NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND
SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH SA 26-25

101 Critical Days of Summer Wrap-Up



The 2026 101 Critical Days of Summer have come to an end; it is now time to see how the season has affected the Naval Enterprise. This summer, 22 Marines and Sailors lost their lives in the roughly 400 off-duty mishaps reported. As in previous years, most of these fatalities were the result of motor vehicle mishaps – eight motorcycle (PMV-2) crashes and 10 four-wheel (PMV-4) motor vehicle crashes. Three drowning fatalities and a vehicle-related pedestrian mishap made up the other four incidents.

Regarding the non-fatal mishaps, motor vehicle incidents were also the biggest ticket item with 173 mishaps. Motorcycles outpaced other vehicles in the category with 90 PMV-2 to 78 PMV-4 mishaps and five bicycle mishaps (we continue to be alarmed, but unfortunately, not surprised that motorcyclists make up such a large portion of the injury population, even though statistically, they make up a comparatively smaller portion of the driving population). Sports and Recreation-related mishaps accounted for the next largest category with 141 reported events, followed by 85 off-duty incidents reported under the Miscellaneous category.

In addition to the 22 Sailors and Marines who never returned to their units, this season resulted in a cumulative 482 days of lost work time from service members being hospitalized or sick-in-quarters and more than 5,691 days of service members placed in a restricted work status due to injury. For just a 15-week period, the injuries and loss of life from these mishaps have made a significant impact on the fleet and demonstrate the need to apply risk mitigation not just when on duty, but in our free time as well. The following narratives help make this point.

A Not Relaxing Summer Activity.

A forward-deployed Sailor was trying to emulate the most significant scene from *Top Gun (i.e., the volleyball scene),* but instead of jean-clad high-fives, there were angry punches … to a wall. The report did not specify what angered the Sailor so, but at some point during the game he became aggravated enough to walk over to a nearby wall and vent his frustration. He did so by balling his fist and punching the wall hard enough to fracture his hand. The outcome from this outburst put him SIQ for a day and in a limited duty status for another 41. – *The kicker of this incident is the Sailor was scheduled for flight operations that same day but had to be removed from his unit because he couldn't control his temper. Being passionate about a game can be a good thing, but getting so angry over it that you lash out, affecting your job and the readiness of your unit, is not.*

A Short Dive.

While on vacation at a hotel, a Sailor was enjoying the quintessential summer activity of lounging by the pool. *(This activity also happened to include the consumption of a few alcoholic beverages.)* Now the report doesn't say how much alcohol was consumed, but it must have been enough to affect the Sailor's judgment and/or observation, because after a while the Sailor decided to dive into the pool … into the shallow end *(you know, the part of the pool where public and hotel pools always have markers saying, "NO DIVING")*. The Sailor struck his head on the bottom of the pool earning a serious laceration requiring eight stitches. – *We understand many people enjoy a few adult beverages during summer vacations, but we must encourage you to make sure you can keep your wits about you, especially around a pool. Causing yourself a head injury is bad enough – doing so in the pool can be fatal.*

Hitting the Only Hard Thing in the Water.

A Sailor was taking advantage of the warm weather to get some experience surfing, however, the waves at the time were bigger than he was used to. While trying to stand as he was catching a wave, the Sailor lost his balance and fell backward. As if this wasn't bad enough luck, the surfboard somehow flipped over causing the Sailor to strike his head on the fin as he went down, resulting in a deep laceration (*fortunately, Jaws wasn't around to smell the blood in the water).* The Sailor ended up getting eight staples in his head *(hey, he can compare scars with the last guy!)*. – *Surfing is a great summertime sport but know your limits. Experienced surfers can usually control where they fall and can "bail out" if they feel they aren't going to make a wave. If you aren't at this level, stay off the big waves.*

Going for a Moonlit Run (?) on the Beach.

Two Marines were enjoying a night of liberty and after going to a movie theater decided to head to the local beach. The report stated their activities included "sitting on the beach, listening to music, walking around and swimming." Afterward, they decided to "run around the beach." We are unsure if this was meant as a strange twilight PT regimen or just goofing around. Based on the fact alcohol was identified as a factor, we'll assume the latter. During this fit of Marine "zoomies", one of the Marines tripped, landing with his face hitting his arm as he tried to brace himself. This impact was hard enough to cause a subarachnoid hemorrhage *(basically, bleeding in the brain, which, by the way, usually causes severe pain and can be fatal if not treated)* landing the Marine in the hospital for two days. – *The beach can be very relaxing at night, but only if you avoid activities that can cause you to literally faceplant. We advise against drinking and running on uneven terrain, like beach sand, in the dark.*

Fore!Head.

A Sailor and his son were enjoying some time in the sun in their backyard and practicing their golf swings. This bonding experience was cut short, though, when the father unwittingly moved a little too close to his son's swing plane. As you might have gleaned from this narrative's title, the father was struck in the head by his son's backswing. This resulted in a hospital visit, four deep tissue stitches and 10 surface stitches. – *The first rule of the driving range is giving your neighbor enough space. This is true for hitting balls in your backyard as well. Pay attention to where you are standing as well as where others are around you.*

Another Tragic Ending.

Our final example is shockingly similar to an example from our *101 Critical Days of Summer Midpoint Update* for this year. The investigation of this final incident is still in progress, but we know from the preliminary report that a Marine was driving with a civilian passenger when their vehicle impacted a tree. Both occupants were ejected from the vehicle and sustained life-threatening injuries. They were airlifted to a medical facility where, as of the time this dispatch was written, their prognosis was still uncertain. With the investigation still pending, there are only a few facts we can present, but it's still worth mentioning. Based on the severity of the injuries and their ejection from the vehicle, it's possible that speed was a factor, or that seat belts were not worn, or both. – *This is obviously a somber note to end the summer on, but we think it's a worthwhile one. As the statistics show, motor vehicle incidents are the most likely way service members will be injured while off duty. We implore you to use every means of mitigation possible to make your drive safe. Specifically, please drive at the right speed for current conditions and wear your seat belts.*

Key Takeaways

While the current numbers show the naval enterprise lost fewer Sailors and Marines in off-duty mishaps this summer; 22 compared to the 29 servicemembers we lost during the same timeframe in 2025, the impact on their families, units and overall naval readiness is still significant and enduring. As the more than 400 reported mishaps as of Sept. 15 demonstrate, there is always room for improvement. We also want to note, while summer is ending in the northern hemisphere, things are just starting to warm up in the southern hemisphere. With that in mind, we would like to reiterate some of our previous warm weather guidance.

1. Drive smart. Seeing as motor vehicle mishaps continue to be the highest impacting mishap category, this might be the most important advice to heed. Speed and fatigue are some of the biggest factors that hurt us in this regard. Get where you are going safe, drive rested and at the right speed.

2. Be careful during sports and recreation activities. Whether competing in a sport or just goofing around, it can be easy to lose focus when participating in sports and rec. Pay attention to the hazards at hand, particularly the heat in the summer, and react accordingly.

3. Be mentally present and proactive. This is good advice no matter the activity and no matter the season. Almost all mishaps are caused by a lapse in judgement, either in planning or in real-time reactions. Plan your activities beforehand and make sound decisions in the moment.

Note: *This data was extracted from the Risk Management Information system Sept. 15. As many mishap reports are not submitted up to 30 days following an incident, it is likely the total number of incidents will increase.*

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