mind, please remember this guidance before you next start pedaling.

- 1. Ride prepared.** At a minimum, this means **put on a helmet**. You should also wear high visibility clothing. Bicyclists not being visible is the second leading cause in fatal bike crashes (*the leading cause is failing to yield the right of way; the following takeaways will help with that*). If you're riding at night, have both front and rear facing lights (*this is mandatory if riding on base*). In addition to safety equipment, make sure your bike is well functioning and fits you. The wrong size bike will be difficult to handle, especially if important things like brakes don't work properly.

- 2. Ride defensively – focused and alert.** Focus on the road and traffic around you. Assume others can't see you (*drivers and bicyclists; like the examples above*) and anticipate their actions. If you're already looking for the next hazard, you'll respond more quickly.

- 3. Ride predictably.** This means ride where you are expected to be seen, and it allows others to expect your next move. Ride with the flow of traffic and adhere to street signs, signals and road markings, just like a car (*this isn't just good advice, it's the law*). Bicycles are treated like vehicles on the road. Also, as mentioned in the narratives, minimize sidewalk riding. In addition to drivers not seeing you as easily, sidewalks can end unexpectedly, forcing you into traffic. If you are on the sidewalk, slow and look for traffic before you cross the street, and again, assume others can't see you.

Visit the NHTSA Bicycle Safety Webpage for more bike safety tips and statistics.

<https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/bicycle-safety>

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