



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED



LL 20-26

### AUTUMN FAILS

With the 101 critical days of summer behind us, it's time for cooler temps and all the activities that accompany them: warm fires, holiday treats, enjoying the great outdoors, and perhaps even some fall yard cleanup. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Not so fast. This article isn't a brochure for fall activities in the Poconos, it's a safety lessons learned. Mayhem doesn't disappear after the summer break. Too often, the fall activity list continues with burns, stitches, bandages, and anti-inflammatories.



Rather than hit you with all the stats upfront, we've sprinkled them in with some of our narratives. Please read on and learn from our "Argonauts of Autumn," who shared their fails, so we don't repeat them (*and because they were required to*).

- Carving Out Time For Halloween Fun. A Sailor was at home while "preparing a home decoration with a knife," according to the report. The report later clarifies the "decoration" was a pumpkin. The report narrative (*likely written by our slightly embarrassed mishap Sailor*) goes on to say, "while cutting the material," the knife slipped and caused a significant laceration to the left forearm requiring more than 20 stitches. — *No judgment here on the pumpkin carving, but we recommend using one of those pumpkin carving sets with the assortment of saws. Stay ahead of the "carve" (see what we did there) with these proper tools and avoid being one of the 3,200 pumpkin-carving victims annually, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).*

- Gang Way, People! A group of Sailors decided to hike a mountain trail. The ascent went without a hitch, but experienced mountaineers claim that's the easy part. After reaching the top, our Sailor demonstrated why. Shortly after beginning the descent, he realized he was "picking up speed." As his walk turned into an uncontrolled run, he saw another hiker coming up the hill toward him. Speeding down the mountain like a contestant in the annual Cooper's Hill Cheese Roll competition\* (*web search if you haven't seen it; you won't be disappointed*), he realized the *gravity* of the moment and shouted a warning, but the other hiker didn't respond. To avoid a crash, the Sailor made a sharp cut to the left, but lost control and tumbled down the hill for several feet, landing on his side. Bleeding and in pain, he continued unassisted (*because his friends were way behind him by that time*). Luckily for our "Yosemite Sailor," he escaped with only a few bumps and scratches, one lost workday, and two weeks on light duty. — *Know your abilities before you climb that mountain, folks.*

- Don't Blame The Mother-In-Law. One fall evening, a Marine's spouse was using cooking oil for dinner. While the oil was heating up, she engaged in conversation with her mother-in-law and forgot about it. The Marine was sitting in the living room when he noticed a fire and jumped up to respond. His wife used a fire extinguisher, but it only increased fire's intensity, which rose up into the kitchen. The Marine covered the pot with the lid (*great decision*), which temporarily stopped the fire. It was temporary because he then grabbed the pot and moved to the sink to get it away from the stove (*wrong decision*). Somewhere in the move, the pot cover came off, and the oil caught fire again. While keeping his face and body away from the pot, his hand didn't fare so well. With third-degree burns, he was admitted to the hospital for three days of burn treatment and skin grafts. — *The CPSC says cooking fires make up 40 percent of residential fires annually, with 27 percent from unattended cooking. Keep an eye on the pot. If it does ignite, put the lid on it, and turn off the heat. Don't move it!*

- Just Roll With It. A Sailor was riding as a passenger in a four-person ATV at an off-road track. He was sitting in the back as the ATV started up a steep hill. At some point during the climb, the ATV flipped backward. As the vehicle tumbled down the hill like a runaway "Zipper" ride at the county fair, the Sailor was knocked unconscious and ejected from the ATV. He ended up with deep lacerations on

his right ear and neck, but no fractured skull because he was wearing a helmet. He had his seat belt on too, but when you're hurling down a hill in a human-sized hamster wheel, there's only so much you can do. Things could have been much worse than 14 days on light duty. — *The CPSC tallied approximately 93,800 ATV-related emergency room visits and 295 deaths In 2017. Wear your PPE, but don't let it make you overconfident in the ATV's performance...or yours.*

- Spontaneous Combustion. A Sailor was lighting a fire in the backyard to burn a fallen tree. Upon lighting the fire, "it flashed due to unknown circumstances while the Sailor was bent over it," causing burns to his face and arms. — *We can't say for certain what made the tree "flash" like that — a cursed ancient burial ground? Unexploded ordnance? Unused fireworks from July? Gasoline!? We may never solve the mystery, but the lesson here is, make sure your fire pit is clear of accelerants and anything else you don't want to burn. Our "Flash-Fire Sailor" was fortunate to receive only minor burns (but they still hurt) and four days on light duty for his unintentional backyard tree explosion.*

- Fall Cleaning, Or Cleaning Fall? One October weekend, a Sailor was cleaning the gutters while sitting or standing on his roof (*the report doesn't clarify which*). He slipped and fell approximately eight feet to the ground. He landed on his feet, which works great for cats, but not necessarily for people. His Olympic gymnast landing fractured his right calcaneus (*heel bone*). The report doesn't account for total lost work time or light duty, but with an injury like a fractured heel, it had to have been a long while. — *According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 25 percent of all fatal falls at work occur from 10 feet or less, so we could say our hobbled Sailor was fortunate to be alive to tell the tale.*

- Rock-et Scientist. While rock climbing, a Sailor placed a "crash pad" under his climb location, (*well, sort of*). While transitioning from one handhold to another at a height of approximately 25 feet, he lost his grip and fell, missing the crash pad with one foot and receiving a compound fracture of his ankle. — *Remember the 10 feet or less fatality rate from our last example? Adding a mat doesn't make a higher climb safer, especially if you don't land on it. Outdoor Magazine recommends climbing no higher than 20 feet with a crash mat if you're not using ropes.*

- Careful, you might have an "axe-ident." One crisp November afternoon, a Sailor was chopping wood for his fireplace using an axe. He came to one log with several knots that didn't want to split (*anyone who's split wood knows about the knotty logs. You usually save those for some other time...like never*). Our Sailor decided to rise to the challenge and go for it. He gave the log a good hard swing and drove the axe down onto the log, splitting both the log and the chopping block (*BAM!*) and continuing all the way through to his boot and into the top of his right foot (*AAAGH!*). Our Petty Officer Bunyan drove himself to a local hospital where he received stitches for a one and a half-inch laceration. — *We don't have any deep wisdom...except to avoid the knotty logs and keep your feet clear.*

- Don't Be A Heel. Quoting directly from the report, "A Sailor was out to dinner celebrating Halloween, while dressed in costume and wearing six-inch high heel shoes" (*Thank you, good night everybody!*). While you can imagine how this turns out, we'll continue to see if there's a lesson in there. While leaving the party, he slipped and fell, lacerating his forearm on the countertop. — *Apparently, the embarrassment of his costume was greater than the injury's pain, because the Sailor went home to change before heading to the emergency room. He required five internal and four external stitches for his wound and suffered a slight dent in his ego. We have no data on costume fails, but if you're going to the party as Gene Simmons or Ariana Grande, beware the risks of your costume choice.*

### Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

This lesson is a reminder that safety hazards await us even after summer is over, and they can pop up anywhere or anytime. Like gravity, hazards are always present, but the more you're aware of them and aware of how to apply ORM to mitigate them, the safer you'll be. Visit the NAVSAFECEN public website (*link below*) for our 2020 Fall / Winter Campaign presentation for tips on how to stay safe during a range of activities, from sports to holiday decorating. Whether you're climbing the "Schmaterhorn," working around the yard, or enjoying some holiday cooking, practice ORM as you do on duty; it can save more than just your pride. Not familiar with ORM? Turn over a new leaf this fall by learning more about it on the ORM section of our public site.

This product is posted on the NAVSAFECEN public website at <https://navalsafetycenter.navy.mil>

Send feedback to: NAVSAFECEN\_CODE522\_LESSONS\_LEARNED@navy.mil

*And remember, let's be **careful** out there...*

*(sorry...We couldn't resist)*