



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 21-28

THE SLIPS AND TRIPS OF FALL

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." – Confucius

As we emerge from another hot summer, fall is right around the corner. We'll be spending more time enjoying the great outdoors, holiday cooking, favorite sweaters, football, and for some, all things pumpkin spice. 🍂 The end of the 101 Critical Days of Summer doesn't mean the risks disappear; it means they reappear in new forms. No matter the season, Sailors, Marines, and civilians find various ways to hurt themselves, and unfortunately, our database is rarely starved for examples. In an effort to prevent future mishaps, this lesson aims to highlight those hazards of fall. We present the Slips and Trips of *Fall* (*they aren't all actually slips and trips, but you get the play on words*); a smattering of unfortunate (*and preventable*) events to remind you of the dangers that still exist after the days of summer are gone. Please read and learn from our services' "Fall-en."



- Fiddler On The Roof. A Marine's home gutters needed de-leafing. Rather than doing said leaf removal from the ladder, he opted to perform the task from the roof. Because you're reading about it here, yes, the Marine fell off the roof, fracturing his ankle. — *The report doesn't indicate how long the Marine spent on light duty, but we're pretty sure it was long enough to consider his choice to work from the roof and not the ladder. Perhaps he even had time to shop online for one of the many gutter-cleaning gadgets that don't require a ladder or going on the roof. We are thankful he wasn't hurt worse. Fall fatalities can happen from heights less than 10 feet. The ladder is safer than the roof.*

- Almost the MVP. A Sailor was playing touch football with his shipmates during lunchtime. On a running play, he made a quick move to the left to avoid being tagged and felt a small twinge in his calf. Sensing that it was only a pulled muscle, the Sailor sat out the rest of the game (*good*), but he didn't seek medical attention until a few days later after elevation and icing didn't seem to be working. At the emergency room, he was diagnosed with a medial head gastrocnemius tear (*fancy words for "torn calf muscle"*). — *The report notes that the Sailor "overexerted himself" and "needs to know his physical limits." We agree with that assessment. Have fun in the game, but please go easy out there.*



- Call The Dog Whisperer. In an unintended reenactment of the dogs / turkey scene from the movie "A Christmas Story," a Sailor's family dog attempted to eat a Thanksgiving meal from the dining room table. In an attempt to discipline the dog by pushing him off the table, the Sailor missed and hit the table instead. His swipe was powerful enough that he lacerated his pinky finger in the process (*karma?*). — *One trip to the emergency room (ER), five stitches, and a cold meal later, our "Old Man Parker" may want to consider obedience training for his dog and perhaps a yoga or meditation class for himself. Relax; don't let holiday stress get the best of you. And keep tabs on the dog before serving dinner.*

THE SLIPS AND TRIPS OF *FALL*

• 🎵“Grease Is The Word.”🎵 A Sailor was cooking at home when a grease fire started. — *Let’s pause a moment here and list the best options for extinguishing a grease fire; a) Cover it with the lid; b) Pour baking soda on it (for very small fires); or c) Use a Class B dry chemical fire extinguisher (for large fires). In all cases, always turn off the source of heat! Now back to our story, which doesn’t include any of these methods.* — The Sailor opted for the highly discouraged, “pick up the pan and attempt to carry it outside”



method. In proving just why moving a burning pan of grease is a no-no, the Sailor stumbled and spilled the hot grease on their chest, hands, forearm, and foot, causing severe burns requiring 10 days in the hospital and 29 days sick in quarters (SIQ). — *Burns like these are a horrible, painful way to learn how not to put out a grease fire. The Sailor is fortunate to have survived and not to have set the house ablaze. If this happens, please (PLEASE!) leave the pan where it is, and use the options above.*

• Slip Sliding Away. A Sailor was riding his motorcycle at approximately 55mph and decreasing speed to 20mph before a 90-degree left-hand turn. While rounding the turn, the rear tire momentarily lost traction. The tire then abruptly regained traction, causing the motorcycle to suddenly stand up vertically from a left lean, ejecting the rider into a ditch. The Sailor suffered a broken collar bone and minor bruising. One identified cause of this accident was dirt and debris on the roadway. — *The fall season only adds to the likelihood of additional debris from leaves on the roads. In these conditions, even the speed limit may be too fast. Take the weather, visibility, and road conditions into account for a safer ride to work...all year.*



• Chunkin Pumpkins. Just when we thought we’d seen all the potential fall seasonal hazards, enter the pumpkin toss. A Sailor was enjoying the local pumpkin patch festivities. While participating in the pumpkin toss, he strained his back, requiring a trip to the ER. — *The report doesn’t indicate the Sailor’s final standings in the event, but we hope that, despite the pain and two days in the hospital, our squash-slinging Sailor managed to have a “gourd” time. Hazards are everywhere. Don’t overdo it.*

• “It’s Not Just A Boulder, It’s A Rock!” — Sponge Bob. A Sailor went for a run just after sunrise. Somewhere around the four-mile point in his seven-mile run, he came across a dry creek bed. While jumping from rock to rock, the Sailor soon realized that the creek wasn’t quite dry enough. He slipped on one of the wet rocks and fell, injuring his leg. Unaware of the severity of his injury, the Sailor continued down the mountain, walking the remaining three miles home. He was later diagnosed with a fractured fibula (*lower leg*), and placed in a walking boot for 30 days. — *Trail running is obviously not the same as the track. This Sailor’s overconfidence and non-trail running shoes contributed to his fall, according to the report. Equip yourself with the proper footwear, and be wary of slip hazards.*

• Beware The Serpent. A Marine was helping a friend track a deer in the woods. While tracking the deer through a swampy area, the Marine stepped over a log and was bitten in his right hand by a copperhead snake. He drove himself to the nearest hospital, where he received anti-venom and was held for 20 hours for observation. After two days SIQ, the Marine returned to full duty. — *Did you know that many species of snakes, including copperheads, are more active in the fall months? They also breed in both spring and fall, making them more aggressive during those periods. Do a quick web search to see a list of ways to avoid snake bites. Watching where you step and where you put your hands are a good start.*

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- Sometimes You Get The Bear. Sometimes The Bear Gets You. In another unexpected animal encounter, a Marine was driving around a curve late one evening when a large black bear ran out of the woods at full speed. Before the Marine could react, the bear impacted the left quarter panel of his car. Fortunately for this Marine, he only suffered a strained tendon in his neck and needed two days on light duty. — *The report doesn't detail the bear's fate, but the Marine's vehicle only sustained minor damage, so it likely survived to scare the dickens out of future drivers. As with copperheads, bears are more active in the fall before hibernating, and this accident occurred in an area with a fairly robust black bear population. That's something to keep in mind when you're driving in bear country in the fall, or any time of year for that matter.*

- You Light Up My Life. A Sailor was smoking a Thanksgiving turkey using a propane smoker. At some point during the smoking, the flame went out. The Sailor went to reignite it (*without allowing the built-up gas to dissipate*). The ensuing "FOOM!" caused second-degree burns to the Sailor's face and various additional first-degree burns, according to the report. — *The report doesn't indicate how the turkey turned out, but the Sailor probably didn't much care at that point (we know we wouldn't, if we were in that much pain). According to the National Fire Protection Association, an average of approximately 5,000 people are treated at hospitals annually from thermal burns like gas exploding. Please don't be one of these painful statistics.*



- The First Cut Is The Deepest. A Sailor was preparing a bonfire at his apartment building. Like a wilderness survival show gone wrong, he decided to chop the wood with a K-Bar knife instead of an axe or hatchet (*why, oh why?!).* After a couple of swings, he missed the wood and chopped his left wrist instead. — *The report is scant on the details of his wound, but it was severe enough to require surgery and 30 days on light duty. If you're not stranded in the wilderness with only a knife to survive, use the proper tool for the job. Whatever the tool – be it a knife, axe, or hatchet – consider where that blade is headed if you miss.*

- Running On Empty. A Marine was driving back to work after visiting family 180 miles away. At approximately 0300, and with only three hours of sleep, he fell asleep at the wheel and rear-ended another vehicle at a stoplight. While the Marine's car was severely damaged, he managed to drive to the base and was treated for neck pain. — *This accident could've ended much worse for our sleepy Marine, and for the people he hit! Drowsy driving is as dangerous as drinking and driving. Travel to visit family is common over the holidays. Plan your trip to allow enough time to travel without needing to drive overnight just to make it to work on Monday. Take an extra leave day if you must; you earned it.*

- Failure To Launch. One fall afternoon, a Sailor arrived at the local nature preserve for a hike with his spouse, but unfortunately, he never made it out of the parking lot (*sigh*). After donning all appropriate (*and soon unneeded*) hiking equipment, the couple started walking toward the trail entrance. After walking about a quarter-mile toward the trail, the Sailor tripped and fell face-first onto the pavement with his arms "folded and locked around his chest." With help from his spouse, the Sailor managed to make the return quarter-mile trek back across the parking lot to their car with a dislocated shoulder. Later, the local hospital reset his shoulder, and our "Titan of the trail" received two days SIQ and five days on light duty. — *Be careful out there on the trails folks ... if you make it that far. Apparently, walking in parking lots can be hazardous too.*



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• Send In The Clown. From the “We can’t make this stuff up” locker, our final story is like a scene straight out of a 1980s B-rated horror flick. A Sailor was at a get-together the night before Halloween. Another attendee scared the Sailor with his clown costume, and the Sailor ran into the woods behind the residence with the clown chasing him. While running away, the victim...uh, we mean, Sailor... ran into a log that was at knee level, and then “ran into” the ground. He received a contusion above his knee and abrasions on his elbows. Doctors later diagnosed him with ligament and muscle tears.



The pain, physical therapy, and 30 days of light duty are a high price to pay for finding out you’re coulrophobic (*an irrational fear of clowns*). Also, if a clown is chasing you, don’t run into the woods; that’s what they want you to do! Here’s another Halloween tip: You may not want to go to the party if it’s at the “Last House On The Left,” “The House At The End Of the Street,” or “The Cabin In The Woods.”

Key takeaways / Lessons Learned

This lesson is another reminder that potential hazards are always present, no matter the season or your duty status. We’ve merely collected fall-like activities that can get us hurt if we’re not careful. While each example here presents unique circumstances, you can mitigate them with a bit of common sense and applying risk management principles just like you do on the job.

For the Naval Safety Center’s 2021 Fall and Winter Campaign presentation, visit the NAVSAFECEN public website (address below) in the Safety Promotions section.



For tips and updates throughout the fall and winter seasons, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

From Secretary Del Toro’s 10 August 2021 message to the fleet, “Please know your safety and welfare will always be paramount to me...” We hope your safety is paramount to you too.

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

