



Naval Safety Command

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH (formerly "Lesson Learned")



SA 22-07

KNIFE MISHAPS II

*"A knife is only as good as the one who wields it."
— Patrick Ness*

That quote is right to the *point*, and judging from the reports we see, maybe not everyone should wield a knife in daily life. Knives are extremely effective tools for, well, cutting things; even an unintended target. Whether the material is rope, paper, produce, or human flesh, knives will cut what you want them to...and things you don't. Despite our best efforts to educate our Sailors, Marines and civilians about knife safety through previous products (see *LL 19-18 Knife Mishaps*), we're still making the same avoidable mistakes. We know, stats can be "*dull*", but we thought it would be enlightening to "*point*" out the impact of knife mishaps on our readiness and to see what the mishap-ees were cutting when the blood started. Here's what we found:

Fiscal Year 2021 knife incidents, which included knives and box cutters (also called utility knives), tallied up 183 mishaps resulting in nearly 700 days on light duty. That's an average of almost four light duty workdays per mishap, or nearly two man years total. The kitchen was the most dangerous place, with 19% of the total mishaps, consisting primarily of cutting produce. The second most dangerous (*and unnecessary*) activity was cutting zip ties at 12% (*these could also fall in the category of "wrong tool for the job."* See *LL 20-27*). Coming in third at 9% was cutting boxes, followed by cutting plastic (*another wrong-tool candidate*). Even when a knife was the correct tool, a common theme you'll read in this dispatch was that body parts were in the "line of fire," so to speak. Spoiler alert: The top takeaway you'll find is "don't cut toward yourself." Read on and learn just how bad "a day in the *knife*" can become for the unwary.



no. No. NO!

When Life Gives You Lemons. A Sailor was cutting a lemon to put in her water bottle (*we're cringing already at the thought of cuts and lemon*). As she held the lemon in her hand (*Why, oh why!?*), she commenced cutting with her multi-tool knife. As expected, the knife eventually sliced through the lemon and her finger! — *Yikes! One thing is for certain, lemon juice will let you know even if you have the tiniest cut, so a laceration must be crazy painful. Please don't use your hand as a cutting board!*

Rambo Cuts A Zip Tie. A Marine was opening a package containing cooking tongs. The tongs were zip-tied to secure them to the cardboard backing. The Marine decided to cut the zip ties using a kitchen knife. In the process the knife slipped and cut deeply into his thumb. How deep? Deep enough that he suffered nerve damage requiring surgery. — *Wire cutters or scissors would have made a better choice. Also, see the spoiler mentioned earlier about cutting toward yourself.*

"It's In The Bone!" — Ace Ventura. Winning the category of the most-lost-workdays, a Sailor was at home cutting a steak, when he set the knife on the counter and turned to talk with a family member. The knife fell off the counter onto the Sailor's foot, lacerating two tendons. As a result of his misplaced knife, this Sailor spent 60 days on light duty after surgery to repair the tendons in his foot. — *This was a case of not fully respecting the blade. Knives are always ready to cut whether they're in your hand or not. Similar to one of the firearms safety rules, "Always treat the weapon (knife) like it's loaded."*



An ER visit about to happen

Holy Guacamole! Returning to the produce department once again, here are two popular (*and unwise*) avocado-in-the-hand mishaps. First up, a Sailor was cutting an avocado using the knife from his multi-tool. As he was holding the avocado in his left hand (*No!*) and slicing it in half, the knife cut through the bottom of the avocado and into the lower part of his thumb, requiring three stitches. Next, we have the wrong way to remove the pit. A Sailor stabbed her hand while attempting to remove an avocado pit, requiring stitches and 48 hours SIQ. — *If service members would stop cutting (and stabbing) toward themselves per our spoiler, you wouldn't be reading about them here. Cut away from your body parts please. And when cutting produce, Don't Hold It In Your Hand!*

"I Saw It On The Internet." This report starts with, "SVM [Sailor] was drinking." He was drinking in his room when he cut himself with his multi-tool knife trying to open a bottle of wine. The Sailor's roommate walked in and immediately rendered medical aid. The Sailor required two stitches and was placed on eight days of light duty. The report also noted the Sailor was intoxicated at the time he cut himself. — *The lessons here are many fold; a) Obviously, don't drink and handle sharp tools; b) Don't open a wine bottle with a knife; and c) Don't drink to excess ... just to name a few.*

Thinking *Inside* The Box. A Sailor was cutting-open boxes on the flight deck using his right hand (*go ahead and take a "stab" at what happened next*). Yes, the knife slipped and cut him in the left hand, requiring an unknown number of stitches. The report notes that the Sailor "lost situational awareness, and was cutting toward their body." — *Please cut away from yourself, folks; we repeat, Away. Also, there are special and inexpensive tools (less than \$5) that are perfect for opening boxes. If boxes are part of your team's daily work, consider issuing "safety cutters." They work great at home for all those online purchases too! Pictured right.¹*



Knife 1, Marine 0. Quoting directly from the report, "a SVM [Marine] was playing with a knife, going through the motion of a downward slash and accidentally stabbed self in the right thigh, resulting in venous bleeding." His injury was deep enough that it required a tourniquet and an ambulance ride to the emergency room where he received stitches and earned three days on light duty. — *There's "train as you perform" and there's just playing. Save your tactical knife-fighting practice for your Marine Corps Martial Arts training.*

Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

The causal factors in the mishaps described here were the same as those in our first edition of Knife Mishaps. So, if you're a follower of our products, and we hope you are, the takeaways will be familiar.

- 1. It's not the knife's fault.** Knives don't recognize their target, they merely cut where you aim them and keep going if you slip or miss. Cutting away from yourself will likely save you from the stitch doctor. A good rule of thumb is to treat knives as you would a handgun: Always point (cut) in a safe direction. Be aware of what you're cutting and what is behind it (cut away from your body).
- 2. "Don't bring a knife to a gunfight."** Most of the knife mishaps in our database could have been avoided by using the right tool for the job such as safety cutters or wire cutters, just to name a couple. When a knife is appropriate, choosing the proper type is equally important. It's easy to just grab the knife you have on you – and if you must in an emergency – be sure to adhere to Takeaway 1 and cut away from anything you don't want to get sliced or jabbed.
- 3. Don't drink and cut.** Add don't drink and cut (*or use any sharp tools*) to our expanding list of things not to drink and do.

¹ Editor's note: After reading so many box-related knife mishaps, our team now owns and uses these safety cutters at home and work. We can attest they work great, and you can get them for as little as \$3-5.

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