



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-24

### *Stairs and Pets*

While we were scouring the mishap database for the August 2022 Stair-Related Mishaps SA Dispatch (SA 22-17; available on the NAVSAFECOM website link on page 2 and *worth a read if you haven't seen it*), we found enough pet-involved incidents to warrant a separate discussion. You don't have to be a pet owner to fall prey to this rarely (*if ever*) discussed hazard. Stairs + pets vs. humans mishaps aren't the most significant contributor to Navy and Marine injuries and fatalities (*shipboard ladders and motorcycles hold those prizes*), but they knocked enough Sailors and Marines out of commission badly enough to warrant discussion. Pet-related mishaps made the top 10 causes of off-duty injuries in the "101 critical days of summer" in 2022. So please read, learn and remember the next time you, a pet and stairs are in the same place. It's better to read and understand than to bleed and learn.



- **"I Knocked You Down The Stairs Because I love You!"** – the dog. A Sailor stopped by a friend's house to pick him up. The friend's dog (we presume a large dog) excitedly decided to greet the newly arrived Sailor – knocking him back down the flight of stairs that led to the front door. His friend kindly drove the Sailor to the emergency room (ER). The docs found he had a torn Medial Cruciate Ligament (MCL), wrapped him up with bandages and released him on crutches. As of the report, follow-up appointments were still pending. — *The report concluded the Sailor did not "assess hazards associated with the nearby stairs and the size and temperament of the dog." In plain English, don't stand near the top of the stairs if a big dog is coming. If you are the dog's owner, please protect your visitors and keep hold of your friendly beast.*



- **What Color Was That Cat?** As a Sailor walked up his front porch stairs, the family cat did what cats do – ran in front of him – causing him to trip and fall. As he fell, he hit his jaw on the concrete. He went to the local ER. The medics provided necessary first aid; thankfully, his jaw wasn't broken. — *There's an old superstition that a black cat crossing your path is bad luck, but it doesn't matter what color the cat is if it cuts your path on the stairs. Keep your eyes open on the steps, especially if you have pets. This incident occurred in the mid-afternoon.*

- **"Squirrel!!!"** Just after midnight, a Sailor woke up to take his "large breed dog" for a walk (we shall call him "Thor"). As they stood on the edge of the second-floor apartment stairs, something suddenly excited "Thor" (*Squirrel!*) and he pulled hard on the leash. On the other end of the leash, the Sailor was yanked off balance and fell down the flight of stairs. At the bottom, he hit his face on the hard-carpeted floor, blacking out upon impact and regaining consciousness about five minutes later. As he got up, he "felt extreme pain coming from his jaw and noticed blood coming from his mouth." A helpful neighbor drove the Sailor to the ER, where he was diagnosed with fractures to his upper and lower jaw, a severe concussion and bruises to his face. The Sailor incurred 18 days sick in quarters (SIQ) and seven days of restricted duty. — *Ouch! As you can see, the old nautical saying "One hand for yourself, one hand for the ship," can apply to your dog too. Animals have a mind of their own. You must be prepared for sudden action, mainly if you are in a precarious spot, like the top of the stairs.*

- **The Invisible Dog.** One morning around 0830, a Sailor at home was about to walk downstairs. He evidently did not see the family dog because he tripped over "Fluffy" at the top of the staircase, falling down the flight of stairs and striking his head against the wall at the bottom. Remarkably, he emerged with a head contusion and only required 24 hours of SIQ to recover. — *The report simply stated he "did not see the dog*

## Stairs and Pets

at the top of the staircase.” Keep your eyes up and your head on a swivel when approaching stairs, especially if you have pets (or little kids, but that’s for another dispatch) in the house.

• **The Joys of Pet Ownership.** The report narrative says all you need to know: A senior enlisted Marine was “descending stairs with dog in tow to keep the dog from throwing up on the stairs, slipped in dog vomit, tripped over the dog and hit his forehead resulting in having to go to the emergency room to be treated for a laceration requiring three stitches.” — *The rush to avoid the dog blowing chunks on the stairs was fruitless and resulted in far worse consequences. Vomit on stairs, vomit on feet, blood on the floor, stitches in the head, ER bill in the mail. We confess we have also tried to take rapid action to avoid pet vomit in the house, but quick movement on the stairs is too high-risk just to avoid pet cleanup. Go slow – or just let Fluffy finish their business and mop up afterward. That is less cleanup and less pain than what can really go wrong.*



### Key Takeaways

These mishaps had simple causes, so the cautions to avoid them aren't complicated. Please remember and follow these tips.

1. **One hand for you, one hand for the ship [dog].** If you're at the top of the stairs attached to a big dog's leash, you're in a hazardous spot. Stay aware of the dog and be prepared for the unexpected. It's not the time to text or scroll to the next song on your playlist. If the stairs have a handrail, use it. You and your dog will be thankful you did.
2. **Walk, don't run.** No matter what your pet is doing on (or to) the stairs, it'll probably be worse if you run to fix it. As we mentioned in the Stairs-Related Mishaps SA Dispatch, running up or down stairs — even without pets — has taken out a long list of Sailors and Marines. Add a pet to a scenario like the one above, and it will likely be worse.
3. **Brace for impact.** If you are meeting an excited pet at the top of the stairs, move away from the edge or be prepared to hold on to something. If you own that pet, be kind to your visitors: have a good hold on Fido before you open the door and possibly prevent sending them falling to their doom.
4. **Keep your eyes open.** Whether it is a cat, dog, pet ferret or outside rodent, keep your eyes up to see what is coming to trip you on the steps. As we said in SA-22-17, stairs are not a good place to multitask. Stay alert and keep your eyes aimed at where your feet are going.

**And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”**