



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-13

Water-Related Mishaps

"If human civilization is going to invade the waters of the earth, then let it be first of all to carry a message of respect."

— Jacques Cousteau

This dispatch complements the Naval Safety Command's 2024 summer safety campaign: The 101 Critical Days of Summer. You can find this year's presentation on our public website at [101 Critical Days of Summer \(navy.mil\)](https://www.navy.mil).

With summer nearly upon us in the northern hemisphere and the days growing longer, it's time for all things fun in the sun—and the risks and hazards accompanying them. Whether you're heading to the boat ramp, the beach, milling about in your backyard, or [fill in your summer activity here], the laws of physics and the need for risk management don't disappear when you're off duty. We found more than 20 mishaps in and on the water during last year's 101 critical days of summer alone, and that was just by searching the keyword "water." We aim to raise awareness and encourage responsible behavior during summer activities by highlighting some of the many examples from our database. Whether you're a seasoned enthusiast or a beginner in a new water sport, prioritizing safety and risk management can make all the difference to make sure you have a fun and incident-free summer. Read and learn from the "accidents aquatic" of our fellow Sailors and Marines.



- ***Headed For Trouble.*** After drinking and playing cards at a hotel pool's bar area, a group of Sailors decided to change into swimwear and use the pool. Sailor 1 entered the pool by diving headfirst into the shallow end (*something he should have learned not to do back when he was in elementary school*). As you probably guessed, his head hit the bottom. None of the other Sailors saw him dive in, but they did see him lying on the pool deck holding his neck. The hotel nurse provided an ice pack while his friends contacted the squadron flight surgeon, who advised him to go to the emergency room (ER) for an evaluation. Initial x-rays showed no fractures, but the next day, further medical evaluation revealed that his neck was indeed broken. —*This Sailor is fortunate that he isn't paralyzed. According to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, diving into shallow water is the fourth leading cause of spinal cord injury among men and fifth among women. Adding alcohol to the equation adds to the risk of making poor decisions. Please drink responsibly so you don't pay a lifelong price for one poor choice.*

- ***♪Thank You for (Not) Being a Friend♪.*** A Sailor let his friend drive his boat. While the Sailor was standing in the rear of the boat, his (*soon-to-be former*) friend put the boat into gear, ejecting the Sailor overboard. As if being tossed overboard (*from his own boat*) wasn't unfortunate enough, the propeller struck the Sailor's arm, causing several lacerations and requiring numerous stitches at the ER. —*This incident could have gone much worse for our Sailor overboard. Whoever is driving must announce when they'll start, stop or turn. There should be no surprises. Don't turn over the helm to your friends if they don't know this cardinal rule.*

- ***♪I'm a Rocket Man...♪.*** A Sailor was being towed behind a boat "on an inflatable rocket," according to the report. He was wearing a life jacket (*always a wise decision and, in this case, a lifesaving one*). Passengers in the boat saw the Sailor depart the rocket into the water, and the driver circled back toward him. The Sailor was flapping his arms in the water as the boat approached, but the passengers noticed he wasn't "acting normal." A passenger jumped in the water, swam to the Sailor, and saw he was disoriented and not responsive. Once onboard the boat, the passengers checked the Sailor's pulse and respiration; he was breathing and had a good pulse but remained unresponsive. One of the passengers called 911 as the boat headed to the pier, where the passengers rechecked his signs, but Sailor had no pulse this time. A

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hospital corpsman who was with the group provided CPR until EMS personnel arrived and used a defibrillator to resuscitate him. EMS transported the Sailor to the hospital, where he was examined and admitted for three days for observation and given 30 days SIQ. — *The good news story here is that the Sailor was wearing a life jacket. That wise choice saved his life by keeping him on the surface while he was unresponsive; that is the critical teaching point. Tragedy can strike instantly on the water, and if you're not prepared, your day or life could be sunk by one unfortunate incident. Please wear your life jacket.*

- **Wave Off!** A Marine and his friend entered the water to body surf. A few minutes later, a wave struck the Marine, causing him to hit the sandy bottom, injuring him badly. His friend pulled him from the water and evaluated him, and the local lifeguards treated him. He was then airlifted to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with a shoulder, neck and back injury with damage to the C5 and C6 vertebrae in his neck. The Marine was permanently paralyzed from the chest down. — *This heart-wrenching accident shows the immense power of breaking waves. Depending on several factors, including wave height, thickness and others, waves can exert thousands of pounds of pressure per square foot. It's not a bad thing to keep a healthy fear and respect for breaking waves. It helps to know your fitness and skill level, too.*
- **♪Don't Go Chasing Waterfalls♪.** As a Marine climbed up a waterfall, he slipped on wet, moss-covered rocks, lacerating his right foot. His friends wrapped the injured foot and took him to the ER, where he was treated with medical adhesive for his wound. — *This short story is a cautionary tale about PPE. Wearing protective footwear like water shoes when walking on slippery rocks, coral and other potentially dangerous objects in or near the water is far less embarrassing than being tactically evacuated by your fellow Marines for an otherwise fun activity. Wear the PPE, which in this case just means "shoes."*



- **Deadly Currents.** A Marine arrived at the beach to do some spearfishing. Shortly after entering the water, he was separated from his buddy and swept out to sea by a rip current. First responders recovered the Marine, who was unresponsive and later pronounced deceased. The report noted that the location was unpredictable and had a history of rip currents. Responders pointed out that the water conditions were calm, but "unseen rip currents came in." — *This heart-wrenching yet avoidable accident spotlights the dangers of rip currents. Spotting a rip current can be difficult, but it is possible. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), to check for rip currents at the beach, stand back from an elevated position, like a dune line or beach access, and look for places where waves are not breaking (see figure left). For more about rip currents, check out the NWS's 7 Rip Current Myths Debunked webpage here: [7 rip current myths debunked \(weather.gov\)](#).*

Key Takeaways

As summer rolls in, let's learn from our fellow service members' painful and, in some cases, tragic experiences. Wear the right gear, be mindful of water safety, and stay alert even during fun times. Learning from past mishaps can save your summer and your life. Here are a few references, in addition to our 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation, to help you be ready to enjoy the summer and be safe while you're doing it.

- ✓ [United States Coast Guard | Boating Safety \(uscgboating.org\)](#). Information from the U.S. Coast Guard about boating safety and safety requirements.
- ✓ [Swimming Safety | Swim Safe | American Red Cross](#). Information about swimming safety and water safety classes from the American Red Cross.
- ✓ [Beach Hazards and Safety \(weather.gov\)](#). Information about the hazards in beach areas from NWS.
- ✓ [Risky Drinking Can Put a Chill on Your Summer Fun | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\) \(nih.gov\)](#). Thirty-one percent of all drownings involve alcohol. Never underestimate how much alcohol can affect your judgment. It can kill you in an instant.

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