



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-22

All-Terrain Vehicle Mishaps

Many of our service members and civilian employees ride an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), whether it's a dirt bike, side-by-side, or a three- or four-wheeler. While ATVs are usually associated with fun and adventure, some of our service members have suffered severe injuries and even deadly consequences from riding them. There are many causes of ATV accidents, such as driving on paved surfaces, recklessness/impaired driving and poor weather conditions, to name a few. After a quick look in our database, we found some examples highlighting the hazards and behaviors that, when unchecked, injured or killed some of our Sailors and Marines.



- An off-duty Marine was driving his uncle's ATV on the road with his cousin as a passenger. He lost control of the ATV, exited the road and overturned it in a nearby field. The Marine and his cousin were thrown from the vehicle, where the Marine suffered massive internal injuries and a possible broken neck. According to the highway patrol, the Marine was pinned under the ATV and likely suffered cardiac arrest as well. An ambulance transported the Marine to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead within a few hours. —*This tragedy should grab your attention. ATVs are not cars; they don't drive the same way and aren't typically made for prepared or paved surfaces. Those wide, deep-treaded tires don't grip like your car tires on a prepared road. The report makes zero mention of PPE, but if we hazard a guess based on experience with other reports, they probably weren't wearing it. Please slow it down, and wear a helmet.*
- A Sailor was hosting a gathering at his house as he and others in his command were adjusting to shift changes from the Swing Shift (1600-0000) to Mid Shift (0000-0800). He used his ATV to deliver food to everyone. There was snow on the ground, floodlights lit the backyard and the ATV was equipped with headlights, so visibility was good. At about 0400, the Sailor was returning to the house, which required going over a hill. He had crossed over the hill several times that night, but on this run he decided to take a different approach. The ATV rolled over backward, and the handlebar struck the Sailor on the head. An ambulance drove him to a nearby emergency room, where he received stitches for a laceration above his eye, and a CT scan revealed three fractures of the orbital socket. Further eye examination determined the fractures caused misalignment of his eye requiring reconstructive eye surgery. —*If you can't tell from the injuries, he was NOT wearing a helmet. Wearing your PPE can save you from a lifetime of pain and suffering. Be smart and protect your noggin.*
- A Marine was participating in an off-duty dirt motorcycle race in California. He was riding in a motor-cross style of racing, where the trails are built primarily on dirt, and the terrain is created by nature. About nine miles into his race, he hit a slope along the course and flew over the motorcycle's handlebars. No other racers were involved in the crash, and he was able to ride the motorcycle to the nearest checkpoint and receive attention from EMS. The Marine was transported to the hospital by ambulance and was diagnosed with a spinal fracture. —*Why was he able to ride to the nearest checkpoint for help? Because he wore PPE, including a faceguard helmet and full padding. Dirt bike racing is dangerous, and a wipeout is inevitable. Follow this Marine's good example and wear all your PPE.*
- A Sailor was house-sitting for a friend in a rural area. After dark, at approximately 2100, she decided to use a side-by-side off-road vehicle to patrol the property. As she patrolled the unfamiliar

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territory, she hit a rock and was ejected from the ATV, hitting her head on the concrete (*Crikey!*). When she regained consciousness, the Sailor realized her head was swollen and bleeding from the impact.—*Why was she ejected, and why did she hit her head on the concrete? No seatbelt and no helmet.* She was able to stop the bleeding but did not seek medical attention right away; instead she chose to stay awake for 4 hours before sleeping, thinking (*incorrectly*) that doing so would prevent a concussion. The next day she felt sick and decided to go to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with brain bleeding. The hospital kept the Sailor for approximately 10 hours and released her with seven days of light-limited duty. —*Wear your seatbelt and helmet! This Sailor is lucky to be alive. None of the decisions were correct: driving an ATV at night; in unfamiliar territory; with no seatbelt and no helmet; and after a head injury, not seeking medical treatment. Please do the opposite of everything she did. Our database has far too many examples like this.*



- A Marine departed his house and headed to the desert for trail/dirt bike riding. He arrived that evening at approximately 1800 and planned to ride for a couple of hours before sunset. The Marine set out for the ride when he noticed the gas cap's breather tube was loose. As he attempted to re-install the breather tube into the lid—while still riding—he veered off the trail and fell approximately 10 feet down an embankment. During the fall, the dirt bike struck him in the head, rendering him unconscious for about 15 seconds. He awoke and attempted to walk it off, but eventually had to call for help. The

Marine was wearing the proper PPE (*Thank You! Well done!*), which saved him from much worse injury. —*Multi-tasking while riding is dangerous. Stop, then fix. That wisdom applies to on-road vehicles too.*

Key Takeaways

Off-roading comes with responsibility, both individually and at your command. Treat all off-road vehicles with a little respect and some healthy fear (you'll live longer), Below are tips to consider before jumping on your ATV:

1. **Am I adequately trained?** This should be the first question asked of anyone considering driving or riding any off-road vehicle. Do I know how to drive this thing? If the answer is no, then get trained!
2. **Consider the conditions and terrain.** Most of these vehicles are not designed for paved surfaces, so ride accordingly. When off the pavement, check for hills, valleys or trees you don't typically encounter on prepared road. Excessive speeds when trail riding in unfamiliar territory (or in the rain or snow) increase your chances of a mishap. You never know what's around the corner or over the hill.
3. **PPE, PPE, PPE.** How often have you heard, "I'm only going up the street" or "I'll be right back?" Sometimes these are the last words spoken before an off-road mishap. If wearing PPE is not the first thing on your mind before riding, it should be. Helmets save lives!
4. **More tips for off-roading.** Stay on the trail and don't venture off. Keep to the right on the trail (*'cause someone may be coming the other way*). Stay off of paved roads as much as possible. Be prepared with a first aid kit and water (and if you're in a larger ATV, a shovel, tow strap, hand-winch and wood blocks). Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return. Inspect your off-road vehicle (tires, hardware, brakes, oil, gas, etc.) and—yes, we're repeating it: **WEAR YOUR PPE...ALWAYS.**

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