

HQ A WFC/SE
SUMMER MISHAP
PREVENTION SCHEMES

“101 CRITICAL DAYS OF SUMMER”



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF SAFETY
Major General Francis C. Gideon, Jr.

As I write this, more than 20 Air Force civilian and military members have lost their lives in fatal mishaps this fiscal year. The majority of these were ground mishaps, and *all* the ground fatalities involved motor vehicles—on- and off-duty. Last year was our safest year in Air Force history. We lost 71 Air Force members—52 in ground mishaps.

Since 1988, safety professionals have investigated more than 80,000 mishaps in the ground, flight, and weapons arenas. Of those, more than 75% were ground mishaps. Thankfully, the vast majority of those mishaps were not fatal and did not cause permanent disabling injuries. As you would expect, our biggest killer (nearly three-fourths of our fatalities), has been motor vehicle off-duty. I can assure you, the motor vehicle was not guilty of complacency, poor judgement, or failure to use Operational Risk Management. No---*human* factors were the biggest part of these mishap equations.

We are about to enter the 101 Critical Days of Summer, running from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Our mishap database tells us this is the most dangerous time of the year. How dangerous is it? Since 1988, 366 air Force members have lost their lives during this 3-month period. Last year, before our campaign had even officially started, the Air Force had reported nine motorcycle fatalities, six during the month of May. By year's end, 15 Air Force members had paid the ultimate price for riding their motorcycles. Our second biggest killer was open water, resulting in nine drownings by the end of FY98. 71 Air Force members died last year, 22 due to ground mishaps last summer. Will we—will YOU—learn from these numbers?

The Chief of Staff, General Ryan ascribed our excellent record last year to sound use of three things—leadership, accountability, and ORM—and heartily agree. Here is an excerpt from his 19 October 1998 message to the field.

“For leaders, successful risk management begins with knowing your people, your equipment, and the pressures—including Ops and Pers Tempos—that contribute to potentially dangerous situations. For individuals, it is knowing yourself, your challenges, your limitations, and the risks involved in our daily activities. Every Air Force team member has my total commitment and support should they make the decision to ‘knock it off.’”

Mishaps *can* be avoided. It's human nature to believe that mishaps only happen to “the other guy,” but remember, every person who died, was injured, or was operating an aircraft or wheeled vehicle that was destroyed in FY98 believed the same thing.

As you prepare for work each day, remember that risk is inherent in everything you do, and one of your duties is to minimize risk to yourself and your coworkers. If you see someone commit an unsafe act—or about to commit an unsafe act—then stop that person. Likewise, as you prepare to engage in recreational activities in your off-duty time—whether it's a family outing or a cross-country run—think before you act. Imagine everything that can go wrong and *then* take preventive measures. Do it for yourself. Do it for loved ones. Do it for your country.

Best wishes for a safe and enjoyable 101 Critical Days of Summer!

Camping and Hiking
By Mr. Frank Kelley
AWFC/SEG

According to A.C. Nielsen estimates, about 64.5 million Americans go camping, and sometimes it seems they're all cramped into your campground. Regardless of the form or duration, camping gets us away from our living rooms and into a closer communications with nature.

Like any worthwhile endeavor, camping is only as good as the preparation and planning that go into it. As we get ready for the Spring and Summer season, your safety office will provide helpful tips aimed at ensuring the best and safest adventure possible. With that in mind, let's start with Camping and Hiking.

What to Take

We could devote several articles on the things to take on your camping or hiking expedition. Suffice it to say, you should never leave home without a well stocked first aid kit and proper, comfortable clothing. Take time to thoroughly consider the things you will need. Start by looking at the conditions for the area you want to camp and/or hike in. Contacting the local park ranger service will greatly help you in this. Next create a checklist needed for the area. Be sure to include cooking utensils (if camping), insect repellents, lanterns, tool kits, sunscreen, matches in a water proof container, toilet paper, soap and a compass.

So now we're ready to run out the door and hit the trails, right? Not quite. There is more to preparation than just a checklist of items such as:

How to Stay - RV or Tent

Okay, you've made your checklist of what to take with you on your great outdoor adventure. You've chose to make this trip a full-fledged camping complete with all the comforts of home, more or less. But just how do you plan to stay? Will you use an RV or truly ruff it in a tent? Both ways have their advantages. However, we want to reduce the disadvantages that can cause mishaps. So let's cover some helpful hints on both.

In a trailer or RV...

- Don't endanger your family's lives by over packing, which will affect your vehicle's handling.
- Drive only on roads your vehicle is designed to travel and use only marked RV campsites.
- Arrive before sundown to select a suitable campsite.
- Beware of trees with dead branches, and low areas that could flood or become muddy in heavy rain.
- Use only electrically operated lights in a trailer.

For you tent lovers...

- Read the labels before buying a tent. Only buy a tent that is flame resistant.
- Pitch your tent at least 15 feet upwind from grills and fireplaces.
- Use only flashlights or battery powered lanterns inside a tent.

Either way you choose to camp over, keep safety at the front of your list. And, oh yes; remember to inspect the area for poisonous plants, bee's nest and other dangers.

So you've made your choice of camping accommodations, got all packed up, and are ready to hit the road. Maybe you are even at your favorite campground, chosen a good campsite, and have everything all set up. The sun is up early, and you think you're ready to hit the road or perhaps the sun is just about ready to go down, and you're ready to build that campfire right? Not until you consider:

Fire: Friend and Foe

Since the dawn of time, fire has been both friend and foe to mankind. Which it is, depends greatly on how we respect it and protect against its harmful effect. Before working with fire ensure that you:

- Check and maintain gas connections and fume vents. Turn off an RV's LP-gas tank before traveling. DO NOT USE LP-fueled appliances while in motion.
- Store flammable liquids only in safety cans, and a safe distance from you tent, camper or other source of heat or open flame.
- Use a funnel to pour flammable liquids. Wipe up spills.
- Fill lanterns and stoves a safe distance downwind from heat sources.
- Keep a fire extinguisher, or pail of water, available at all times.
- Do not use a flammable liquid to start a fire.
- Develop a fire escape plan with your family. Get out first.

Let's not forget good campfire and grill safety.

- Build a campfire where it can not spread. Never leave a burning fire unattended. Put it out with water and soil.
- Leave at least a three-foot area clear of leaves, dry grass, and pine needles around grills, fireplaces and tents.
- Don't pour fire starter on a smoldering fire.
- Do not dump hot charcoal on the ground where someone can accidentally step on it.
- Do not put a grill in a car or RV unless it's cold and thoroughly cleaned of cinders.
- Supervise children at all times.
- Don't wear loose-fitting clothing around fire.
- Teach and practice the STOP, DROP and ROLL, method of putting out a clothing fire.

Fire is a great tool given to mankind but it also takes a responsible person who treats fire with respect. Learn to become that person. As Smokey the Bear say, "Only you can prevent forest fires"!

Life's beautiful and all is right with the world. You're at the campground, maybe have a steak on the grill or you could be at the beginning of the trailhead, ready for the hike. The air is clean, the sun warm and you're ready to do some exploring. But before you take off, consider these tips. They could make the difference between a wonderful memory and a hair-raising experience.

While Exploring

- Children should carry a loud whistle in case they are lost or injured.
- For long treks into deep woods, wear long pants and hiking boots (instead of sneakers), with jeans tucked into boots or long socks. A long-sleeved shirt with the collar up is also a sound idea.
- Do not pet or feed wild animals, no matter how cute they may seem.
- To avoid bee stings, do not wear bright-colored clothing, and do not use cologne or scented cosmetics, especially florals. Avoid rapid movements around bees.
- Learn to identify the three most common poisonous plants: poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. If you come in contact with one of them, wash the affected area with soap and cool water quickly.

Camping and hiking are great ways of relieving stress and enjoying the great outdoors. We have tried to provide you with some helpful tips aimed at making your stay with nature more enjoyable. There are many more areas that deserve your consideration and overtime you will fine-tune your efforts. We wish you the best camping season ever and remember that "We Care About You"!

This Is No Toy Story

Courtesy "Safety Times"

Roxanne and her teenage friends spent the afternoon taking turns on the two-seater personal watercraft (PWC). Riding the waves and splashing around were great ways to enjoy the bay. In a moment of inattention, Roxanne and her partner fell off. Before she could get out of the water, Roxanne was struck by another PWC and died at the scene.

PWCs are not toys, but too many people treat them as if they were. In 1995, 79 people across the country died in accidents involving personal watercraft. While only 5% of the boats on the water are PWCs, they account for 30 to 40% of boating accidents.

Before You Go

*Know your craft. Read the owner's manual to learn operating techniques and to develop riding skills. Share this information with others that may ride on it.

*Check over the craft. Be sure:

- the throttle and all switches are working properly;
- the fuel and battery lines are properly connected;
- you have enough fuel;
- the cables and steering are functioning properly.

*Never exceed passenger weight or capacity.

*Have a Coast Guard-approved fire extinguisher on board.

*Wear Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) and a wet suit.

*PWC riders have an increased risk of abrasions due to contact with their PWC, other vessels, docks, rocks, corals, or the water's surface, particularly as speeds increase. A wet suit also protects you from hypothermia. Consider wearing a helmet, water shoes, gloves, and other protective apparel. Normal swimming attire is not good enough.

*Know and obey navigational rules of the road and posted instructions.

*Practice reboarding before going out for the first time.

*Know local water conditions and where the obstacles are.

The Operator

*Insist on training when you're renting a craft. Ask questions until you're confident you know how to operate the controls. Be sure the instructor is competent to teach.

*Never drink and ride. At least 50% of all recreational boating fatalities involve alcohol.

*It is recommended that PWC operators are at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license. This indicates the operator has demonstrated some degree of maturity, responsibility, and good judgement.

*Parents should guide and supervise a teenager's use.

*Know your limits. Don't stay on the water too long. You'll become tired and more prone to mishaps.

*Take time to master the basic techniques before attempting more difficult maneuvers.

*Many craft have a lanyard connected to the start/stop switch. Never start your engine without attaching the lanyard to your PFD or wrist.

On the Water

*Ride with someone nearby in case you run into trouble.

*Allow plenty of room to safely turn when you are near swimmers, scuba divers, surf-boarders, boats, and docks. Remember you don't have brakes.

*Sailboats, commercial, and fishing vessels always have the right of way.

*Watch out for sail craft; they cannot maneuver as quickly as you can.

*Stay to the right of oncoming boats. They must pass on your left side. When overtaking a boat, pass on the right or left, but stay well clear.

*Always stay within sight of land.

*Be especially alert around water skiers, since you may distract the driver or skier.

*Wake jumping is dangerous! You are a distraction to that boat and a potential hazard to oncoming craft. Also, you may injure yourself or damage your boat when landing. Crossing a wake should always be done cautiously.

*If you loan your craft to friends, make sure they are of legal operating age for your area and they know how to operate your craft and follow safe boating rules.

*Never operate a PWC after dark.

*Be especially alert at dawn and dusk. The sun's glare makes it harder to see you then.

*Take a boating safety course and regular refresher courses. For more information, call the U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Hotline, 1-800-368-5647.

SAFETY COMMISSION REISSUES WARNING:

Young People Under the Age of 16 Should Not Ride Adult-Size ATVs: Safety Alert

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is still concerned about young people under 16 years of age who are killed or injured riding adult-size ATVs. Despite a significant reduction in ATV-related injuries and deaths since the mid-1980s, young people constitute about 40 percent of all deaths and estimated injuries. In 1990, there were about 77 deaths and an estimated 19,400 injuries involving ATVs ridden by young people under the age of 16. For drivers under 16 years of age, there is a 1-in-3 chance of having an ATV-related injury during the average lifespan of the ATV. The total costs of deaths and injuries to young people under the age of 16 amounted to more than \$500 million in 1989. The cost of deaths and injuries associated with ATVs is about \$3,500 per ATV over the life of the product.

Commission statistics show that the number of estimated injuries from ATV-related accidents treated in hospital emergency rooms declined from about 86,000 in 1986 to about 52,000 in 1990. Deaths declined from 299 in 1986 to 218 in 1990. The injury rate for both the general ATV-riding population and ATV operators below 16 years of age dropped by about 50 percent, and the death rate declined about 40 percent from 1985 to 1989. The significant decline in ATV-related deaths and injuries during the past few years is the result of several factors, including the stop-sale of 3-wheel ATVs (ordered in the 1988 consent decree between CPSC and the ATV distributors), declining sales of 4-wheelers, and increased consumer awareness of ATV hazards and of skills needed to operate the vehicles.

The Commission warns that young people under the age of 16 should never operate an adult-size ATV (over 90cc engine size). To help adult riders avoid injuries and deaths with ATVs, the Commission also recommends:

- Take a hands-on training course offered by certified instructors.
- Always wear a helmet and other protective equipment.
- Do not carry passengers.
- Do not ride on paved roads or use alcohol.

General Water Safety Tips to Live By

- Learn to swim. The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water is to learn to swim.
- Always swim with a buddy; never swim alone.
- Know your swimming limits and stay within them. Don't try to keep up with a stronger skilled swimmer or encourage others to keep up with you.
- Swim in supervised areas only.
- Obey "No Diving" signs.
- Watch out for the "dangerous too's"--too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
- Don't mix alcohol and swimming. Alcohol impairs your judgement, balance, and coordination, affects your swimming and diving skills and reduces your body's ability to stay warm.
- Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket when boating and fishing.
- **Know local weather conditions and prepare for electrical storms. Because water conducts electricity, it is wise to stop swimming or boating as soon as you see or hear a storm.**
- Know how to prevent, recognize, and respond to emergencies. Remember, **CHECK-CALL-CARE**: CHECK the scene to ensure it's safe and CHECK the victim; CALL 9-1-1 or your local emergency number; and CARE for the person until help arrives.

In the event of a drowning--

- Remove the victim from the water, have someone call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.
- Check consciousness and breathing.
- If the victim is not breathing, tilt the head to open the airway and attempt rescue breathing.
- If breaths do not go in, retilt the head and attempt rescue breathing again.
- If air still does not go in, give abdominal thrusts (Heimlich maneuver) for children and adults to clear the airway.
- Once the airway is clear, provide rescue breathing or CPR, as needed.

Learn more about American Red Cross [CPR](#) courses or contact your [local Red Cross](#) for course schedules in your community.

Human error plays critical role in boating accidents

A U.S. Coast Guard review has concluded that nearly 80 percent of boating accidents involve operator controlled factors. Choosing not to wear a life jacket, boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs, operator inattention or carelessness, speeding, and falling overboard were the leading causes of fatal boating accidents.

"The key to safety on the water is operator knowledge and experience which can be gained by taking a safe boating course." said Jerry Scannell, president of the National Safety Council, which produced the National Safe Boating Campaign, under a grant from the Aquatic Resources (Wallop-Breaux) Trust Fund administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Ninety percent of recreational boating accidents involve an operator with no boating instruction. It is estimated that only a small fraction (5 to 10 percent) of all non-fatal boating accidents that meet reporting requirements are ever reported to the Coast Guard or state or local law enforcement agencies.

"We provide training ranging from local laws and regulations to boat handling maneuvers," said *(name, title) of (your organization)*. "Most importantly we can teach rescue and survival techniques in case an accident does occur." *(Last name)* noted that the most vital step to survival is wearing a life jacket. Nearly nine out of ten of boating-related drownings involved victims who were not wearing one.

Boaters are invited to increase their boating knowledge at *(your organization)*. Call *(telephone number)* for a class schedule or the BOAT/U.S. CourseLine, 800-336-BOAT.

Here are some questions and answers from the U.S. Coast Guard to get started.

True or false: Most serious boating accidents involve large, powerful watercraft.

False. The typical boating accidents involve a small boat, less than 16 feet, with a motor of less than 16 horsepower or no motor at all. Fishing and canoeing accidents are common.

True or false: If you fall overboard you can prevent hypothermia by treading water.

False. If you are immersed in water try not to tread water or submerge your head. If you are wearing a life jacket, use the "huddle technique" by bringing your legs up towards your chest and keeping your arms folded. Hypothermia can occur in any water less than 70 degrees. Some life jackets are good insulators from hypothermia.

True or false: Drinking an alcoholic beverage while boating is the only factor that may impair your judgment.

False. Motion and vibration of the boat, exposure to the sun, wind and dehydration from being in the sun, and alcoholic beverages will all impair your judgment. Combine these factors and the impact multiplies. The best advice is don't drink alcohol while boating and drink plenty of water. Remember that a day of fun on a boat can also be tiring.

True or false: A white buoy or sign with an orange diamond is a warning of danger.

True. If you see this sign, there may be rapids, rocks or dams. Black lettering identifies the danger source.

LIGHTNING SAFETY RULES

Property damage from lightning each year is estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Lightning claims quite a few victims every year; averages of a little over 100 are killed and 250 are injured, many while seeking shelter from the storm.

Almost 3/4 of the deaths attributed to lightning occurs during the summer season, with the majority during July. You may say this is because more people are out of doors during the summer months. But the main reason is because more occur then. The chances of being struck by lightning are about the same as winning the \$1,000,000 lottery:

2,000,000 to one.

In the United States more than 200 people die each year from lightning or from fires caused by lightning. It kills more people than hurricanes or tornadoes. At any moment there are 2,000 thundershowers occurring around the world. Lightning takes the shortest path. It hits the highest object, a tall tree or building, a tower or a person standing alone in a flat field.

Lightning can strike many miles away from its parent storm. So even if you are not right in the middle of a thunderstorm, but one is near, be prepared. If your hair starts standing on end, or you taste copper in your mouth, you are about to be struck by lightning.

You can take a few safety steps to avoid being hit by lightning.

- Stay indoors and away from windows during a thunderstorm. You should not be out in the rain anyway. Unplug televisions, computers and other appliances.
- If you are away from buildings, get inside an all-metal, non-convertible automobile, and avoid contact with the metal.
- Avoid using telephones, unless it is an emergency. Watch the storm instead, it is spectacular.
- Do not stand under a natural lightning rod such as a tall, isolated tree in an open area.
- Do not stand on a hilltop, an open field, or on the beach.
- Get away from open water and do not fish from a small boat.
- Stay away from metal objects, especially golf clubs. Take off your golf shoes. You do not want to be in contact with any metal, which is a good conductor of electricity.
- Get away from tractors and other metal farm equipment. Get away from scooters and bicycles.

- **Stay away from wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes, rails and other metallic paths, which could carry lightning to you from some distance away.**
- **Avoid standing in small isolated sheds or other small structure in open areas. Get off the golf course.**
- **If in a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees. In open areas, go to a low place such as a ravine or valley.**
- **Do not stand under a single tall tree. Most lightning victims are killed while seeking shelter under a tree. Do not be the tallest object in the area. Make yourself as low as possible and stay away from single tall trees. If it is hit and you are near it, you may get a shock from the electricity travelling through the ground.**

First Aid

If a person is struck by lightning, he is not carrying any electrical charge and so can be touched. He will be burnt and has received a severe electrical shock.

Many people apparently "killed" by lightning can be revived if quick action is taken. When a group is affected, the apparent dead should be treated first; those unconscious but breathing will probably recover.

First aid should be rendered to those not breathing within four to six minutes to prevent irrevocable damage to the brain. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation should be administered once every five seconds to adults and once every three seconds to infants and small children.

If the victim is not breathing and has no pulse, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is necessary. This is a combination of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and external cardiac compression. Persons with proper training should administer it.

Check for burns along their extremities and around areas in contact with metal.

Give first aid for shock.

Send for help.

Fluid imbalance could cause health concern

By MSgt John Capers
Ground Safety Manager

Whether walking, working outside or sunning yourself, as the weather heats up even more, you could be at risk of dehydration.

Dehydration is what happens when – through sweat or working conditions – your body's water supply gets too low. Many people are at risk when working or at play:

- *firemen and emergency response teams
- *people who wear protective gear and clothing
- *anyone working beside heat-producing equipment
- *people working in a warm building with poor air circulation, and
- *people who work outside on a continual basis.

When you become dehydrated your blood volume decreases which slows the flow of oxygen to your muscles. Since the muscles can't get rid of the heat they produce, your internal temperature increases. It's similar to what happens when your car runs out of coolant or antifreeze. If you don't have enough liquids inside of you, and don't take time out to replace that fluid, you'll feel even worse the next day.

To help prevent dehydration, stop for a breather regularly. Relieve workers and rotate them more frequently when it's hot outside.

Drink up

The easiest way to prevent dehydration is to make sure you drink plenty of liquids. In hot weather, try to drink about a cup of cool water every 15 to 20 minutes. This is often better than trying to drink a large amount every hour. Drinking fluids before you begin work will help you prepare even more.

Drinking alcohol isn't actually as refreshing as it sounds. We've all heard that alcohol dehydrates you even more, but do we know how? Alcohol is a diuretic – it increases the need to urinate – which causes fluids to leave your body at the time you need them most.

The key to a safe and healthy summer is to make sure you don't go hours without drinking recommended fluids and taking frequent breaks from the sun and heat.

Seatbelts and Air Bags

Picture a baseball crashing through the window of a house.

Now you have a rough idea of what happens when the impact of an auto accident hurls a passenger through the windshield.

But in a high-speed accident the passenger is sometimes moving with more momentum than a pitcher's fastball or a slugger's line drive. Now consider this: The impact of a 12-mile an hour crash is enough to kill an adult or child passenger.

But:

When passengers wear seatbelts and shoulder harnesses, they can often survive crashes occurring at 60 miles an hour or more. Overall, seatbelt/shoulder-harness wearers are four times less likely to die in accidents than are unsecured travelers.

Yet millions of Americans refuse to use belts and harnesses. Some say its too much trouble. Others say the devices are too confining. A few even go to the extent of disabling automatic belts on the newer cars. Massachusetts has repealed a law requiring travelers to fasten their seatbelts.

Some psychologists theorize that the reason people don't like to buckle up is that doing so is admission that an accident could occur. And that's not a pleasant thought.

But if people applied that same thinking to other aspects of their lives, they wouldn't buy health insurance, fire insurance or auto insurance. And they wouldn't have smoke alarms or electrical circuit breakers.

But, like circuit breakers, seatbelts and shoulder harnesses prevent tragedy; they don't cause it. If all Americans wore them, government statisticians say, 12,000 fewer people would die in accidents each year. Thousands of others would suffer only minor injuries or none at all.

The death and injury toll would be even lower if more Americans drove newer models that include a driver's-side air bag. Air bags inflate upon impact, protecting the driver from colliding with the steering wheel or flying debris.

If you're now shopping for a new or used car, don't just buy for style. Buy for safety, too. Read the latest reports on the model you're interested in. If its safety record is satisfactory, see that all seat belts and shoulder harnesses are functioning properly before you conclude the sale. And, after the car is yours, make sure everyone in your family uses the safety devices for every trip, long or short.

If you have an infant in your family, don't forget to provide a special safety belt for him or her. Such seats prevent an estimated 28,000 injuries a year.

Once you and your family get into the habit of buckling up, you won't mind the belts or harnesses at all. And someday they may save your life.

A Few Weird Stories (Safety Related...sort of)

Three days after the November election, someone called in a bomb threat to the Minnesota capital during Gov.-Elect Jesse Ventura's visit, and police found a suspicious object taped to a tree on the grounds. The package was given full, serious bomb-squad treatment and very carefully driven to a disposal facility. Despite all the precautions, however, a wind gust blew the package out of the bomb-squad truck and onto the street, where it was run over by several cars.

Jarold Sanchez, 23, shot himself in the face in November in Craig, Colo., after spotting an elk near a railroad track on a hunting trip. Sanchez had lain down, resting the barrel of his rifle on the near track, pointed at the elk, and squeezed the trigger, but managed only to hit the other track two feet away, causing the bullet to bounce back and graze his cheek. Sanchez said he knows now that the barrel is lower than the sight.

In November, employee John Boernier-Mercier, 45, who was tending to his own business sitting in the men's room at Budney Overhaul and Repair in Berlin, N. H., was grazed on the hand and knee by a bullet fired by his boss, Kevin M. Budney, 31, who was across the hall and had accidentally squeezed the trigger while looking for its serial number.

A 29-year-old man was accidentally run over in September by a tractor-trailer on the traffic-jammed Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago after he had gotten out of his car to gather debris to throw at the truck's driver for some alleged highway discourtesy. Apparently, he slipped on spilled oil and fell under the wheels. And a 33-year-old man died in a workplace explosion in Ascutney, Vt., in November when he cut into a 55-gallon drum with a blowtorch in order to make scrap metal and was perhaps surprised that the drum contained propane. According to fellow workers, the man had done the very same thing the week before, but that explosion had merely blown his gas mask off.

In November, a jury in Westminster, Calif., convicted college professor Elena Zagustin, 61, of 69 health and safety violations at her suburban home, which is filled with trash and has no running water but many buckets that substitute for toilets. Neighbors of the civil engineering professor at California State University at Long Beach have complained for years about the smell, the rodents, and the insects, and in January, officials declared the house unfit to live in.

In September, mischief making Donald Portner, 18, and two friends placed a homemade pipe bomb in a portable toilet at a construction site in Manchester Township, Pa., and ran off to a safe distance to await the explosion. According to police, when nothing had happened for nearly an hour, Portner returned to check it out and apparently could not resist picking up the device and examining it. All three men were arrested when the subsequent explosion brought police to the scene, and Portner was hospitalized.

News of the Weird has several times reported on construction workers who survived after accidentally shooting themselves in the head with their nail guns, most recently in a 1996 incident in Amarillo, Tex., involving a brad 1-1/4 inches long. In July 1998, a co-worker of Travis Bogumill, 21, in Eau Claire, Wis., accidentally jarred his nail gun and fired a 3-1/4-inch nail into Bogumill's head. He recovered but believes math is more difficult for him than it used to be.

Within days of each other in October, a 20-year-old college student in Morehead City, N.C., and a 21-year-old college student in Lansing, Mich., died after accepting dares by their friends. The North Carolina man consumed a quantity of caffeine tablets equivalent to about 250 cups of coffee, and the Michigan man consumed 24 shots of an alcoholic beverage in less than two hours.

In June, astonished workers remodeling City Hall in Echo, Ore., ventured into the 4,000-square-foot attic, apparently unused since the building opened in 1916. Because of holes in the roof and the windows, pigeons have been roosting there for decades, and it took a professional waste-removal crew a week to clear out the five and a half tons of droppings. Said the city manager; "It's a wonder the ceiling didn't collapse."

Roger McCown, 20, was arrested in Toledo, Ohio, in October after a series of mishaps during two robberies. At a convenience store, according to police, McCown tried to cut the power cord to disable the cash register, only to receive a nasty electrical shock. Then, after asking for a bag to put the money in, he became confused when the clerk asked "Paper or plastic?" He also left his knife behind when he fled. He was captured several hours later when, police said, he robbed a pizza shop, but apparently his getaway driver was late, and police found McCown waiting on a street corner.

In August, Josh Hempel, 16, Calgary, Alberta, became the latest person to be struck by lightning shortly after ending an argument by inviting God to strike him with lightning if he was wrong (in this case, wrong about the very existence of God). He was hospitalized but recovered. And at the Bathgate Golf Club in West Lothian, Scotland, in June, Father Alex Davie was playing in the Clergy Golfing Society tournament when lightning struck the tip of his umbrella and, a few minutes later, a tree under which he had sought refuge. He suffered a sore arm but continued his round.

In Orinda, Calif., in September, Michael Trevethan, 42, was crushed to death against a fence post by his truck, which had been accidentally knocked into gear by his dog when Trevethan got out to open his front gate. And in Milwaukee, John Hwilka accidentally shot himself to death while showing his mother how to use a .45-calibre handgun, when his pet French poodle jumped into his lap and jarred his hand.

When Pigs Fly: In Corbeil, Canada, in August, Lucette St. Louis, 66, suffered a broken leg and other injuries when a 180-lb. pig, owned by her son, came flying through the air and hit her broadside. It had been knocked airborne by a passing car.

In September in Lanham, Md., a 26-year-old man lost control of his motorcycle and crashed, killing himself. Police said it was alcohol-related; four hours earlier, the man had been driven home from a part-time job, which was to get drunk at a police training class so officers could practice doing sobriety tests on him. When he left work, he had a 0.12 blood-alcohol level.

Mike Sheridan, telling a Kansas City Star reporter in May that he doesn't believe his "Fangs and Rattlers" exhibit at Western county fairs (in which he lies perfectly still for about 15 minutes in a sleeping bag into which a dozen live rattlesnakes have been inserted) is all that dangerous: "I'd a lot rather be in that bag full of snakes than a clerk in some big-city convenience store after midnight."

Daniel Mark Henderson, 20, was accidentally run over and killed by a road roller at a construction site near La Grange, Ore., in August. Police said he apparently had hot-wired the 5-ton vehicle to go joy riding but then fell off, and it rolled over him. And a 17-year-old boy in Jackson, Tenn., was hospitalized in critical condition in July with burns over 90 percent of his body. Police believe he soaked himself with gasoline and then dared his best friend to set him on fire, which the friend did. Police confirmed in both incidents that, of course, alcohol was involved.

Charles Askew, 63, in prisons most of his life and in the Sparta, S.C., jail in August on his way back to prison for bank robbery, escaped. However, he was killed several hours later when he lost control of a stolen car and was ejected in a one-car collision. According to a U.S. Marshal, Askew probably had not driven a car in 45 years and was unfamiliar with the controls, including, apparently, the concept of a seat belt.

A 17-year-old boy was killed in Navarino, Wis., in July when shrapnel from a mailbox he was playfully blowing up with a firecracker severed his carotid artery. And a 28-year-old man drowned in Mount Clemens, Mich., in July in an apartment-house pool while winning a game with his friends as to who could hold his breath underwater the longest.