



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-26

101 Critical Days of Summer Wrap Up - 2025

The 101 Critical Days of Summer may be over, but the impact stays with us. Every fatality and injury reminds us that hazards don't take a break. This summer, 27 off-duty service members were killed and many more were injured. Most of the deaths were in roadway mishaps: 11 involved motorcycles, 12 were four-wheeled vehicles and one was a pedestrian. Off-duty recreational deaths claimed three more lives, including a drowning, an All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) mishap and an electric bike mishap.

These days-of-summer mishaps reflect a 10% increase in motorcycle deaths and a 33% increase in vehicle mishap deaths compared to a five-year average (FY 2020 – 2024) over the same timeframe. This fiscal year (*so far*) 69 servicemembers have been killed in vehicle-related mishaps, a 20% increase over the last year's total – and the FY isn't over yet. We've got to do better. Please help us keep YOU from being one of those numbers.



Sailors and Marines also injured themselves in many off-duty summer activities. Basketball, weightlifting, baseball/softball and biking accounted for the highest number, while stair-related falls led the non-sports mishaps (*proof that handrails are there for a reason*). In all, more than 300 incidents were reported (*and late entries are still being entered*), to include stuff ranging from animal bites and jellyfish stings to slips in the shower. Here are a handful of real examples for just a small snapshot of how we hurt ourselves this summer. Please read and see the risks these folks didn't manage, so you can avoid the same fate.

- **A Matter of Seconds.** A motorcycle rider on a double lane highway was riding in the left lane at an estimated 50-60 mph. After passing a car positioned in the right lane, he sped up and moved into the right lane to get around a slower vehicle ahead in the left lane. As the highway curved left, the rider collided with the right-side guardrail and was thrown from the motorcycle, which traveled riderless for a distance. Witnesses called 911 and the rider was transported to a medical facility. Despite wearing prescribed PPE, he died from his injuries. —*Maintaining good situational awareness and avoiding overconfidence in your abilities are important in ANY activity, but even more so when riding a motorcycle. This rider did many things right—he wore PPE, completed rider training, and wasn't driving with excessive speed—but a momentary lapse in judgement at highway speed tragically cost him his life. Typical human reaction time (the time it takes a person to perceive a hazard and then react) is about 1.5 seconds when traveling on a highway¹. At 55 mph, a rider will travel about 120 feet in that 1.5 seconds before initiating any action such as breaking or leaning for a turn. Fatigue or other distractions only add to the reaction time and the distance traveled before you react to an upcoming hazard. Stay alert, look for hazards, ride within your abilities, and maintain focus on every ride.*

- **Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail.** A Marine on a motorcycle began a late-night trip home from a weekend away, aiming to return in time for work Monday. According to the report, he hadn't had adequate sleep over the past three days. While traveling on an unfamiliar road, he didn't notice an approaching roundabout until it was too late to navigate safely. Trying to avoid a crash, he braced to ride over the curb; instead, his front wheel caught the curb, throwing him from the bike. After briefly losing consciousness, he walked to a nearby house and asked them to call 911. Medics took him to the hospital, where he was treated and scheduled for surgery to repair a broken wrist. —*This mishap resulted from poor planning and lack of risk management. Traveling long distances at night without sufficient rest on unfamiliar roads is dangerous; doing that on motorcycle just makes it worse. Supervisors, remind your team members to think about hazards and risk with all activities, even when (or especially when) unsupervised. Fortunately, this Marine's good decision to wear full protective gear likely prevented more serious injuries.*

¹Reaction time according to the Federal Highway Administration <https://highways.fhwa.dot.gov/safety/speed-management/>

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- **♪ I'm a Lumberjack and I'm OK. ♪** A Sailor was in the backyard chopping firewood in the evening so he could get a small cooking fire started. The area was dimly lit, with the porch light as the only source. He didn't have a chopping block to better stabilize the wood and raise it to a comfortable level; instead, he was working in an awkward position and kneeling on the ground. When he swung the hatchet, it ricocheted off the unstable wood striking the top of his other hand, causing a significant cut. He tried to stop the bleeding on his own but was convinced by a family member to have it checked out at the ER. The family member was right; he needed eight stitches to close it up. —*The Sailors approach ignored a list of hazards/risk in this incident: inadequate lighting, unstable positioning of the wood, working in an awkward position, and lack of heavy-duty gloves as PPE...just for starters. Combine poor task planning with overconfidence (maybe he's done this before) and it becomes a recipe for stitches. It's luck alone that he didn't sever his hand or fingers. Whatever you're doing, think through your task, visualize what could go wrong, and then modify your actions to reduce the risks. If he'd done that, he'd have avoided hacking himself.*
- **Surviving the Crash Was Only Half the Battle.** Sometime after 0100 (*the time should concern us already*), a servicemember riding as a passenger in a vehicle was injured when the driver lost control, struck a guardrail and rolled over. According to the report, the driver and passenger exited the vehicle and split up, possibly to go find help. The passenger attempted to cross the highway, but due to the darkness (*it's 0100*), the driver of an oncoming vehicle didn't see him in time to react (*remember reaction time*) and struck the servicemember while crossing. Fire/rescue responded to the scene and pronounced the servicemember deceased. —*Being on foot on or around a highway at night is one of the most dangerous scenarios there is. With low visibility at night and high speed, assume drivers can't see you and expect that they'll have slower reaction times. Late night adds even more danger from drivers being fatigued or impaired (DUI). Your life is almost completely in your own hands in this situation! If you breakdown or are in an accident and must exit the vehicle, find a safe place off the shoulder and stay clear of the roadway.*
- **I Did...WHAT...Last Night?** A watch stander at an entry control point noticed a Sailor in distress and alerted the medical watch standers to bring the Sailor back to the ship for evaluation. The medical folks found he had a fractured clavicle (broken collarbone). The Sailor was returning from liberty and was so intoxicated he couldn't remember what happened. No one reported seeing him returning from liberty, arriving in a vehicle, or witnessing a fall. The Sailor 'believes' he fell out of a *non-moving* vehicle and either hit the ground or an object. —*If you're going to drink, do so in moderation, go with a buddy, and help mitigate the alcohol effects by eating before drinking. Drinking to the point of being so blitzed that you're not sure how you arrived or how you broke yourself and needed over a month of light duty is dangerous and risky. Enjoy your time off, but use a little bit of wisdom. The team needs you to be recharged and ready, not sidelined when it's time to get back to work.*

Key Takeaways

Nearly all off-duty summer mishaps were caused by a lapse in judgment, lack of situational awareness, or complacency. To reduce or eliminate missteps like those, we've got to make it normal to think about hazards and how to avoid them (*a.k.a. manage risk*) before and during any activity. Risk management isn't a program or checklist – it's thinking. Here are a few other words of wisdom:

1. Be mentally present. This applies to whatever you're doing – riding, driving, chopping wood, or going out for a night on the town. When you're on the road, respect speed limits and road conditions. Excessive speed reduces reaction time, so slow down and pay attention. For other stuff, think through processes and activities before starting them. Identify the risks so you can mitigate them instead of discovering them after they bite you.

2. Be smart, prepared, and proactive. Risk management applies to all activities all the time – and it really isn't complicated. It's about thinking ahead. Make assessing risk a first thought, not an afterthought. Think through your task, picture what might go wrong, and then act accordingly. You don't need a trip to the ER to learn a lesson; learn from those that have already learned the hard way.

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