



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-17

Summer Driving

Summer has officially arrived (the summer solstice is 20 June), and warmer weather is already here in most of North America. With the warm weather comes holidays and friendly get-togethers. It also brings wet roads, long drives and some potentially poor choices after those get-togethers. Summer is a favorite time for vacations and summer parties, and these activities often require some miles on the great American roadways. There are a variety of road hazards to be aware of. While they're not necessarily exclusive to summer driving, here are some incidents worth remembering as you travel to your summer destination...or anywhere else.



- **Unexpected Water.** A Sailor was riding his motorcycle home on a hilly roadway. There were light rain showers earlier in the day, but the roadways seemed dry when the Sailor began his ride (*seemed being the key word here*). The Sailor traveled down a hill at about 25 mph, knowing a stop sign was around the bend. As he came around the hill, he hit a wet patch from the earlier rain and felt his rear tire begin to slide. He applied his rear brake but wasn't able to correct the slide. The Sailor hit the curb and tumbled from his bike. Fortunately, he was wearing all the appropriate PPE, and the worst of his injuries was a fractured elbow (*see, PPE works!*). —*This incident is an example of commendable behavior as much as it is a word of caution. The rider was driving the speed limit (something many of our motorcycle riders don't do) and wearing proper PPE. He stated that the outcome would have been much worse if he hadn't worn a helmet. So we commend him for that. However, we still want to encourage a little extra prudence during certain weather conditions. Roads may seem dry after a storm, but you never know where those lingering wet patches hide. Think about your route beforehand, and exercise caution around blind turns.*
- **Blowin' in the Wind.** In the following example, a motorcycle rider lost control of his bike (*don't worry, PMV4 drivers will get their turn*). A Sailor was riding on quintessential US Hwy 95, taking in the vistas of the vast open desert. One problem with deserts is they can come with strong crosswinds. The Sailor began passing a vehicle but wasn't prepared for the effect of the vehicle blocking those crosswinds. As he finished passing the vehicle, he was struck with a strong crosswind, pushed off the road and subsequently thrown from the bike. Fortunately, the other driver wasn't offended at being passed and called an ambulance for the Sailor, who suffered a variety of injuries to the body and internal organs. —*Be conscious of the weather and your vehicle's limitations. Sometimes, it's best to pull over until the winds die down; if this isn't an option, be careful and aware of how the other vehicles will affect yours. Also, we can't harp on PPE enough. This Sailor sustained severe injuries, but they would have been even worse without a helmet and proper riding gear. With that gear, he made a full recovery.*
- **♪“You Spin Me Right Round Baby, Right Round”♪** At 0500, a Sailor (*in a car this time*) was on the way to a duty changeover in heavy rain. He was traveling 60 mph on the highway when his vehicle hydroplaned and shifted in the lane. He applied his brakes, trying to regain control (*Ahem, this is not how to regain control when your car hydroplanes*). The vehicle lost control (*as expected*) and slid across three lanes into the center concrete barrier, where it spun around and stopped. —*According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there are two things to know for hydroplaning: 1) Slow down and 2) Avoid the urge to brake. The author of the mishap report implied the Sailor was already driving well under the speed limit, but the fact he hydroplaned means he could have been going slower. Hydroplaning happens when you hit standing water while driving too fast for conditions (or if your tire treads are too thin, so look out for that). If your car does hydroplane (it happens), avoid the urge to brake. Sudden overreaction can increase your loss of control; gently let off the accelerator until your vehicle regains traction; it only takes a few seconds.*
- **“The Fall Guy”.** This report was very short and lacking in detail, but *drives home a good point*. A Marine was driving home on leave when his car's tire blew out. He lost control of the vehicle and went off the road

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into a 60-foot ravine. The Marine lost consciousness in the crash (*not surprising after a 60-foot fall*). He regained consciousness, climbed up the ravine and flagged a vehicle for help (*Ok, wow, without the details, we imagine the Marine scaling a vertical wall with a Ka-Bar in his teeth*). — *Tire blowouts can happen year-round, but they're more common in the summer when high ambient heat and hot roads can increase the tire pressure. Periodically check your tires for bulges or other irregularities, especially before long road trips.*

- **Swept Away.** A Sailor and his spouse were making a 200-mile trip through the desert on their motorcycles and encountered a severe thunderstorm. They stopped on the side of the road to wait out the storm (*good idea*). While they were stopped, a flash flood swept them both approximately 100 feet off the road (*good idea to stop, lousy luck where they stopped*). — *This couple was lucky to end up with only minor lacerations and bruises. Flash floods can occur quickly (hence the name “flash”) and can often be fatal. This mishap may seem like just bad luck. There certainly is a little of that here, but driving a motorcycle through the desert with heavy thunderstorms in the area is inadequate planning. Check the weather on your route before your trip and avoid waiting by the side of the road in the rain. Most weather Apps have severe weather alert functions; try them.*



- **The All-Too-Common Alcohol-Related Crash.** We'll finish this dispatch with an incident that is so obviously wrong, but we are never at a loss for examples like it. A junior Marine was enjoying a summer day at the beach with friends, partaking in a few adult beverages. After a few hours, one of the friends wasn't feeling well, so the group left the beach in the only driver's El Camino (*it's an old car with a pickup-style bed in the back*) to get him something from the store. Two of the friends rode in the front, while the Marine and another friend lay in the bed of the vehicle with their heads toward the front. The driver was talking to the front seat passenger and not paying attention (*which is all too easy when alcohol is involved*) and crashed into a parked vehicle. The two in the bed hit head-first into the back window of the car. The Marine was paralyzed from the chest down, ending his Marine Corps career barely after it began. — *The first obvious lesson here is: Please don't drink and drive, and don't get in the car with someone who does. It doesn't matter what the situation is; call a taxi, get an app ride or just get another ride. The second lesson is the unrestrained passenger piece. We know country songs have romanticized riding in the bed of a pickup truck on summer nights and all that (or, in this case, an El Camino), but a century of accident data proves seat belts are one of the single most effective means of reducing injury or death. Don't deny yourself this simple life-protecting device.*

Key Takeaways

Vehicle accidents happen year-round, so you should hold on to this dispatch's lessons as the seasons change. Consider your driving habits and some of the seasonal variations you may see. In addition to these takeaways, you can find more driving and summer safety tips in our 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation here on our website: <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil/Stand-Down/101-Critical-Days-of-Summer/>

1. **Keep a weather eye out.** This takeaway's title is an old term that means to be watchful of a storm, but later, it came to mean to be very watchful in general. Bad weather can happen during any month, but many regions have higher rainfall in the summer. Check the weather when planning your drive. Severe weather should very rarely be a surprise.
2. **Do vehicle checks like you would on duty.** You should check your vehicle at least seasonally and before each road trip. The NHTSA advises checking, at a minimum, tires (pressure, tread, and irregularities), cooling systems, fluid levels, batteries and wiper blades. Feel free to do a more thorough check, though. Your summer or even your life could depend on it.
3. **Don't drink and drive, period.** Once again, we know this isn't limited to summer, but we'll repeat it as often as necessary: alcohol and driving don't mix! Don't drink and drive – and don't ride with someone else who's been drinking.

And remember, “Let's be careful out there”