



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 21-11

NAVAL SAFETY CENTER'S SUMMER VACATION

Note: This lesson complements the Naval Safety Center's 2021 summer safety campaign: The 101 Critical Days of Summer. You can find this year's presentation on our public website at <https://navalsafetycenter.navy.mil/> in the Safety Promotions section.

Once again, summer is almost here. The past year certainly had its challenges, and as we begin to see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, the same hazards still await us. Even while socially distancing, outdoor activities in our backyards, the beaches, and on the water pose the same risks. This summer will be no different. Each year from fiscal year

2016-2020, the naval services have lost an average of five Sailors and nine Marines in off-duty mishaps. During 2020's 101 Critical Days of Summer alone, we had more than 600 off-duty mishaps.

We've collected some examples to illustrate that mayhem doesn't take a vacation. It doesn't know or care if you're at home, on deployment, or hanging out at the beach. Every year, Sailors, Marines, and civilian employees demonstrate, through their painful examples, just how quickly things can go from "all fun and games" to a trip to the emergency room (ER). Let's take a moment to read and learn from our Sultans of Summer, so their misfortunes may save you from the same painful results.



The Pool



- Unnecessary leap of faith. A "service member was at the housing community pool where he was consuming alcohol and swimming with his kids." (Yes, add drinking and watching the kids in the pool to the list of activities that don't go together). The Sailor exited the pool to check his phone while the kids remained in the shallow end. When he looked up from his phone, his oldest child's head was underwater. Having "previously experienced a drowning," according to the report, the Sailor panicked and dove into the pool to assist ... but hit his head on the bottom, lacerating his forehead (and more). While the kids were all okay, the Sailor clearly wasn't. In addition to requiring nine stitches, the Sailor sprained two ligaments and fractured four vertebrae. — *We understand the Sailor's anxiety at the moment, but his dive turned rescuer into rescuee. Diving is the fourth leading cause of paralyzing injuries in the U.S. according to a 2012 Shepherd Center study; 36 percent of those occurred in pools. We hope we don't have another example like this in next year's summer mishaps lesson. Feet first would've worked better.*

- [Sound of whistle blowing] No running! While attending a BBQ, a Sailor was playing tag around the pool with the neighbor's kids. At some point during "you're it" duties, the Sailor tripped and fractured his forearm. He required surgery and spent 21 days recovering on convalescent leave. — *Sometimes slips, trips, and falls are unavoidable, but we've likely all heard the "No running!" shout from the pool lifeguard. There's a good reason for that! It's slippery, and it's cement! Save your pool area for swimming, and move your game of tag or whatever activity that involves running to the yard area.*

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Wreck-reational Boating

• Un-Safe Speed. Here's an example of exactly why Navigation Rule 6 (*safe speed*) exists. A Sailor spent the day out in the local bay with five friends on his 25-foot center-console boat. Around sunset, he proceeded to a location to best observe the local July 4th fireworks show. After the show, he proceeded around a peninsula, heading back towards his launch site. While transiting outside the channel markers at a speed of **25-30 knots**, the Sailor saw a boat silhouette approximately 15 feet in front of his boat! He immediately pulled the throttles to idle in an attempt to avoid the other boat, but to no avail (*25-30 knots may have had something to do with that*). He allided with the anchored boat, tearing off his bow pulpit and wrapping the anchored boat's chain around one of his props. Thankfully, no one flew overboard, but there were plenty of injuries among the Sailor's boat guests, including cracked ribs, muscle tears, a knocked-out tooth, bruises, and cuts, with some requiring a visit to the emergency room. — *This boat trip was a missed opportunity to put deliberate **risk management** to work. While the Sailor claimed to have made the transit 20-25 times before, including 10 times at night, did he ask himself, "What's different this time?" Hmm. Perhaps hundreds of additional boaters anchored and milling about to watch the fireworks show? A much slower speed at night (especially this night) would have helped the Sailor and friends make it home sooner ... and in one piece.*



• Never getting on that thing again. While operating a jet ski, a Sailor "lost control and struck his forehead on the handlebars, resulting in a fractured nose, facial lacerations, and bruising." The report also indicates the Sailor didn't adequately judge the wave heights. — *Jet skis are akin to a water version of dirt bikes, especially when waves are involved. Water may be softer than ground, but at high speed, water impact can feel like hitting cement. And, at any speed, jet ski handlebars are just as hard as dirt bikes. Both will win the battle with our face. Slow it down, especially with waves and wakes.*



• Again with the jet ski. While on a jet ski, a Sailor attempted to jump large wakes from other boats. In the process, the Sailor hit one wake at a "high rate of speed which resulted in a loss of control, ejecting him at approximately **40 mph**." — *That kinda reads like a dirt bike accident, doesn't it? With a mild concussion and six days light duty, we bet our hydro jockey won't be "jumping" on another jet ski soon.*

• "Whip it, whip it good!" — Devo. A Sailor was water skiing with his family when the boat whipped him at approximately **50 mph!** (*Do you see the speed trend?*) Presumably, at the maximum G-force of the whip maneuver, the action slammed the Sailor into the water. He lost consciousness and suffered a minor laceration to his arm from the ski. The report doesn't say whether he received the proverbial "eye enema" (*water forced under the eyelids with considerable pressure*), but he wouldn't have felt it while unconscious anyway. He did not immediately seek medical attention, but complained of headaches since the incident. After being directed to seek medical attention by his leading petty officer, the Sailor was placed on light duty for two weeks. — *A little slower, please.*



• Here we go again. The speed trend continues as a Sailor was sitting on a rubber tube that was being pulled by a boat "at **high speeds** on a lake." The Sailor eventually fell backward off the tube, tearing the MCL and ACL in her left leg. — *The report states that she "underestimated the force at which she would hit the water." Well, our tube-tumbling Sailor had three months on light duty to "learn the ways of the force," ... so to speak.*

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The Backyard

• **“Ryan started the fire.”** — The Office TV series. A Sailor had lighter fluid residue on his hands and shorts (OK, *you know what comes next, but here’s the story anyway*). The Sailor opened the grill while cooking and a backdraft caused a flame to come out and burn the Sailor’s arm. — *This Sailor learned the hard way that lighter fluid doesn’t care what it lights on fire. Backdraft or not, you’re asking to join our database victims when you stand by the grill while soaked in lighter fluid! Please learn from this mistake. With second-degree burns on his left arm and 14 days on light duty, at least this Sailor didn’t use gasoline, like our next “petty officer of pyro.”*



• **It’s like a fuse, but not really.** A Sailor collected tree trimmings for several weeks, placing them into a burn pile for disposal, then one summer day, it was time to light it up. The Sailor poured some *gasoline* onto the pile and, like a MacGruber skit from Saturday Night Live, he created a 15-foot trail to light. After waiting approximately 60 seconds for the fumes to dissipate ... they didn’t. According to the report, he found out the hard way that “the fumes had not dissipated as much as expected.” The inevitable FOOF! from the igniting vapors inflicted first and second-degree burns to the left side of his face, left side of both legs, and his right hand and sent him on a fun-filled trip to the emergency room. — *Safety tip: Gasoline doesn’t burn, the vapors do (look it up; it’s true). Try lighter fluid (but don’t pour it on yourself), or even diesel fuel or lamp oil soaked on a rag for brush pile burning; they’re FOOF-less.*

• **Eject! Eject!** A Sailor was celebrating Independence Day with friends and setting off fireworks. At about 2100, the Sailor drove an ATV back from the fireworks area to a friend's house to get more fireworks. While driving down a paved path, the ATV caught loose gravel and he lost control. When the ATV was about to flip, he bailed off to “avoid additional injury.” In the ensuing fall, he injured his head and shoulder. Two hours later, he decided to head to the ER, where he was diagnosed with a separated shoulder and a laceration to the scalp. The report indicates the Sailor would likely require a sling for multiple weeks. — *The scalp injury tells us he wasn’t wearing a helmet. The report doesn’t say if speed was a factor, but the risks of four-wheeling accidents increase after dark regardless of speed. Slow down ... and wear a helmet.*

Sun And Sand



• **Don’t try, try again.** A Marine was snorkeling at a popular beach. Foreshadowing later problems, the report says his “first attempt” was successful as he and two other Marines went out 25-50 yards off the coast. After resting, he and the other Marines made a “second attempt,” but went further out this time. The Marine lost his fins and was unable to swim back to shore. A rip current carried him out approximately one mile, but fortunately for our finless frogman, he was rescued by a local fisherman about 45 minutes later. — *This Marine was very lucky, but for some*

Sailors and Marines, their snorkeling and swimming adventures ended in tragedy. Learn to identify rip currents and heed warning signs at the beach, your life could depend on it.

• **“Tan, don’t burn.”** — Old sunscreen slogan. A Sailor was spending the day at the beach from 0900-1600. She only applied sunscreen once before heading to the beach that morning [*insert face palm emoji here*]. As we expected, she developed a second-degree sunburn that blistered on her arms. — *The extreme pain and 48 hours SIQ were probably not worth the seven-hour tanning session at the beach. It may not seem important, but please apply and reapply that sunscreen. You’ll be glad you did.*

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- **The twelfth player.** A Sailor was playing football on the beach when he tackled a friend “in the same proximity of some wooden pallets.” (???) As a result, the Sailor’s arm became trapped between the tackled individual and the wooden pallets. He received multiple lacerations and his arm began to swell, bruise and had sharp pains. — *Fourteen days on light duty with a broken arm are no way to spend your liberty time. Give yourself plenty of room for whatever beach sport you’re playing.*



- **Tread lightly.** Early on a summer morning, a Sailor was walking into the ocean to go surfing at a local beach when he was stung by a sting ray. The report doesn't elaborate on the extent of the surfing Sailor’s injury, but it landed him 16 days on light duty. — *We understand that not all hazards are completely avoidable and that sting rays are nearly impossible to see, even in clear water. Experts say to shuffle your feet as you walk to avoid stepping on one and “triggering” its defensive response.*



- **Watching too much “Game of Thrones.”** In our final story, which **is** real as we routinely point out in our “Once Upon a Mishap” videos, a Sailor was at the beach with friends “running into each other with medicine balls trying to knock each other down,” according to the report. At some point during the medicine-ball joust event, the Sailor was running towards his friend, medicine ball at the ready, when his friend slipped and his friend's shoulder hit him in his cheek bone (*is anyone else not surprised?*). The Sailor was treated in the emergency room for an orbital fracture (*a broken eye socket*) and given ten days light duty. — *If you must engage in medieval sports, choose something safer like “skittles” (early ten pin bowling), because there’s nothing noble about medicine ball jousting.*

Key Takeaways

That’s all for our latest sampling of select summer mishaps. While these stories are, unfortunately, not all-inclusive, they serve as a reminder of the ever-present hazards lurking in the great outdoors. For more topics and tips, check out our 101 Critical Days of Summer presentation to help you stay safe this summer. In the meantime, here are a couple of tips to get you started.

1. Don’t mess with mother nature. The beach, the water, your backyard, or whatever outdoor environment you enjoy, pose unique hazards not normally encountered while on duty. We may not have total control over the hazards, but we can mitigate them by educating ourselves, planning with the risks in mind, and respecting the forces of nature.

2. Vacay responsibly. Consider what you are actually getting yourself into this summer. Whether you’re lighting a burn pile, out on the water, or playing your favorite medieval summer games on the beach, consider your own fitness and the special hazards around you. It should also go without saying to drink responsibly, but every year we see mishaps where alcohol was a factor. Please don’t add to our incredibly long list of things not to drink and do.

As we begin to emerge from COVID-19 restrictions this summer, please enjoy some well-deserved time off. Take care of yourself, your family, and each other in all that you do. Make risk management a routine part of your daily life, so that we don’t need to write about you in our next lessons learned.

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

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