



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 20-12

MISHAPS OF SUMMER

Note: This lesson complements the Naval Safety Center's 2020 summer safety campaign: The 101 Critical Days of Summer. You can find this year's presentation and accompanying magazine on our public website at <https://navalsafetycenter.navy.mil/> in the Safety Promotions section.

Summer is nearly upon us. This year may prove more critical than ever as we begin to emerge from months of social distancing and head out for our favorite outdoor activities (*and the hazards that accompany them*). Even if our movement stays restricted, the potential for mishaps exists as we knock out the overdue yard work or fire up that new grill. Over the last three years, the naval services have lost an average of 93 Sailors, Marines, and civilian employees in off-duty mishaps annually. While the rate trended downward from 108 to 98 to 74 fatalities in FYs 17, 18, and 19 respectively, zero would be a much better number. During 2019's 101 Critical Days of Summer, there were more than 1,000 off duty mishaps, including 26 fatalities.

As we kick off the longest vacation period of the year, we've compiled a "Summer Sampler" of mishaps to illustrate how we must be safety conscious on our off time just as we are when in the cockpit, on deck, the demolition range, or [*insert your occupational specialty here*]. These summer warriors learned a bit too late of the potential mishaps lurking at the next event. The good news, however, is they reported their misfortunes "so that others may learn" and stay safe during the critical days of summer.

Not so Swimmingly

*"I got a backpack on! You don't get in the water with a backpack on, everybody knows that!"
— Fridge (Kevin Hart), "Jumanji 2; Welcome to the Jungle"*

- The report starts with "Multiple service members bought a children's swimming pool, planning to use it to relax during the hot weather." (*We could just let your imagination fill in the rest, but here's what actually happened.*) The Sailors filled the pool with water from a nearby hose. Like the "caddy day" pool scene in *"Caddyshack"*, Sailor 1 put his head in the water to cool off when Sailor 2 "playfully" pushed him. Sailor 1 lost his balance and fell over, hitting his head on a nearby bucket that was being used as a seat. As Sailor 1 got up, he noticed blood dripping from a laceration on his forehead. As if in anticipation of an incident, his fellow Sailors promptly fetched the help of a Corpsman. The Sailor was later treated at the emergency room and received one lost workday and three days on light duty. — *The report recommended the member who did the pushing give a water safety brief to the crew. We think that's a great idea.*



- A Marine was going for an evening swim in the apartment pool. He misjudged the depth when diving into the pool and his head made contact with the pool bottom (the slope from the deep end to the shallow end). While the Marine initially felt fine after the head bump, he felt discomfort in his neck the following day and headed to the hospital where he received a CT scan and a chest X-ray. Diagnosis: Closed Head Injury (CHI), earning him two days SIQ. — *How many times have we heard of these types of incidents? Too many! Our Marine is fortunate to only have a couple days of SIQ. Be sure **before** you dive. Remember the saying, "Feet first, first time."*

- A Sailor was swimming at the beach with his family when his spouse got caught in a heavy current around a jetty. During his attempt to rescue her (*and he did; well done!*), he suffered lacerations and abrasions to both his legs. His visit to the emergency room also revealed a concussion. — *There's just no way to find the humor in this one. This Sailor should be lauded for rescuing his spouse from the current. Some ORM earlier in the day, however, may have led them to a safer area to swim. Currents, including rip currents, can turn deadly in a hurry. Risk Management helps protect you (and your family) at home too. Check out our 101 Critical Days of Summer brief for details on staying safe in the ocean.*

Messing About in Boats

*"I wish to have no connection with any ship that does not sail fast; for I intend to go in harm's way."
— John Paul Jones*

- A Sailor jumped off a pontoon boat into waist-deep water, landing on a submerged object (*then came the pain*). This Sailor's leap of faith ended with a trip to the emergency room, which revealed fractures to his left foot, tibia and fibula. After surgery, the Sailor lost three workdays, followed by 83 days on light duty. — *It's good he remembered the "Feet first" rule (see page 1), or that could've been a broken neck. Murky water can carry more risk than a pool, so exercise ORM and know what you are getting into, literally.*



- A Sailor was a passenger on a boat. While a fast ship, with a good crew, is a good thing (see note from John Paul Jones), a fast boat filled with the unwise isn't. In this case, the boat operator was traveling at approximately 40 miles per hour, at night, like a James Bond boat-chase scene (*there are many, so imagine your favorite*) when he struck a channel marker (*basically, a telephone pole with a light and wooden marker on it.*) The Sailor said a contributing factor to the accident was passengers blocking the operator's view. That's the extent of the report other than the Sailor was wearing a life jacket (*good*) and alcohol may have been a factor (*bad*). A report from the local Coast Guard on a boat hitting a channel marker in the same location, at the same time, on the same day, filled in some of the blanks. The operator was not a military member and was cited for boating under the influence, gross negligence, and an insufficient number of life jackets. The local authorities arrested him. Of eight people on board, two were injured and transported to a local hospital, while one was ejected from the boat and recovered by the Coast Guard without injury. — *There are several lessons here: **Do not** boat under the influence of drugs or alcohol; **Always** wear your lifejacket (and have enough for everyone); **Choose** your friends wisely; and **Don't** let others drive drunk.*

The Backyard

"Mmm, mm, mm, I don't know why they call this stuff hamburger helper. It does just fine by itself. I like it better than Tuna Helper myself, don't you, Clark?" — Cousin Eddie, "National Lampoon's Vacation"



- A Sailor was trying to start her charcoal BBQ to cook supper. (*Step 1*) She put the charcoal in the grill, (*step 2*) she applied charcoal lighter fluid (*so far so good*), and (*step 3*) put the grill lid back on the grill to let the charcoal lighter fluid soak in. (*Safety tip: you don't need to, nor should you, put the lid back on the grill after applying lighter fluid. If you do, don't forget "(step 4), allow the fumes to dissipate"*). When she was ready, she removed the lid, skipped step 4, and went to light the grill. FOOM! The fumes exploded like the detonation scene at the end of the movie "Predator." The Sailor was treated at the emergency room for superficial burns and blistering to her face, chest, and hands. — *Follow the instructions for the proper use of charcoal grills, so you won't need to "Get to the choppah!" The life flight chopper, that is.*

- We could probably find enough fireworks examples to have their own future lessons learned topic (*and probably will*), but for now, here's a sample of what not to do. A Marine was drinking with his fellow Marines "in his shop in the desert" (*that sounds like the set of Breaking Bad or Better Call Saul, but we digress*). At some point, they began to light fireworks (*drinking and fireworks. insert "scowling" emoji here*). The report states our subject Marine placed "a large firework between his legs and lit it." (*insert "horrified" emoji here*). The result (*as expected*) was extensive damage to the Marine's groin, requiring him to be airlifted to the hospital. There he spent 45 days undergoing reconstructive surgeries. — *A recurring lesson here is: Fireworks and alcohol don't mix. Now, we feel obligated to add to the list "fireworks and groins don't mix," as if that ever needed saying (apparently, it does).*

- After work, a Sailor decided to go home to complete some unfinished yard work before it got dark outside. Using his weed whacker and rushing to get the job completed before dark, an object flew into the Sailor's eye, causing eye irritation. The cause? *(We'll give you one guess)* He wasn't wearing eye protection. That oversight *(vision pun not intended)* earned our weed-whacking Sailor a trip to the emergency room to remove the debris and four days of light duty. — *Wear your "eye pro," dude (that's "eye protection," for those over 40) in your backyard just like you do at work.*
- A Marine was cutting the grass and, while attempting to clear a jam in the mower, severely cut four fingers on his right hand. The Marine had let go of the shutoff handle, but the cable became stuck, and the mower didn't shut off. Not hearing the sound of the engine due to wearing his hearing protection *(those must've been some good earmuffs)*, the Marine reached under the *(still running)* mower. On the positive side, A) he was wearing PPE and, B) he didn't knowingly reach under a running mower. On the negative side, the mower didn't care. This mishap still bit our unfortunate Marine because he didn't verify the mower was fully stopped before reaching under it. He was flown to a medical center where he required extensive surgery on his hand. The additional cost: One day in the hospital, one lost workday, and 30 days on light duty. — *Beware the "blue threat." It can be lurking in your own backyard.*
- A Sailor was performing yard work at his residence. At some point during the work, he fainted and fell. The Sailor was reportedly unconscious for about one minute. He drove himself to the local naval hospital and was admitted for five hours and diagnosed with extreme dehydration and a fractured rib sustained during the fall. This Sailor was fortunate that he came to in short order. While driving himself to the hospital may not have been the best decision *(we're glad he didn't faint behind the wheel)*, he fully recovered with no lost workdays or light duty. — *Unlike the familiar television ad, we prefer the saying, "Stay **hydrated** my friends." Heat exhaustion can creep up on you quickly, so stay hydrated with water and perhaps an occasional electrolyte drink (but mostly water).*

A Day at the Beach

"It's a beautiful day, the beaches are opened, and people are having a wonderful time. Amity, as you know, means friendship." — Mayor Larry Vaughn, "Jaws"

- A Sailor was climbing a tree on the beach with a butcher's knife in her mouth. *(In what universe did this sound like a good idea?!)* Given that we are telling the story here, yes, the Sailor fell out of the tree. When she landed in the sand, "the knife fell from her mouth and landed *(stuck)* in her right leg just above the knee." She was taken to the emergency room where she received several stitches, and was assigned 24 hours SIQ and eight days on light duty. — *The report doesn't say whether she was auditioning for the next season of Survivor, but we're pretty sure she didn't make the "cut" if she was (see what we did there?). Like the fireworks above, add "butcher's knives and tree climbing don't mix" to the list of things we never thought we'd have to say. Sigh.*
- A Sailor was playing volleyball with friends on the sand court behind the barracks. *No, it wasn't Top Gun, but it was an aviation command.* Sailor 1 and Sailor 2 *(We'll call them Maverick and Goose)* were on the same team *(obviously)* and simultaneously jumped to spike the ball. While airborne, Maverick's left leg "shot out to the side," and his foot contacted Goose's leg. Maverick's left middle toe "came in direct contact" with Goose's shin, injuring Maverick's toe. Maverick fell to the sand in pain and was assisted off of the court by the other players *(Iceman and Slider)*. Maverick slowly walked back into the barracks and informed the staff *(Viper)* of the injury. X-rays showed that Maverick had fractured his middle toe. — *We don't know who subbed in for our Maverick that day, but regardless, he had 30 days off the court to reflect on his visual scanning techniques (cue "Take my Breath Away" by Berlin).*



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- A Sailor was snorkeling just off the beach. He applied sunscreen (*good job*), but failed to re-apply (*not good.*) What's worse, he went approximately two hours unprotected in direct sunlight (*did we mention this occurred in the south Pacific?*). The next day, our sun snorkeler had blisters all over his back, shoulder, and face. After treatment for second-degree burns, he was assigned SIQ for three days. — *Sunburn can have long-lasting complications such as premature skin aging, and even skin cancer, just to mention a couple. Besides that second-degree burns hurt! Apply and re-apply sunscreen often. A rash-guard shirt isn't a bad idea either.*



- A Sailor was at the beach attempting to skimboard, something he had never tried before (*and here we go!*). On his second attempt at jumping onto the board, his front foot landed on the board and his back foot didn't. Having gotten it half right, most of the Sailor's body kept moving forward while the rest stayed behind with the planted foot. This action broke his leg (fibula) and shattered bones in his ankle. The Sailor set the bone in the leg himself at the beach (*wow!*). His wife drove him to the emergency room (*glad he didn't drive himself*), where X-rays confirmed the breaks. With orthopedic surgery, and several plates and screws later, our skimboard Sailor (*now retired from skimboarding*) was put on 42 days convalescent leave, followed by six weeks on light duty. — *We're repeating old lessons here: Know your limitations, warm up and stretch first, and ease into a new sport.*

- *We feel the need for a disclaimer here. We strive to maintain the integrity of our lessons learned process by adding color commentary to real mishaps only. We do not make this stuff up, promise.* Now, for our final summer sampler. "A Marine was playing musical chairs with his fellow Marines at the beach during a grill out." Sometime during the game (*perhaps halfway through the second verse of "The wheels on the bus"*), the Marine fell, pinching his fingers between two chairs as he was running to sit. — *The report makes no mention whether the Marine won that round, but with a broken finger and 30 days on light duty, he was probably made the designated DJ for future tournaments.*

Key Takeaways

This lesson is a mere sampling of the risks associated with summer activities. Our 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation and magazine include additional topics like driving, pedestrian safety, ATVs, fire prevention, and more, with helpful tips to stay safe. Whether you are taking the cross-country drive to Wally World, heading to the beaches of Amity, or just messing about in your own backyard, be aware of potential hazards around you and keep these principles in mind:

1. **The more you make risk management a part of your life, the safer you get.** That fact goes for your off-duty time as well as on the job. *ORM isn't a program or a checklist, it is a way of thinking.* Mayhem knows no duty status, so consider risks before you head to the beach just as you would before flight ops. We don't expect you to have a safety briefing before your swim, but know the hazards and account for them ahead of time.
2. **If there's PPE for the activity, wear it.** All too often, our warriors relax their standards for PPE when they cross the brow or depart the base. That equipment, 4-wheeler, or power tool doesn't know, or care, if you're in uniform or not.
3. **Don't drink and [fill in activity here...swim, drive, boat, firework, musical chairs].** We get it, having some drinks with friends and family is a summertime thing. However, in many of our off-duty mishaps, alcohol was a factor. Drink moderately and keep your wits about you, so you don't end up in our next lesson, or worse. From the Navy's ongoing safety campaign, "The safety of our Sailors, Marines, civilians, and family members has a direct impact on fleet and warfighting readiness and therefore is a top priority." Make it yours.

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