



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-29

### Falling Down

With temperatures beginning to cool in the northern hemisphere, it's that time of year for all things fall: enjoying the great outdoors, holiday fun and the inevitable fall yard work. And with those activities, come (*you guessed it*) mishaps. The 101 Critical Days of Summer may be behind us, but our database is still filling up with new off-duty mishaps daily. A quick tally of off-duty badness in our database revealed more than 200 non-vehicle mishaps during the fall of 2022 (we searched astronomical fall 22 Sep – 21 Dec). Here in the Safety Awareness Division, we understand that many of the mishaps we describe in this dispatch can happen year-round, but indulge us for a few minutes as we take a look at some fall-like mishaps and the lessons they bring. Read on to see how the Hazards of Fall ruined these Sailors' and Marines' day worse than eating pumpkin spice sausage (*Yuck! Sadly, it really exists*). 🙄



- **This Story is no Crock.** A Sailor was transiting the stairwell from the first floor to the second floor to attend a command Thanksgiving potluck lunch (*yum!*). On his way upstairs, he lost both his balance and positive control of a hot crock pot containing the turkey and gravy (*nooo, not the main course!*). As he fell at the top of the stairway, hot gravy spilled from the crock pot onto his hand. The Sailor was later treated at the emergency room for minor burns to his left hand. —*The report indicated that the Sailor was “casually transiting the stairwell.” Being entrusted with transporting the most important symbol of Thanksgiving (not to mention, scalding-hot liquid) calls for strict attention and focus, and having at least one hand available when going up the stairs. There’s a life hack for just about everything these days. Check out “Crockpot carriers” on the web. They’re even made for one-handed carry.*
- **It’ll Hold...Ooh, Nope.** We have enough tree stand hunting mishaps for an entire dispatch, but they would all read something like this: A Marine went hunting in a national forest. At around 1530, the strap down of his tree stand came loose, causing the Marine to fall, striking his head on the ground. He sought treatment at the clinic the next day, where he received three days of SIQ. A primary cause of the mishap was the cold and the age (*old*) of the Marine’s safety harness, which would have served as a safety backup to the stand’s strap, but snapped under his weight. —*Marines are known for maintaining great physical fitness, so we’ll assume he was the same weight as the previous hunting season. Regardless, doing a gear check (as he would before an assault mission) would have spared this Marine’s fall. ORM doesn’t end when you go on liberty. Apply it, always.*
- **Don’t Trust a Branch if You Don’t Have Wings.** In another fall fall (*see what we did there? That wasn’t a typo*), a Sailor decided to cut back tree branches using manual pruners. He was approximately six to eight feet above the ground, using a step ladder to climb onto the tree (*this idea already sounds questionable*). Eventually, the branch he used to support himself gave way and he began his descent to the ground. Like a slow-motion scene from “The Matrix,” the Sailor threw the pruners safely away during the fall, but gravity prevailed. He landed on the ground, face first (*Yikes!*). Later that evening, he noticed swelling and bruising around his eye and notified his command. The report is mum on the status of his injury. —*In another ORM lesson, specifically Time Critical Risk Management (TCRM), this Sailor likely could have planned his pruning task without needing to straddle between a ladder and a tree branch. Think the task through and invest a few extra moments to consider what could go wrong and the safest way to do the job.*
- **A Shortcut to The Hospital.** Quoting from the report, “They [two Sailors] received a trail recommendation from a bystander at the local gas station and decided to try it.”—*That sentence reads like the opening*

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scene from a B-rated horror flick, but it turns out the trail was legit. About 45 minutes into the hike, the Sailors decided to turn around and head back to their car. Once they had a visual on the parking lot, they decided to take a shortcut down the mountain to make it to the parking lot quicker (*because you're reading about it here, it wasn't shorter, but it did lead to some cuts*). On the way down, now off the marked trail, one of the Sailors slipped on loose rocks and fell down the terrain, severely twisting his ankle. His shipmate helped him down a nearby road and called for an ambulance. There were no further details on the injury. —*Here's some slasher horror movie-style advice: Don't go in the house at the end of the street, the cabin in the woods, or, in this case, off the marked trail. If the terrain requires marked trails, it's probably for good reason. Stay on them.*

- **Chutes and Ladders.** A Sailor was on a ladder fixing a damaged section of his house's gutters when the ladder safety locking device broke and the ladder slipped out from underneath him like the Clark Griswold ladder scene from the movie Christmas Vacation. Gravity did the rest as he fell onto a concrete edging stone (*aaaagghh!*), fracturing his arm. The Sailor drove himself to the ER, where they determined he needed surgery to repair the break. He was placed on six weeks of convalescent leave. —*As with our Marine's tree stand example, gear checks can save you from months of pain. Have you checked that old ladder in your garage lately? After writing this, we're gonna check ours.*



- **He "Flamed" to Please.** After a group of family and friends went on a horse trail ride, they decided to have a bonfire—yes, here comes the customary fire-related mishap. Some of the group went to find fuel (*"accelerant," according to the report*). After they poured an unknown amount of the *unknown accelerant* onto the wood pile, they placed a long 2x4 outside the pile to use as a guide the accelerant. An unlucky Marine in the group was chosen to light the fire because he was the only one with a lighter (*that's a great reason to quit smoking*). When he ignited the whatever-it-was accelerant, Whoof! It flashed up. The Marine felt immediate heat, smelled burning hair and felt immediate pain following the flash. His friends (*and we use the term loosely*) escorted him to the ER, where he was treated for severe burns from head to toe. —*The word "accelerant" always makes us cringe, mainly when used in conjunction with any kind of fire. If you have a burning desire to start a fire (pun intended), try an old-school method like kindling, or at least choose a starter fluid that's specific to the job. Gasoline is never a good option.*

- **Trip or Treat.** During a Halloween magic show one evening, a Sailor got up to walk with friends toward the Haunted House. There was a beam structure to her right and as the Sailor was walking past it, she didn't see an ankle-high support wire in her path. The wire caught both of her feet and she fell forward, attempting to break the fall with her hand to ease the impact. She heard a loud bang and thought she blacked out for a few seconds. She was later treated for a likely sprained wrist. —*The lesson from this tale could be "Never leave the magic show early," ☺ but the best cautionary advice we can offer is to maintain your situational awareness at all times. Have fun this holiday season, but keep your wits about you.*

### Key Takeaways

This dispatch reminds us that hazards know no season. They are ever-present and only change their forms through the year. That means ORM doesn't disappear when the seasons change either.

We're not saying you need a pre-mission brief before trimming a tree or carrying a turkey up the stairs. But, take a minute before an activity to consider the hazards and ensure you take the safest approach.

The best all-fall-encompassing takeaway we can offer is, **"Let's be careful out there."** ☺

For more information about fall and winter safety, visit our public website and check out our 20-23 Fall and Winter Safety presentation in the Stand Down section here: [Safety Stand Down \(navy.mil\)](https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil)