



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 22-03

WINTER SPORTS MISHAPS III

"In Finland I was invited to go cross country skiing, and all I could think was, 'Is fun illegal here?' "
— Comedian Jim Gaffigan

With the Winter Olympics just weeks away, many service members and their families are inspired to **hit** the slopes and trails (*pun intended*). If you've followed our lessons learned series on the topic, you know that more than 300 Sailors and Marines are injured in winter sorts annually, according to a 2018 Naval Safety Center study. Our database nearly mirrors the national numbers showing that skiing, snowboarding, and skating are the top three winter sports for injuries. For the breakdown of our stats, check out Winter Sports Mishaps, LL 20-02.



As you'll read here, we continue getting hurt out there on the slopes, and many of the mishaps are preventable. With a bit of practice, patience, and common sense, you can avoid injuries from slips and tumbles like the winter warriors we discuss below. We've captured some examples from the most popular winter sports events for our very own naval safety winter "Oh-nolympics."

- First time Snowboarding. To kick the competition off, this report begins with a Marine who "went on their first snowboarding trip ever." The report says up-front that he "did not attend a class nor training for snowboarding," so you know that's not a good sign for what's to come. On one of the slopes, the Marine lost control and ran into a tree-line – and then a tree – (*and there ya' go*). The ski patrol transported him to the emergency room, where he received stitches and staples to close a laceration in his forehead, but no lost workdays (*Oorah!*). — *The report doesn't say if this Marine was wearing a helmet, but one would likely have prevented his head laceration. Wear your PPE, and go easy the first time. And, Marine or not, it's really okay to take a day off after a head injury and staples.*
- High Traffic Ski Jump. "As an experienced snow skier, a Sailor skiing on an intermediate run went off a small jump," according to the report. Seems easy enough for an experienced skier, right? During the landing, the Sailor attempted to avoid another skier and fell, twisting their skis. Complicating matters, the toe binding didn't release. When the Sailor's upper body rotated, the skis didn't, causing a spiral leg fracture (*which sounds horribly painful*). — *Not everyone on the slope is experienced, even if you are. Maintain situational awareness, and ski at a safe speed for the traffic.*
- Downhill Saucer Sledding. A Sailor was sledding with their children on the snowy hill near their residence. On one of the runs, the Sailor lost control and was thrown from the sled, immediately feeling pain in their foot and ankle. X-rays later revealed the Sailor broke their foot. — *The report doesn't say if the Sailor used Clark Griswold's patented "non-caloric silicon-based kitchen lubricant," but it did say that "it is possible that member was going too fast down the hill..." It's fun sledding with the kids, but perhaps refrain from attempting an "amateur recreational saucer land speed record."*
- Singles Ice Face Skating. On his first time ice skating, a Sailor attempted to stop, but hit a crack in the ice, "which sent him flying and caused him to land on his face." The face-landing was so hard that it knocked him out for a few minutes! The report recommended that the Sailor get more practice building his skill level, instead of doing too much on his first day of ice skating. — *Yes, knocked out on the first day! Perhaps first learning how to properly fall would be a good start. There really is a technique; just web search it and voila!*

- **The Rail Fail.** As a Sailor was snowboarding down the slope, he saw a rail and desired to ride it. Once committed to the rail, he noticed his board starting to stick. Before he had time for a quick dismount, the rail decided for him. The snowboard abruptly stopped, but the Sailor didn't and was "launched forward," according to the report. Because you're reading about it here, you know the Sailor didn't stick the landing. He landed on his shoulder and was sent to the emergency room for X-rays. — *Fortunately for our Ranger of the Rail, no bones (or snowboarding records) were broken that day. The report stated the mishap occurred on the Sailor's 16th run as temperatures rose throughout the day, causing the rails to become sticky. Be mindful of changing conditions on the slopes (and rails), and you'll improve your chances of staying vertical.*
- **Hockey Stop Competition.** Sometimes we aim to do everything right, but end up just shy of the mark. In this mishap, a Sailor wanted to learn to play hockey, and, acknowledging his amateur status, he enrolled in hockey lessons (*good call!*). The Sailor obtained the required PPE consisting of a helmet, shoulder pads, leg pads, shin guards, and gloves (*excellent!*). Although there were full-face shields available, he elected to purchase an open-face helmet, which was the minimum league requirement (*a decision he would soon regret*). During the first lesson, the Sailor was practicing "hockey stops" on his weak (*non-dominant foot*) side. During his first attempt, the Sailor "believes" his left foot dug too deeply into the ice, which caused him to flip over and hit his head. He wasn't sure what happened, because he suffered memory loss, but witnesses said he landed face-first on the ice. His injuries included a maxillary bone (upper jaw) fracture, a mild concussion, and a laceration to his right cheekbone. — *Wearing face protection may not look cool, but neither does a broken face, and it's a lot less painful.*
- **The Downhill Fall.** In this final event, A Marine was skiing with his spouse on the intermediate trail. During the descent, the Marine took a fall, impacting his shoulder and head. He was wearing a helmet, which lessened the blow to his head, but his shoulder bore a large amount of impact. He was only slightly injured (*because he wore a helmet*), so he "gathered himself up, skied down the mountain, and went to the resort clinic." He was placed on seven days of light duty to recover. — *Kudos to this Marine for wearing his helmet! His injuries could have been much worse if he hadn't. Please join our Duke of the Downhill in making PPE cool.*

Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

In this third installment of winter sports mishaps, we've seen a couple of common themes that, if mitigated, could have prevented mishaps or at least minimized the injuries. We encourage you to view editions one and two (LL 20-02 and LL 21-01) for more examples and key takeaways. Here are a few from this year's events.

1. **Learn how to fall.** It may seem odd to factor in taking a fall while on the slopes, but it happens to the most seasoned athletes. If you plan for the inevitable fall by learning how to do it correctly, you're less likely to suffer serious injury. There are plenty of resources to show you how to properly fall while engaging in your favorite winter sport. Just head to "them internets" for tutorials and in-person training.
2. **Know your limits.** This takeaway appears in nearly all lessons learned where physical activity is involved. In this case, choose slopes and maneuvers that match your skill level. You're not in a James Bond movie, slow down.
3. **Monitor the traffic and conditions on the slopes.** Ski resorts and sledding hills can get more crowded throughout the day. The snow conditions can change with temperatures changes. Taking these conditions into account can help keep you on the slopes and out of the emergency room.
4. **If there is PPE for the event, wear it.** Whether it's a helmet or a face shield, you'll be glad you did.

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