



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-09

Backyard Blunders

While discussing upcoming yard and gardening projects, our safety awareness team decided we're due for a springtime backyard safety awareness dispatch. With temps beginning to rise in the northern hemisphere, many of us are getting out in the yard for some much-needed spring clean-ups or enjoying spending time outside again. Before you head out for your favorite backyard activity, take a quick read of the misadventures of our "Bastions of the Backyard" so you may avoid the same painful outcomes.



- How To Blow Yourself Up in Three Easy Steps.

- 1) Add lighter fluid to the charcoal briquettes in your grill.
- 2) Close the lid of the grill and go indoors.

- 3) Come back 10 minutes later, open the lid and light the charcoal briquettes with a long-barreled lighter. A Sailor did precisely those steps, and... *Foom!* The built-up vapors ignited violently, causing second and third-degree burns to his right hand and arm, and singed his hair and eyelashes. —*No, we don't want you to attempt to blow yourself up. Instead, we're pointing out the absurdity of allowing lighter fluid vapors to build up in a covered grill for 10 minutes and then putting a flame to them. You don't need to soak the coals that long, and never allow the vapors to build up under a closed lid.*

- A-tiller the Hun. A Marine was using a tiller in his garden when his apron got caught in the machine and pulled him toward the turning blades. The Marine managed to escape, but not before lacerating his hand. He received an unknown number of stitches at the emergency room (ER) and was scheduled for a follow-up appointment with a surgeon. —*Loose clothing and moving blades are a dangerous combination. We recommend ditching the gardening apron when operating any rotating machinery.*

- Grounded. Two friends went to assist a third friend in cleaning his rain gutters. All three friends climbed a ladder onto the roof, with two friends taking one side of the house and the third (our Mishap Sailor) on the other. While cleaning the gutters, the two friends who were working together heard a bucket fall, followed by a thud (*ooh, that's not good*). They went to the top of the roof and didn't see their friend. As they approached the roof's edge, they saw their friend lying on the ground face down. They found the Sailor unconscious, assessed his injuries and took him to the local hospital where he was treated for bruises and contusions to his face, neck, and mouth, a fractured jaw, and a concussion. —*Exactly why this Sailor fell off the roof is a mystery, but we did find that most home improvement websites recommend cleaning gutters from a ladder. And in the few videos showing gutter cleaning from the roof, the person is wearing a safety harness. If you're not a professional, we recommend that you stay off the roof and stay on the ladder.*

- A Stirring Event. A Marine placed papers in a burn pit outside his home to destroy them before his permanent change of station move. He doused the material with a gasoline and oil mixture (two-stroke oil). He lit the material, and as he stirred it with a shovel, the fire flashed into his face and right ear. After putting out the fire, he noticed his vision was slightly clouded due to debris, so he contacted a friend who drove him to the ER. However, base security stopped them at the gate (*probably seeing the extent of his burns*) and notified the base fire department. The Marine was flown to the regional medical center, where he was treated for burns and removal of debris from his eyes. —*Does this scenario sound familiar? That's because we've written about similar events many times and have yet to run out of fresh examples of people using gasoline to start fires and then learning the painful reasons why it's a bad idea. Please stop using gasoline to start fires. We're getting tired of writing about you.*

Backyard Blunders

- **No, Your Other Reverse.** A Sailor was in his garage on his riding lawnmower. He believed he had placed his lawnmower in reverse but had put it in forward gear instead. We're not sure which gear, but it was high enough that the mower lunged forward into the garage wall instead of backing up, rupturing the flexor tendon in the Sailor's left index finger. —*Perhaps this Sailor was distracted like Ricky Bobby in the pizza delivery scene in "Talladega Nights" or just in a hurry to cut the grass. Either way, we recommend taking your time and being deliberate with your controls (AKA, pay attention to what you're doing).*



- **Edward Scissor (Chainsaw) Hands.** A Sailor was using a chainsaw to cut branches from a tree at his parent's property. While in the tree, his chainsaw became wedged in a branch. He repositioned himself to get better leverage in an attempt to free the saw, but (*here's where time-critical risk management would have been handy*) he was only using his right hand to run the chainsaw and his left hand and both feet to support himself in the tree. When the saw freed, it fell against the back of his left hand (*still running with the chain rotating, Yeesh!*), cutting two tendons. He was not wearing gloves at the time of the injury, which could have prevented the severity of his injury.—*According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, being struck by an object is the most common type of tree-trimming accident. Getting struck by a saw just makes it worse. If you think, "If I just reach out a little bit more," stop and reevaluate your choices. It'll save your limbs. See what we did there?*
- **Jump School Dropouts.** Two Sailors tried to ride a DIY zip line together in their friend's backyard (*which sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but it's a real narrative from our database*). As you might have guessed, it didn't go well. Sailor 1 held onto the rope while Sailor 2 held onto Sailor 1. Once they "got off the ledge," Sailor 1 lost his grip on the zip line and both Sailors flipped and fell about five feet to the ground on their backs and necks. Sailor 1 was taken to the ER and diagnosed with a fractured disk in his spine. Sailor 2 was okay at the time but later had headaches and dizziness and went to medical, where he was diagnosed with a concussion. —*We're not physicists, but we're sure that one average-sized Sailor holding the weight of two average-sized Sailors on a zip line, plus something about momentum and acceleration, equals significant force on that one Sailor's grip. The report doesn't say if alcohol was a factor, but we're not ruling it out. Take a minute to consider the risks (and your abilities) before you zip or start any backyard activity.*

Key Takeaways

This dispatch reminds us that safety hazards await us even when we're not on the job. Like gravity, hazards are ever present, but the more you know about them and apply risk management principles to mitigate them, the safer you'll be. These takeaways can apply to any activity or season, so have a read before you head out to your favorite outdoor activities. For more about off-duty safety, check out NAVSAFECOM's 2024 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation on our public website here: [Safety Stand Down \(navy.mil\)](#)

1. **Respect gravity.** Gravity may only be a theory, but we've seen our service members prove its existence time and time again. Before you do any work (or play) from height, consider your options and the safest way to get the job done (as you do when you're on duty). Safety tip: Hanging on with one arm while you use a chainsaw with the other is not the best option.
2. **Think it through.** Along with takeaway #1, take a minute before you start a task to consider a) Your skill level and b) Your fitness for the task. Consider how long it's been since you last used your yard and gardening tools. Ask yourself, "When was the last time you spread mulch or climbed a ladder?" Consider your fitness for the task, too. If you're not physically up to it, get help.
3. **Don't drink and do yard work.** Yes, a cold brew or seltzer may be refreshing on a warm spring day, but don't pair it with using power tools or climbing. And, as we see all too frequently in our database, too much alcohol inspires the dumbest ideas, like tandem zip-lining and the like. Be responsible, please.

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