

The Air Force Journal of Occupational, Recreational, and Driving Safety

# ROAD & REC

Volume 13, Number 2

Spring 2001



**Alcohol + Water ...  
A Bad Mix!**

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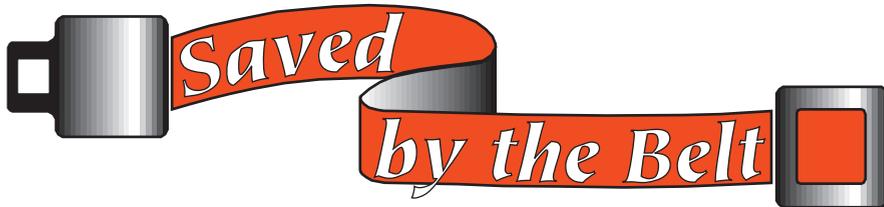
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SSGT GREG KARLIS  
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**A**s military members, attention to detail is a part of our jobs. We all *know* seat belt use is mandatory, as well as car seats for small children. Unfortunately, sometimes we only worry about buckling-up when we're approaching the front gate.

Recently, while driving home with my 15-month-old daughter in the backseat, I was involved in a serious accident.

My Ford Explorer went off the road. As I tried to slowly turn back onto the road, my tires caught the lip of the pavement and I started to fish-tail. Before I could get the Explorer under control, it flipped and did a series of rolls. When the Explorer came to rest, I knew it was sitting upright because of all of the rocks and glass in my lap.

My heart sank when I heard nothing but silence from the backseat where my little girl was strapped into her car seat. I forced my door open and ripped open the back door. That was when she started crying — it sounded more like wailing. When I got to her, I didn't see anything wrong. Even though she was still crying, I resisted the urge to pull her out. While she was still in her car seat, I looked her over and felt as much of her body as possible to check for any injuries. The dust had settled at this point, and I didn't find anything wrong. So, I carefully unbuckled her and took her out of the vehicle. As soon as I did, she stopped crying. She started to wave at the passing cars and say, "Puppy," her favorite word.

I have never been so grateful in all of my life. Some ambulance personnel who were headed back to Lewiston happened on me a few

minutes later and stopped. I immediately handed them my daughter to check out for injuries. They assured me that she was unharmed. The Explorer was totaled, but I didn't care. My little girl was all right and I had escaped with minor scratches. This is where the attention to detail made a difference.

I'd had my seat belt on and it undoubtedly saved me from serious injury or death. My daughter was strapped into her car seat, which performed wonderfully.

Car seats can be hard to install properly and it is easy to fall into the "good enough" mindset. Remember, however, that is **YOUR** child back there. If something horrible happened, would you be able to look at yourself in the mirror? If you can install your child's car seat tighter and you don't, then you are gambling with your child's life.

My wife and I always paid attention to detail and installed our car seat as tightly as possible. Some days we struggled with the car seat for more than 10 minutes. It seemed like a pain back then, but it proved to be time well spent. Also, we always placed the child seat in the middle of the backseat even though it would have been easier to have placed it near one of the doors. In this accident, all of these little things — these life-saving details — added up. As a result, my daughter escaped this accident without so much as a scratch.

My Explorer can be replaced, but my daughter can't. Without a doubt, our paying attention to detail saved her. So remember, "excellence in all that we do" does not have to stop when we get home.

Always wear your seat belt and install your car seats according to the manufacturer's instructions. These devices can save your life, and the lives of your loved ones. ■

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# Fractured Follies

BOB VAN ELSBERG  
Managing Editor

**Editor's Note:** *Most folks know the basic rules of safety — don't drink and drive, always wear your seat belts and always wear the proper personal protective equipment. However, these don't quite cover all of the accidents that come our way. And, even when it comes to these simple rules, we sometimes think we can bend them and not get "bit." However, the "Mishap Monster" is very crafty — a fact the folks in these mishaps learned at their expense.*

## The "Billfold Bash"

Sometimes it's downright inconvenient for a guy to carry his wallet in his back pocket. With all of the credit cards and other junk we stuff into our wallets, it's tough to fold them tight enough to fit into a back pocket. And even when we do, there's the agony of sitting on one of these "rump-rocks" while driving down the road. That can make a guy just plain miserable.

One young airman found himself in just such a dilemma while riding as a passenger in a friend's car. Having duly belted himself into the front seat, he'd almost made it to the front gate before his posterior pain receptors signalled that it was time to quit perching on the "Rock of Gibraltar."

Not to worry, he thought. After all, he wasn't driving

and they were only doing 25 mph. So, slipping out of his seat belt, our airman reached behind to retrieve his wallet and stow it in a more comfortable location.

While it may be an exaggeration to say that timing is everything, sometimes it's *DARN-NEAR* everything. On a different day, our temporarily unrestrained airman might have retrieved his wallet and re-belted himself without incident. Unfortunately, however, this WASN'T a different day!

"Screech! ... Crr--ash! ... Krr--unch" — or sounds to that effect — alerted our departing duo that their front bumper had become "one" with the back bumper of another car. The laws of physics being immutable, at that moment one of the principles of "inertia" set in. You know, the one that says a body in motion tends to keep going unless disturbed by an "external force." Firmly in inertia's grasp and serving as a human missile, our airman soon encountered an "external force," namely, the car's windshield.

Were this a boxing match, the windshield would have been awarded an instant "KO." The 10-count had long passed when our airman arrived at a regional medical center. Waking up with nasty contusion to his noggin and the "Mother of all Headaches," he also garnered a day of quarters. Plenty of time to contemplate what CAN happen when you take off your seat belt — even briefly — while going down the road.

## "Skeeter-Bait" Flambe

"Skeeters" — especially when they arrive in swarms — can turn a person into an insect smorgasbord. Such, indeed, was the problem faced by one airman at his off-duty job on a local farm. Getting much unwanted attention from the mini-vampires of the insect world, he liberally sprayed his arms and face with insect repellent.

Satisfied he had the irritating little bloodsuckers at bay, he prepared to ignite a 20-foot-wide pile of trash. As he knelt next to the pile, he pulled out a small butane cigarette lighter and "flicked his bic."

This could have been a spectacular finale to a mundane chore, but for one thing. The lighter's flame — like electricity seeking the path of least resistance — headed for the object with the





lowest flash point. Unfortunately, that happened to be our airman, still reeking of fumes from his thorough dousing of insect spray.

On the good side, the skeeters REALLY scattered when the fireball erupted and turned our airman into “farm-worker flambe.” Being skeeters, they prefer their meat uncooked.

Checking himself over, our airman discovered he’d singed the hair on both arms and noticed a burning sensation on his face and arms that was probably something more than just embarrassment. Still, being a manly sort of guy, he kept working until he noticed the blisters rising. Deciding it was time to either notify the chef that the meat was cooked or drive himself to the hospital, he finally sought help.

The diagnosis at the hospital wasn’t good. With second-degree burns on his arms and face, he’d need 14 days of quarters to heal his hide. He’d learned the hard way that insect repellent is very flammable.

### What’s Cookin’?

Our “galloping gourmet” was busy in the kitchen slaving over her stove. The sounds of food frying in the skillet added to the anticipation of a delicious home-cooked meal. Careful to keep her cooking area clean, she wiped up any splattered oil with paper towels which she kept nearby.

Trying to make the most of her time, she had also

loaded her laundry into her washing machine upstairs. Realizing the wash cycle was over and it was time to pull her clothes out of the machine, she checked the stove then ran upstairs.

As we all know, time flies when you’re doing laundry. Before she knew it, 10 minutes had already passed. Indeed, another few minutes might have passed blissfully had not the ear-splitting sound of the smoke alarm caught her attention. Running downstairs to the kitchen, she discovered her oil-soaked paper towels were in flames.

Flying fearlessly into the flaming fray, she tried to beat the fire into submission with a towel. Failing that, she went to “Plan B” — dousing the fire with water. Normally, water would be a good choice for putting out a paper fire — but not when oil is involved. You see, oil has the nasty habit of floating on top of water and incinerating anything in its path.

Applying a stout dose of H<sub>2</sub>O to the fire, we can only imagine her surprise as her kitchen conflagration spread like a wildfire and headed for her dining room. Following the old axiom, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen,” she beat-feet to her neighbor’s house and called 911. The firefighters arrived in time to save the house, but not the dinner. It was, as you might imagine, a bit beyond “well-done.”

Lessons learned? Like driving, cooking deserves your undivided attention. Also, if your skillet or fry-daddy



goes up in flames, douse them with baking soda — not water. You could also try getting a compact home fire extinguisher for your kitchen. Knowing how to respond to a kitchen fire just might save your bacon. ■

# That "Sink

BOB VAN ELSBERG  
Managing Editor

**I**t has been said that drowning is a painless death. Having experienced it firsthand as a child — one fortunate enough to be brought back by CPR — I can tell you that is true. However, it's not something you want to happen to you.

This past spring, five airmen found out the hard way what it is like to die from drowning. Three were swimming — one in the ocean, another in a pool, and a third in a river where he went over a series of waterfalls. A fourth airman died while snorkeling, and a fifth drowned when he was trapped beneath his capsized canoe. At least two of the airman had been drinking — a factor that may have contributed to their deaths. Last March and April proved that you don't have to wait for the "lazy, hazy days of summer" for drowning to become a serious threat.

According to the National Safety Council, drowning is the fifth leading cause of accidental death in the United States, killing nearly 4,000 people annually. The majority of drownings occur in natural water environments such as lakes, rivers and oceans.

## What Causes Drownings?

Statistics show that most drownings or "near-drownings" (mishaps in which the victim is revived but suffers a permanent disability) occur when people:

- Use alcohol or drugs while participating in water recreation.
- Dive into unfamiliar waters, which are often too shallow or have hidden obstructions.
- Swim *too* long, *too* far away, *too* long in cold water, or play *too* hard.
- Fall from docks, boats, bridges and the shore. Many drowning victims were doing something other than swimming or playing in the water at the time of the accident.
- Were careless in small boats. Many victims were untrained and inexperienced and most were not wearing personal flotation devices (PFDs).
- Experience medical emergencies such as seizures or heart attacks.

# ing" Feeling

## How To Protect Yourself

- ◆ Take swimming instruction from a qualified instructor.
- ◆ Make safety a top priority when choosing a place for water recreation.
- ◆ Never swim alone. Whenever possible, confine your water activities to areas supervised by lifeguards or qualified adults.
- ◆ Know and obey the safety rules posted in the area where you are swimming. Learn where the lifeguards are located and where to find rescue equipment and a telephone.
- ◆ Don't engage in horseplay.
- ◆ Never leave children alone near water. Swimming lessons don't make a child "drownproof."
- ◆ Do not rely on inflatable objects like rafts or toys to keep you afloat if you are a poor swimmer. The only reliable flotation device is a properly-fitted U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD. Here's a tip for the kids: Check for a snug fit by picking the child up by the PFD's shoulders. If the vest fits correctly, the child's chin and ears will not slip through.
- ◆ When boating, playing in a river or fishing near deep water, children and nonswimmers should always wear PFDs. Swimmers should wear, or at least have immediate access to, PFDs.
- ◆ Wade or slowly enter feet first into unfamiliar waters (or familiar waters the first time on each trip).
- ◆ Don't swim or wade in swift-moving water. If you are swept into a current, swim with it and angle toward the shore or the edge of the current, until you reach safety.
- ◆ Stay out of water that feels too cold. Cold water can be a shock to the body, causing hypothermia and rendering a swimmer unconscious in minutes.
- ◆ Check the weather before you start swimming and avoid swimming in stormy weather. If you see lightning, get out of the water immediately.
- ◆ Before you enter the water, have an emergency plan for responding to water accidents. If you own a cellular phone, keep it handy.
- ◆ Know your limitations. Unless you are trained as a lifeguard, you are putting yourself and a swimmer who is in trouble by attempting to swim to their rescue. Instead, stay out of the water and avoid making physical contact if possible. Throw them a rope or buoy, or extend a paddle or other object they can grab. ■

# An Elephant in the Backseat!



Courtesy *ASHORE* Magazine

Elephant drawn by Mr. Dave Baer

**H**ow would you like to be in a car wreck and have an elephant crash into you from behind? That is what it would feel like if your unbelted backseat passenger slams into you in a 55-mph collision.

While 49 states have seat belt laws, most cover only

the driver and front-seat passengers. Only 29 states have seat belt laws that require backseat occupants to buckle up. Where the law doesn't apply, people in the backseat have no fear of getting a ticket for not wearing a seat belt.

People believe they are safer in the backseat, and experts agree. However, backseat riders are still at risk. In 1996, 1,400 people who had not buckled up died in backseats.

Unbelted backseat passengers endanger not only themselves, but also the people riding in the front seat. An unbelted person in the backseat can become like an unguided missile during a crash and be thrown around the car with amazing force. Crash experts refer to this as the "elephant-in-the-backseat" syndrome, because in a 55-mph crash, an average-sized person unbelted in the rear seat can fly forward at the

force of 3,000 pounds.

Parents should be especially careful to buckle up their children in the back. Research shows that properly restrained children in the backseat have the lowest rates of deaths from crashes. So, even if there is a front seat available, it's a good idea to put all children ages 12 and under in the backseat, and make sure they're properly restrained.

You don't want even baby elephants flying at you from behind. ■



# The "Wild Side" of Weed Whacking

Courtesy *Safety Times*

*Marty hated weeding and edging. He complained that every time he bent over his back ached, and every time he stooped his knees hurt. What he needed was a really good power edger and weed trimmer. Tired of an unsightly yard and Marty's complaining, his wife went out and bought him the best edger money could buy. Without reading the instructions, Marty revved it up and strode into his front yard. Within minutes the edger kicked up a rock that hit him in the eye. The teenage boy down the block did Marty's yard work for the next six weeks.*

## One Warning Suits All

No matter what tool you are using, some basics apply.

- ◆ Read all operating instructions carefully before turning on the motor. Failing to do that was Marty's first mistake.
  - ◆ Clear loose rocks and debris from the area where you will be working with a power tool. Not doing that was Marty's second mistake.
  - ◆ Stand and walk directly in back of the tool to prevent being hit by flying objects its force may kick up. Overlooking that safety rule was Marty's third mistake.
  - ◆ Always use safety glasses with side shields. Skipping that safety advice was Marty's fourth mistake.
  - ◆ Work only when you have good light and you're not rushed or tired.
  - ◆ Operate the machine only where you have firm footing and good balance. Do not operate an edger or weed eater where you would need to use your hands to prevent a fall. You already have your hands full handling the power tool.
- Keep bystanders away from the area where you are working — especially from the area in front of the tool.
- ◆ Stop the engine when crossing gravel drives, walks or roads, or under any conditions where thrown objects might be a hazard.
  - ◆ Wear long pants, close-fitting clothes, and sturdy

shoes or boots.

- ◆ Do not remove or disable protective guards or other safety devices on the tool.
- ◆ Fill the gasoline tank only when the engine is cold.
- ◆ Know how to stop the machine quickly.
- ◆ Never place your hands or feet near or under rotating parts while the engine is running.
- ◆ Hold the handles firmly with both hands. If you strike a foreign object or if your machine vibrates abnormally, stop the engine. If the motor is gas driven, disconnect and secure the sparkplug wire. Then inspect and repair the damage before you continue working.
- ◆ Do not allow others to use your edger/trimmer unless they are responsible, have read and understand the instructions, and are schooled in its operation.
- ◆ Take your edger/trimmer to an experienced dealer every year for servicing.

## When the Power Is Electric

- ◆ Look for the UL sticker or label to be sure the equipment has been tested by an independent testing company to meet nationally recognized safety standards.
- ◆ Be careful not to cut over a power cord if you are using an electric motor.
- ◆ Check and replace damaged cords. Use only grounded extension cords marked for "outdoor" use. For extra protection use a Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupter.
- ◆ Never use an electric powered implement near water or in wet conditions of any kind.
- ◆ Unplug the tool before making any adjustments.

## When Children Are Around

- ◆ Always unplug an electric tool when it is not in use and store it where children cannot reach it.
- ◆ Keep all tools high on the wall, on a high shelf, or in a locked box or drawer.
- ◆ Cover lawn and garden equipment with a heavy tarp and hide the ignition keys. ■

# Ephedra — A Deadly Choice



**T**urn your body into a fat-burning machine. Lose weight without exercise. Do these claims sound too good to be true? Well, they are. These claims are not based on scientific study.

Many of these supplements contain the dangerous herb ephedra, also known as ma huang. Some of these products include Metabolife, Xenadrine, Diet Fuel, Ripped Fuel, and Enhancer X.

Recently, ephedra-containing products were involved in the deaths of two active-duty soldiers at a basic combat training installation.

To date, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has received more than 800 reports of adverse reactions and more than 35 reports of death due to ephedra-containing supplements. Many states ban the sale of ephedra to anyone younger than 18. The state of Florida and the National Collegiate Athletic Association banned its use entirely.

Ephedra is an herb that excites the central nervous system and cardiovascular system. It over stimulates your body; it excites the heart, constricts the blood vessels and increases both heart rate and blood pressure. When blood vessels are constricted, your body does not get necessary oxygen during exercise. Ephedra makes you feel like you have more energy, but it also dehydrates you and overworks your kidneys. Other bad side effects include the inability to urinate, abnormal heart rhythms, cardiac arrest, dizziness, seizures, insomnia, nausea and vomiting, and death.

Ephedra is not regulated.

"The FDA does not regulate these supplements. No one regulates how much ephedra is actually in the pills or powders, meaning the amount can vary from jar to jar. One pill could have no ephedra, and the next pill could have five times the amount on the label," said Lt. Col. Curtis Hansen, chief, pharmacy services, Winn Army Community Hospital.

"Also, labels for many supplements make claims that are not scientifically

sound. Therefore, their safety and efficacy is really not proven. In fact, given what we know about drug interactions, they may be quite dangerous," Hansen added.

Many supplements contain caffeine with ephedra. Caffeine increases the effects of ephedra, making your heart beat faster than either caffeine or ephedra alone. Look for guarana, guara concentrate extract, kola, and kola nut on labels. These forms of caffeine contain three to five times more caffeine than coffee. Foods containing caffeine and theophylline such as coffee, tea, cola and chocolate also

increase the effects of ephedra.

Supplement bottles contain the following warning: Do not take ephedra if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or younger than 18. You also should not take ephedra if you have been diagnosed with a heart condition, high blood pressure, glauco-

ma, thyroid disease, diabetes, psychiatric disorders, neurological disorders, renal disease, have difficulty urinating or have prostate enlargement. Also, do not take ephedra if you take MAO inhibitors, methyl dopa, any product containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine — such as Sudafed — or medication for high blood pressure.

The bottom line, according to Hansen, is to stay away from ephedra-containing supplements.

"We recommend you avoid ephedra. Ephedra is a dangerous herb that should be used with caution. It has been implicated in causing heart attacks, strokes, seizures and even death. If you take ephedra or any other herbal supplements, let your healthcare provider know. This will allow the provider to evaluate potential side effects when managing your care," Hansen said.

For more information, ask your healthcare provider or check these websites. Both the National Institutes of Health (<http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>) and the American Botanical Council (<http://www.herbalgram.org>) maintain informative websites on herbal and dietary supplements. ■

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***"[Ephedra] has been implicated in causing heart attacks, strokes, seizures and even deaths."***

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Lt. Col. Curtis Hansen  
Pharmacy Services, Chief, WACH

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*Compiled by Amy H. Turner, Winn Community Hospital, Fort Stewart, Georgia.*

# A Lesson Learned the Hard Way

Reprinted from *ASHORE* Magazine, Spring 1999

It was 8:30 a.m., Friday, March 14, 1997. I was exhausted, but I was finally off after standing duty all night. The entire battalion at Camp LeJeune, N.C., was at a field meet, but since I had special liberty, I didn't have to go. By 9 a.m., I was on the road to Navarre, Fla., for a long weekend. I didn't have to be back to work until Tuesday morning.

Neither the dreary, rainy weather nor my exhaustion was going to keep me from getting to the Sunshine State that night. Thoughts of the good times I was going to have in the beautiful Florida weather were running through my head.

An hour later, I was in Wilmington, N.C. The rain was still pouring, and I could see cars hydroplaning. I was in the left lane going over a drawbridge at about 40 mph. An old Toyota pickup about 10 feet ahead in the right lane suddenly began hydroplaning. The Toyota hit the curb on the right and immediately went airborne in a 360-degree spin. It looked like a NASCAR crash when a car goes into the wall.

What finally stopped the pickup was a set of rails that marked an area reserved for the bridge operator's car. The pickup hit the rails head-on, then bounced back toward traffic. A truck carrying a load of sand nearly ran over the pickup. I heard glass shattering, metal crunching and plastic breaking. But most of all, I heard the squeal of air brakes as the huge trucks next to me tried to stop.

Debris was flying everywhere. I couldn't use my brakes or steer clear of the debris because I, too, was hydroplaning. The only thing I could do was *try* to control my car. I traveled nearly half the length of the bridge before I stopped.

I turned off the ignition, then got out of the car and ran as fast as I could toward the pickup. My thoughts were of the driver. Was he OK, or was he seriously injured or dead?

I saw wisps of smoke coming from under the collapsed hood as I approached the truck. All of the windows were shattered, and glass was scattered across the highway. People drove by with uneasy expressions as their tires crunched on the glass. The truck was folded

like an accordion from the front bumper to just behind the cab. Both front tires were flat and the wheels were turned up deep inside the wheel wells.

The two people in the truck looked dead. Neither had been wearing a seat belt. The driver was hanging halfway out of the crushed door. As I swung it open, his upper body fell into my arms and I carefully lowered him to the concrete. His legs were pinned inside the truck by the engine block. As I looked at his injuries, I tried but couldn't feel a pulse through his thick, coarse beard. His head had struck the steering wheel, cutting a nearly half-inch deep divot across his forehead. I thought that injury alone would have killed him.

His nose was bleeding, and several teeth were broken and lying in his mouth. I assumed I was wasting my time on a dead man. I tried to flag down someone who had a car phone so they could call 911, but no one would stop. One driver finally did, and I told him to stop every car that passed until he found someone with a phone.

Next, I checked on the passenger. It was hard to get to him. I couldn't go through the driver's side because the driver's legs were in the way. Also, the passenger door was jammed shut. However, that was my only way in, so I pulled the door off its hinges.

The passenger was lying face down on what was left of the dashboard. I rolled him over onto the seat. As soon as he groaned, I knew he was alive. His left ear was missing. Above where it should have been, there was a deep cut. There were also smaller cuts all over his face.

People began to gather, but no one offered to help. I noticed the driver twist once or twice — I was amazed that he was alive. I asked a bystander to hold the passenger still and talk to him to get information — basically do whatever he could to help the man. I ran around the truck to the driver, cleared out his mouth with my finger, then tilted his head back to clear his airway. His face felt clammy.

At this point, my only real help arrived. An emergency medical technician (EMT) with medical equipment happened to be driving by and stopped. He told me to keep the driver's airway open while he got the driver's legs out of the truck. Then he asked me if I wanted some gloves. I looked at my hands, which were covered with the driver's blood. If I needed gloves for protection from

diseases, it was too late.

The driver wasn't moving his right arm. I could tell it had almost been ripped off and I was scared to remove his jacket. His eyes rolled back into his head and all I saw were the bloodshot whites. I tried to talk to him and, after several minutes, he began to respond.

The EMT and I began to cut off the driver's clothes. I had to hold his left arm down because he was getting hysterical. At first, his movements were weak. However, he seemed to gain strength as time passed. When I held his arm against his chest, I could feel his ribs crunching as he inhaled and exhaled.

Finally, some ambulances arrived. One crew put the passenger on a stretcher and took him to a hospital. It took another crew nearly 10 minutes to free the driver's legs. Once his legs were clear, we saw how badly they were damaged. Two bones in his right leg were broken and sticking out at a 90 degree angle. Tendons and flesh were wrapped around the exposed bones. Two bones in his left leg were sticking through his calf muscles. I stayed with him as long as possible until the crew put him into the ambulance. I never saw him or the passenger again.

After being questioned by the police and interviewed by a news crew, I went back to my car, anxious to get on the road. However, when I sat in the driver's seat, I

couldn't move. During the time I had been helping the two men, I hadn't been scared. Now, I had time to think and I realized I'd only driven 50 miles of my 800-mile trip. It was still raining and my mind was on edge. It took several minutes to convince myself to get back on the road and drive.

Although it rained for six more hours, the rest of the trip was uneventful. Every time I drove through a large puddle, I thought of the two men in the pickup. When I arrived in Florida, I was still shaken.

After the accident, I got a phone call from the passenger's lawyer. He asked me about the wreck and told me that both men had survived.

I'd always wondered how I would act in a situation where I would have to try to save someone's life. Now I knew, and I felt good.

That wreck also taught me some important lessons about driving long distances. I realize that I shouldn't have started that trip as tired as I was. Instead, I should have taken the time to sleep before I set out on my journey. Also, I've never again tried to drive such a long distance at one time. Had it not been for that wreck on the bridge, I probably would have been much less alert during the rest of that trip. Looking back on it, I'm fortunate that somebody didn't have to stop and help me out of my wrecked car. ■

Photo by Bill Luster, © *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky



The damage to the Toyota pickup in the story was nearly as severe as the damage done to this Toyota pickup.



# Surviving the Highway Huns

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

**H**ave you ever noticed how some people approach driving with a “Conan The Barbarian” attitude? You can recognize them in an instant. They eat up other people’s back bumpers, dodge in and out of traffic, then cut you off and give you a rude gesture if you honk at them. When it comes to driving, these people see themselves as the hunters and you as the prey.

Do you really enjoy meeting such people on the road? Chances are you don’t, but you don’t really have a choice. They’re out there just as sure as God made little green apples.

I know. I spend almost two hours each day commuting to and from work and it’s rare when I don’t meet a “Conan” somewhere during those trips.

What can you do when you meet your own “Conans” on the road? The answer is to protect yourself by having a safe-driving “attitude.” We once ran a back cover on this magazine that featured the message, “Safety Is An Attitude — Man!” That’s a message that really works, if you know how to apply it.

First of all, ask yourself, “What kind of an attitude do I have when I get behind the wheel?” Do I look at getting to my destinations as an “objective” I must conquer? Am I going to pull out the stops to get from Point “A” to Point “B” in the shortest possible time? Am I going to drive aggressively, look for every advantage, then swiftly seize it?

If the answers to the above are “yes,” then consider the words of that American philosopher, Snoopy, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” You may, without realizing it, be headed in the direction of BEING a “Conan.” You may also be headed for increased insurance and medical costs because you can’t take risks without suffering the consequences. And, while you’re at it, ask yourself one of those “touchy-feely” questions. After you’ve gotten to your destination, are you stressed-out and irritable, already packing a head of steam? You don’t have to feel that way. You can choose to make driving enjoyable, satisfying and, most of all, safe.

How do you do that? Well, first of all, look at your driving habits. Do you leave early enough so that you don’t have to hurry to your destination? Not having to race the clock will cut down your stress level and reduce the pressure to make unsafe driving decisions.

Second, don’t feel compelled to switch lanes every



ones — the traffic clumps — become an impediment to hurried drivers. The fast-movers, or jet streams, can swiftly become “death in the fast lane.” I’ll give you some examples.

Back in 1970, I was driving south on Interstate 5 from Los Angeles to San Diego when a yellow ‘56 Chevy passed me doing at least 85 mph — well over the speed limit. I watched him roar down the road then get caught behind a relatively slow-moving traffic clump. Still driving the speed limit, I caught up with him in time to watch him zigzag through the traffic, then blast out the other side. In a couple of minutes I caught up with him again — stalled behind another traffic clump. Once again, he performed a series of dangerous antics as he weaved his way through the traffic. He repeated this at least once more before exiting the interstate. In the end, I caught up with him as he pulled off of the highway. What had his dangerous “improvising” gained him? Absolutely nothing.

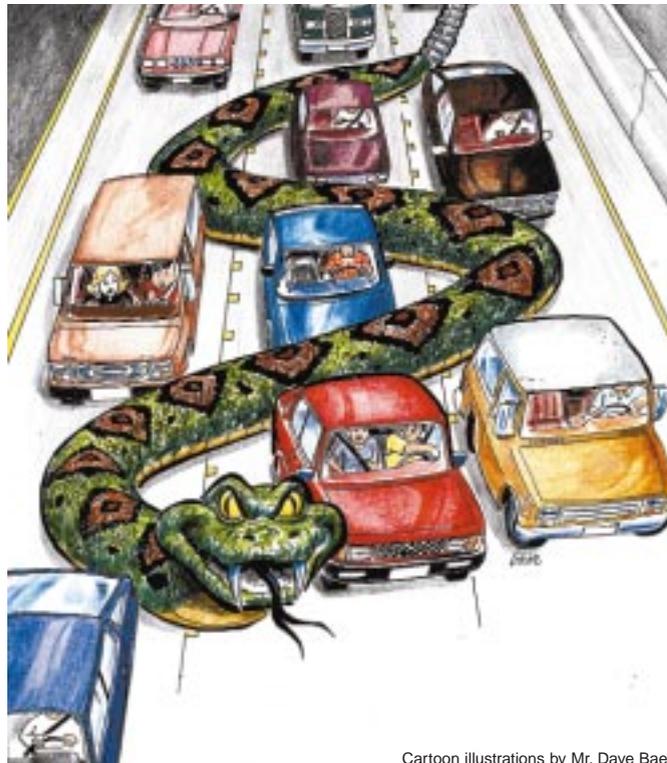
Twenty years later I watched a jet stream heading north on Interstate 75 toward Atlanta. Six drivers were tailgating each other at a pace that would peg the meter on any State Trooper’s radar gun. Maybe they thought there was safety in numbers — that no patrolman could possibly pull over all of them. If that was their rationale, it didn’t do them any good when the lead car hit a deer crossing the highway. The car swerved back and forth in its lane as the driver fought for control. Glowing brake lights, squealing tires and clouds of blue smoke signalled pandemonium as the five high-speed tailgaters hit their brakes and tried to steer into the right lane. Fortunately, no one lost control, but there could just as easily have

been serious injuries or fatalities. A high price to pay for hurrying down the highway in one of these highway jet streams.

So what are the lessons in this? First, reduce your stress **and** the temptation to take chances by leaving early enough that you don’t have to hurry. Second, recognize that driving aggressively — speeding and weaving through traffic — doesn’t mean you’ll get to your destination any quicker. Indeed, you may not get there at all! And finally, avoid the “herd mentality.” Resist the temptation to “cover ground” in one of these fast-moving jet streams. If you don’t, you may end up with six feet worth of ground covering you. ■

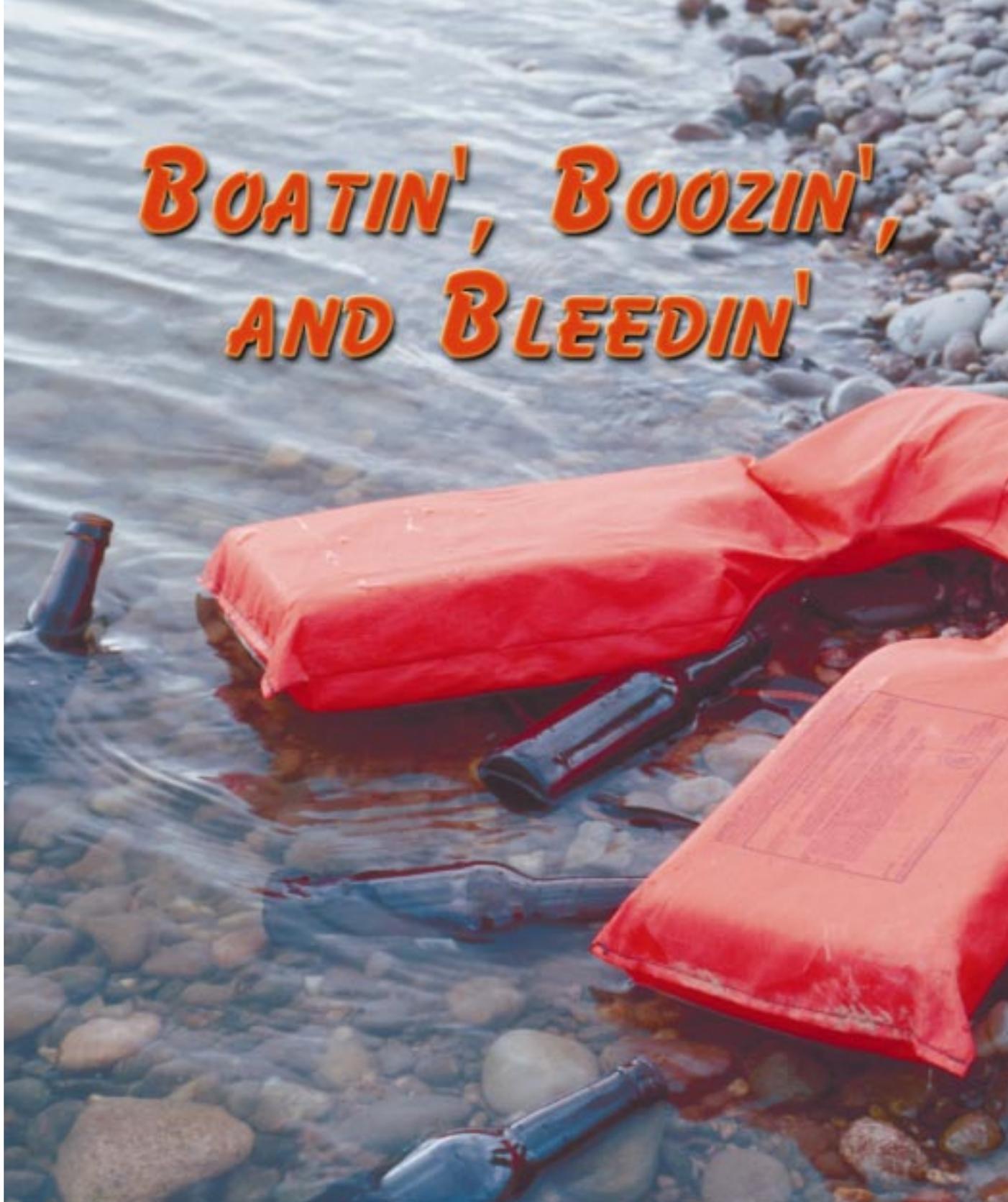
time you see traffic in another lane moving a little faster than it is in yours. In practice, you rarely save any time by frequently switching lanes. In town, stoplights tend to be the “great equalizer” — eliminating any advantages gained from frequent lane changing. After all, how many times has someone passed you like a madman, only to end up sitting next to you at a stoplight a couple minutes later?

On freeways and highways, the great equalizers are what I call “traffic clumps” and “jet streams.” It seems that some drivers like to travel in “herds” — some moving slower than the traffic flow and others moving faster. The slow



Cartoon illustrations by Mr. Dave Baer

# BOATIN', BOOZIN', AND BLEEDIN'



LT COL Mark A. Russell  
AFROTC Det 560  
New York, N.Y.

USAF Photos by TSgt Mike Featherston

It was a typical summer day in Arkansas. The thermometer hovered around 100 degrees — almost matched by the 95 percent humidity. The beer was flowing, people were swimming and water-skiing, and we'd set up our camp. The conditions were perfect for a good time.

It was 1990 and I had flown back from Germany to spend the Fourth of July with three friends who'd previously served with me in Greece. One had family in Arkansas, and each year they got together for a real hoe-down at Lake Ouachita near Hot Springs. When my friends met me at the Little Rock airport, they were already in beach attire and drinking beer. They promptly offered me a beer — "let the drinking begin!"

We drove for about an hour to the lake, then left the car at the marina parking lot. Climbing into our boat, we

brought our bags and beer with us, then blasted off for the island. We started drinking again as soon as we arrived, catching up on old times and partying until almost 5 the next morning.

Making breakfast over the campfire as the sun came up, we washed down a couple of Anacin with beer, then prepared to go out and water-ski. It was another hot day with the temperature and humidity both up in the 90s. That evening there would be a fireworks show — an event not to be missed — over the north end of the lake. Our girlfriends started arriving about 6 p.m., so we jumped into the boat to pick them up at the marina.

Our blood-alcohol-content was about “maxed” by then. We made it to the marina, picked up the girls and then were off. We had six people — only two being sober — in a 17-foot boat. I was driving and had borrowed one of the girl’s hats to wear, trying to look funny. Barefoot and drunk, I pushed the 140 horsepower Mercury engine to its limits. Sitting on the back of the driver’s seat and steering with my foot, we hit the wake of a passing boat. I didn’t know it, but the engine trim tab was partially broken off and the steering cables were loose, reducing my steering control. That, combined with our speed and load, caused the boat to turn sharply to the left, catching us all by surprise.

My best friend — sitting in the bow rider seat — flew overboard. I landed in the water right behind him while the other passengers were slammed into the boat’s right gunwale. I remember hearing the roar of the engine then feeling a firm “thump” when the back of the boat hit me. I tumbled through the water, then surfaced to see the boat in a sharp left turn coming directly at me and my friend. I quickly ducked under the water and prepared for a close call, then heard the engine slow down to an idle about 10 feet away. Fortunately, someone had been able to reach the throttle in time.

I looked around for my friend and saw him floating face-up about 25 yards away. He had an excruciating look on his face. I checked my limbs to make sure I hadn’t lost anything, then swam over to him. He was bleeding from the mouth and having difficulty breathing. I pulled him to the step at the back of the boat, then climbed out of the water. My fingers tingled and my left leg felt like it had fallen asleep. However, I’d gotten off lucky — I’d only suffered a strained shoulder and back. As I helped my friend out of the water, one of the girls screamed. The prop had hit my friend. He had a 12-inch laceration in his left thigh that went from his groin to about three inches above his knee. We wrapped a beach towel around his thigh, which, surprisingly, wasn’t bleeding that badly. The cut had been limited to muscle tissue, so none of his arteries had been severed. At least that was some good luck.

Another boater saw us and stopped and asked if we needed any help. Using his citizens band radio, he contacted the sheriff who, in turn, called for an ambulance. The ambulance picked us up at the marina parking lot, then took us for about a 30-minute ride to a local hospital. As soon as we arrived, our injuries were treated and



patched-up, then we were counseled about our foolishness by an old-time country doctor. Afterwards, we got a hotel room with an air conditioner so our friend would be as comfortable as possible during the painful aftermath. What a fiasco our day had been.

Looking back, I realized that I’d almost caused my friend to lose a leg. Also, my back injury proved to be permanent and still gives me pain six years after the accident. For the rest of my life, I’ll carry the guilt of having caused those injuries because I ignored the message that drinking and driving — including “driving” a boat — is bad business! ■



# I Didn't Beat the Law of Averages

Adapted from an Article Published in the *Space and Missile Times*  
Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

**L**ike many airmen, I work in an undermanned office, so, when the opportunity came to take a 30 day leave, I jumped on it. I began with a scenic road trip across America, then spent the rest of my time with my folks. My leave was almost over when I decided to test the law of averages —

and lost.

I was out late one night when I found myself drunk and alone with a set of car keys. Although I knew that a ride was only a phone call away, I decided there was no need to bother anyone because I was fit to drive.

This wasn't the first time I'd made this

choice, and the fact that I'd gotten away with it before only reaffirmed my decision. My parents lived only 10 miles away, and I truly believed that a drunk-driving accident "couldn't happen to me." So I got into the car and headed home.

I was less than a mile from my parent's house when I passed out at the wheel and collided nearly head-on with another car. It wasn't until I woke up the next day in the hospital that I found out what a disaster I had caused. Not only was I responsible for the destruction of two cars, but I had also put three people — myself included — into the hospital.

As I lie in my hospital bed suffering from a concussion, bruised ribs, and several other bumps and bruises, the doctor came to talk to me. With obvious contempt in his voice, he informed me that I had been driving with a blood alcohol content of .27 — almost three times the state's legal limit.

Although my injuries were bad, they paled in comparison to those suffered by the occupants of the other car. The driver had a broken leg — but the passenger was **much** worse. She had to be airlifted to a major medical center that was capable of handling her serious injuries. Although I was released from the hospital two days later, I still had a very serious struggle ahead of me.

I was placed on two weeks' bed rest. However, **that** prescription mattered little to the police. They came to my parent's house the day after I was released from the hospital and placed me under arrest. They charged me with DUI (Driving Under the Influence), two counts of aggravated assault (both felonies), and a slew of traffic violations. Because of my health, I was not placed in jail. However, I did have to appear in court five days later. As the judge read the charges to me, it was all I could do not to break down and

cry. The charges carried some serious jail time. The fact that I was in the Air Force caused me to be granted the privilege of returning to my base, but my legal problems were only beginning.

Since the day of the accident I have had to appear in court twice and I still have one more trip to make. That trip will be for the sentencing portion of the

trial, after which I will likely be placed in jail. I am currently facing a jail term of between six and 14 months. Although there is a slight chance my sentence could be reduced to three months, it could also be extended to 17. In any case, my future is uncertain and dim.

Since the day of my accident, my life has been difficult, to say the least. I will spend the rest of my life knowing that I injured two innocent people, shamed my family and put my career in serious jeopardy. The financial strain this incident has placed on me has also been tremendous. Not only do I

face punishment from the civilian authorities, but I also face legal action by the Air Force.

I once had dreams and aspirations to do great things with my life. Now, however, those have been put "on hold" because of a poor decision I made. There is nothing I regret more in my life than this accident. It is such a shame, because all of this could have been prevented with a simple phone call. ■

*I will spend the rest of my life knowing that I injured two innocent people, shamed my family and put my career in serious jeopardy. The financial strain this incident has placed on me has also been tremendous. Not only do I face punishment from the civilian authorities, but I also face legal action by the Air Force.*

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**The Final Judgement:** The individual who wrote this article eventually had his day in court. He was sentenced to nine months in jail and three months on probation. In addition, he was fined \$75,000 to pay for his victim's injuries and will be discharged from the Air Force.



**Don't Be the**

**Toast of Your Base**

Adapted from *Flightfax*,  
October 2000

USAF Photos by TSgt Mike Featherston

**W**hen I was a unit safety representative for a logistics support squadron, my duties were largely administrative. When I inspected offices, I was often told, "You won't find much in here; all we do is office work."

Most of the time I found very little, but if I did find something, it was usually a fire hazard. Some of the hazards most often identified in office environments included, but were not limited to, the following:

**Power strips plugged into power strips.**

With the increase in the number of desktop computers in our work areas, some older buildings don't have enough power outlets. Plugging one power strip into another

provides only a temporary solution, and in fact, is hazardous. When one power strip is plugged into another the user is drawing power for two strips through a cord only rated for one.

**Extension cords used in lieu of permanent wiring.**

Another short-term solution for having a limited number of outlets is the use of extension cords. Extension cords become a hazard, however, when they are used for long periods of time or used to handle greater loads than they were designed for — like your PC. In addition, extension cords are often laid across walkways and can become frayed.

**The wrong type or inadequate numbers of fire extinguishers.** A work center may have been originally equipped with a Class A extinguisher intended for trash, paper, and wood combustibles. With the addition of multiple desktop computers, you should also have Class ABC extinguishers. Also, ask yourself if you have

enough extinguishers in the building to provide quick and easy access in the event of a fire and do people know where the extinguishers are?

**Materials stacked too close to light fixtures or fire detection suppression devices.** Offices often have a shortage of storage space. As a result, flammable work materials can end up on top of refrigerators, filing cabinets and shelves. It's important to make sure these items are at least 18 inches away from overhead lights or fire detection/suppression devices.

Most of us would readily admit that refueling aircraft can be a dangerous operation with easily identified fire hazards. In contrast, very few of us would acknowledge that an office environment can, and often does, present some significant fire hazards. It's better to find them now than to have the fire chief explain them to you amidst the smoldering ruins of your workstation. ■





**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

It was a “dark and stormy” morning—just like the forecaster said it would be. Thick, grey clouds hung low in the sky as I left Blue Springs, Mo., and cruised east on Interstate 70.

Normally, I would have taken Highway 7 south to Highway 50, then headed east to Warrensburg. However, it had rained heavily the night before and I knew Highway 7 had flooded. Still, I knew that east of Oak Grove on I-70 were some one-lane roads that ran south and connected to Highway 50. I figured I’d take one of them and pulled off at Odessa to go down State Road M. I knew I’d have to go over a bridge that crossed a small creek, but I was certain it wouldn’t be a problem. How wrong I was!

As I pulled up to the bridge, I couldn’t believe my eyes! Dirty brown water had rushed over the road in front of me and slammed a car into the bridge railing on the right. Normally the creek would have scarcely been more than knee deep. But not today. Heavy rains had turned the lazy creek into a raging torrent. There was no way I was going to try to cross that fast-moving water in my Ford van. My respect for Mother Nature had just been reinforced.

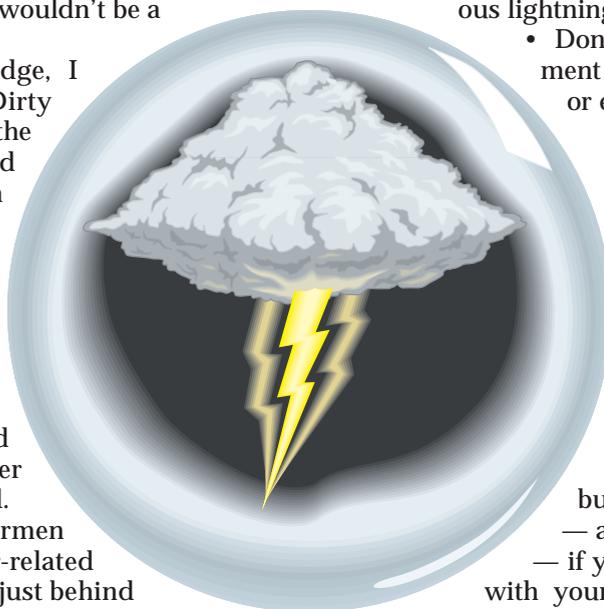
Every year a number of airmen are injured or killed in weather-related driving accidents. And it’s not just behind the wheel that they get into trouble. A few years ago, maintenance personnel working on a C-130 on a flightline were injured by lightning. However, you don’t have to be the victim of a weather-related

injury. Here are some tips to help you protect yourself and others this spring.

### **Thunderstorms and Lightning**

**Lightning kills about 90 Americans a year, making it more deadly than tornadoes or hurricanes.** Lightning can strike miles from the parent cloud. The minute you can hear thunder (which is caused by a lightning stroke), you are at risk of being struck by lightning. In a thunderstorm:

- Get inside a home, large building, or automobile (with the windows rolled up).
- Stay away from open doors and windows, fireplaces, and all metal objects. Golf cleats are dangerous lightning conductors.
- Don’t use plug-in electrical equipment like hair dryers, tooth brushes, or electric razors during the storm.
  - Don’t take a bath or shower.
  - Do not use the telephone, except in the case of an emergency.
  - If you are caught outside:
    - if you are with a group of people, spread out so the lightning cannot jump from person to person.
    - avoid tall objects such as isolated trees or telephone poles.
    - avoid standing on top of a building.
    - avoid standing on a hilltop.
    - if you are caught in the open, squat with your feet and knees together with your hands over your ears and keep twice as far from nearby trees as the trees are high.
    - get out of the water and off small boats.
    - in a forest, find a low area under a thick growth



of small trees.

## Tornadoes

About 850 tornadoes strike the U.S. each year, killing about 80 people and injuring 1,500 more. A *tornado watch* means that conditions for tornado development are favorable. A *tornado warning* means a tornado has been sighted on the ground.

### In the home:

- Head for the basement if you have one and seek shelter under sturdy furniture, a workbench or a stairwell. Anywhere you take shelter, COVER YOUR HEAD!

- In homes without basements, take cover in the center of the house. Go to a small room, closet or hallway on the lowest floor. As an alternative you can hide under heavy furniture against a strong, inside wall. Put as many walls as possible between you and the approaching storm.

- Keep a flashlight and portable radio handy, along with extra batteries.

- The National Weather Service recommends keeping all windows closed.

### In the open:

- Exit vehicles immediately and go to a substantial structure or designated tornado shelter. If no suitable structure is nearby, lie flat in the nearest ditch, ravine, culvert, or other depression and use your hands to cover your head.

- Leave as soon as tornado danger has passed to avoid swollen stream waters that often accompany thunderstorms.

### In a Mobile Home

While only 5 percent of Americans live in mobile homes, about 45 percent of people killed in tornadoes



were in mobile homes when the twisters struck. The best advice is:

- Evacuate your mobile home and seek shelter in a building.

- If necessary, find a low spot such as a ditch or ravine.

## Flash Floods

**Flash floods and river floods have become the biggest weather-related killer across the U.S. causing more than 150 deaths annually.**

- Do not camp near small streams or creeks when thunderstorms are expected.

- Go to high ground immediately.

- Do not try to cross a fast-flowing stream on foot.

- It only takes two feet of water to make a car float. If your car does stall, abandon it immediately and move to higher ground.

- Be especially cautious at night because it is harder to recognize flood dangers in the darkness.

- Never try to drive cross rushing water in your vehicle. If you must cross standing water, be sure you know that the water is below your floorboards. Drive slowly so you don't stir up waves. Be aware that earlier fast-moving water may have damaged the road surface. ■



NOTE: Information provided courtesy *Safety Times*.



## When the "Rider Mee

KAREN EDGE  
SA/ALC Kelly AFB TX

Photo provided by author

*Helping my husband, Jerry, pick out a helmet was scary for me. I realized that the one we chose could possibly save his life. I remember wondering if spending more money for a better-rated helmet was worth it. Weren't all helmets the same? ...*

I was sitting down to lunch when my boss came in to tell me that my husband, Jerry, had been involved in a serious motorcycle accident. I'd seen him just minutes before, and the news seemed unreal to me. Before my boss could give me the details, my mind began filling in the blanks.

I thought, "Jerry's dead — he's been in another motorcycle wreck and he's dead. I hope he didn't suffer."

Jerry had laid his motorcycle down less than a

month earlier. However, this time I was afraid he hadn't been as lucky as before. I had a gut feeling he'd been killed. When I finally reeled myself in, I listened to what my boss was saying, "He's groggy, but he's stable. The doctor said it's a good thing he was wearing a helmet."

Every time he rode off on his motorcycle, I knew there was a possibility that he wouldn't be coming home again. Now my fears loomed large, and I wouldn't believe he was alive until I saw him.

A friend drove me to Wilford Hall Medical Center where Jerry — who was active-duty Air Force at the time — had been taken by ambulance as a Code 3 patient. It seemed like it took forever to get there. The only thing I could think of was the last thing I had told him that day, "I don't have time to talk to you right now — we'll talk later."



## t s the Road"

At the time, those words came naturally. Now, I was choking on them, wishing I had taken the time to listen to Jerry. But he'd already put on his helmet and was sitting on his motorcycle. I hadn't even kissed him good-bye, I'd merely touched his hand and said, "Ride safe." Now, as we drove to the hospital, I thought that would be my final memory of us together. That broke my heart.

The last time Jerry had an accident and was taken to the hospital, I was able to see him immediately. This time, however, they didn't let me go in right away. The added waiting time gave my mind the reigns to the unimaginable.

"I didn't get here in time, he is really dead," a voice said inside. "I should never have let him get back on that stupid bike."

Finally, a social worker came to see me. She met me at the door to the trauma area and

talked to me in what seemed like slow motion. The only words that registered were that Jerry had been involved in a serious motorcycle accident, and that it was a good thing that he'd been wearing a helmet.

Trying not to be rude, but with my nerves worn thin, I interrupted her and asked to see my husband. When she said, "yes," I almost ran to where he was. When I saw him, I came to a standstill. He looked pale — almost yellow. His neck brace and IVs scared me, even though the doctor said the IVs were for morphine and the brace was a precaution. However, what scared me most was seeing him crying — I had never seen him cry. When he looked up at me, my heart melted. The only words that would come to me were, "I love you, and I'm sorry." Fighting back the tears, I promised, "I'll always have time to hear you."

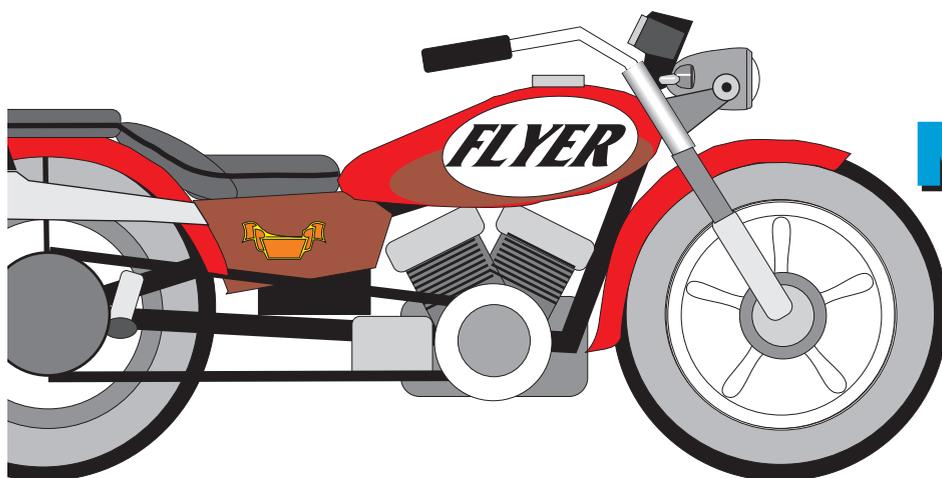
The rest of the day was a blur of doctors and specialists. Six hours after totaling his motorcycle, Jerry was released from the hospital. He had a broken collarbone and some ugly bruises and scrapes — but at least he was going home.

As we left the hospital, I grabbed the two paper bags holding Jerry's personal belongings. It didn't dawn on me then, but later that night when Jerry and our son, Nicholas, were asleep, I looked through the bags. I saw the mangled helmet and realized that could have been his head. I held his leather jacket — or, at least, what was left of it. It looked as if it had been put through a shredder. It dawned on me that the shredded leather would have been his skin. His Kevlar gloves, which I had complained were too expensive, had also been chewed-up by the pavement. His jeans had also held up well, minimizing the amount of road rash he suffered. Even his riding boots had done their job, protecting his ankle, which had recently healed from a previous injury.

I was surprised at how well Jerry's protective gear had protected him from the pavement. He'd hit the pavement at approximately 60 mph, then tumbled for 250 feet. His helmet had struck the ground first, then his shoulder — which broke his collarbone. However, because he was wearing his protective equipment, he was alive and sleeping peacefully after this serious accident.

He'll probably ride again one day. For now, however, he's healing and taking time to think it over. The choice whether or not to ride is his, but the choice to wear a helmet and riding gear is **NOT** optional.

Jerry now sells motorcycles like the one he totaled. When a customer says he or she doesn't want to spend the money on a helmet, jacket and gloves, Jerry simply shows them his road-ravaged gear. That's usually all it takes. ■



## The Motorcycle Safety Program

MSGT JIM MULLIS  
HQ AFSC/SEGO

**A**ccording to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there are currently more than 4 million motorcycles registered in the United States. The rising popularity of motorcycles is attributed to their low initial cost, their use as pleasure vehicles, and their fuel efficiency. Unfortunately, motorcycle fatalities represent approximately 5 percent of all highway fatalities nationwide, while representing less than 2 percent of all registered motor vehicles.

These statistics are far worse for the Air Force. During fiscal 2000, motorcycle fatalities represented more than 19 percent of all motor vehicle-related fatalities. The main reason motorcyclists are killed in crashes is because motorcycles provide virtually no protection in a collision. This is illustrated by another NHTSA statistic that shows approximately 80 percent of motorcycle crashes result in injury or death, compared to slightly more than 20 percent for automobile crashes.

Clearly, automobiles have more weight and bulk than motorcycles and they also have doors and a roof to provide protection during impacts and rollovers. Automobiles also have seat belts to hold you in your seat and many have airbags to cushion you from impacts. Also, because of their size, automobiles are easier to see

than motorcycles. Because motorcycles are lacking in each of these areas, their operators are at a disadvantage in terms of safety. In their defense, what motorcycles sacrifice in weight, bulk, and other crashworthiness attributes, is somewhat offset by their ability to swerve and stop quickly when necessary.

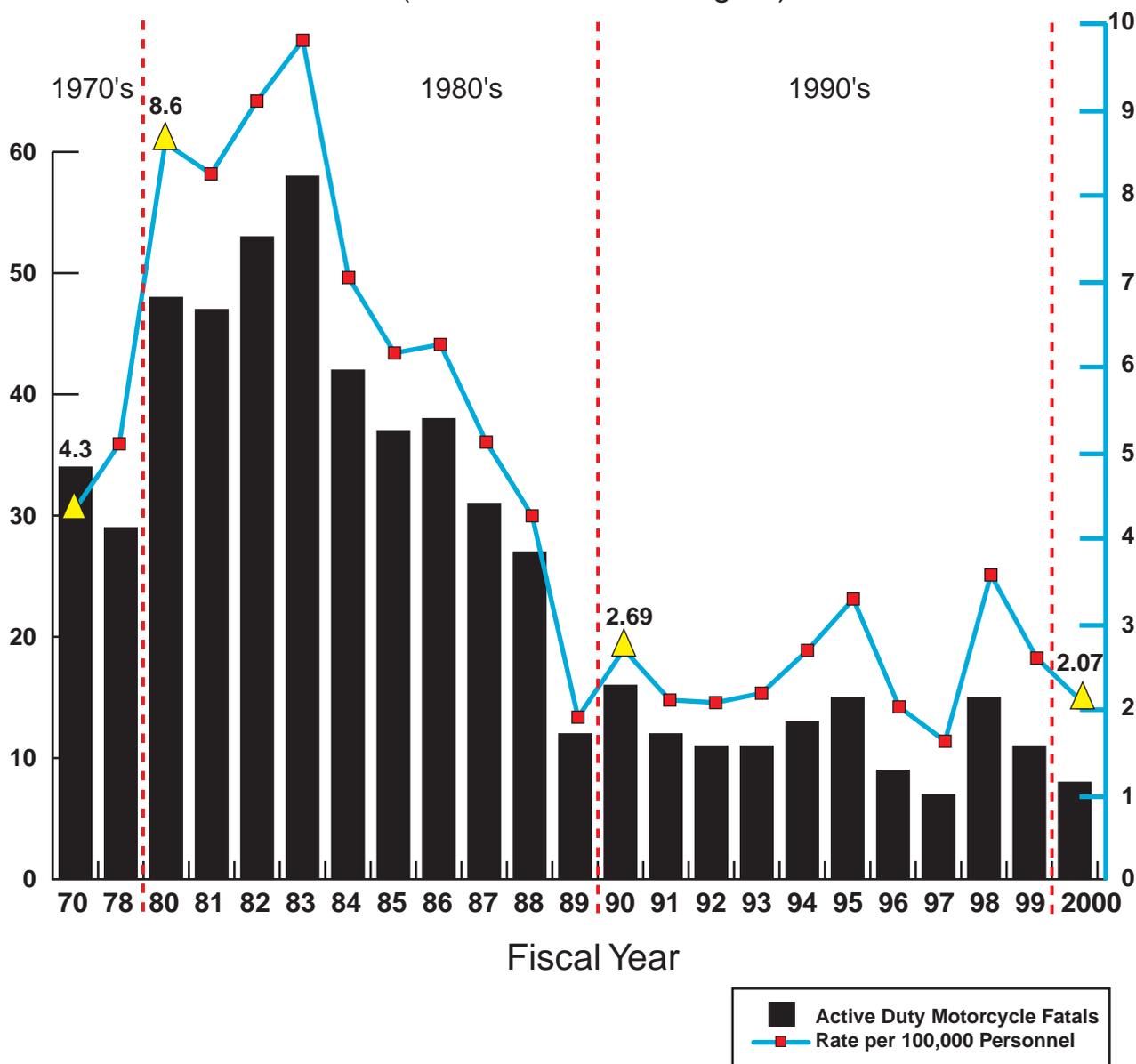
As a safety technician at the Air Force Safety Center, I am often asked what I think of the Department of Defense (DoD) requirement for motorcycle operators to attend formal rider safety training. These questions are often accompanied with statements like, "I don't have the time to attend training," or, "We don't have the manpower or money required to send our folks to this training." In these times of manpower reductions and dwindling budgets, these are certainly valid objections. However, when you weigh the minimal costs and manpower investments against the average annual loss of 10 Air Force members and \$1.25 million, these arguments quickly lose their validity.

Does motorcycle safety training work? ABSOLUTELY! One major study of civilian motorcycle mishaps indicated that 92 percent of the motorcycle operators involved had no professional or formal motorcycle training. In addition, 75 percent of the motorcycle mishaps involved riders with more than six months riding experience.

As the graph on the next page illustrates, following the inception of formal rider education programs during the mid-1980s, the Air Force experienced a dramatic 50 percent drop in motorcycle-related fatalities. However, training was not the *only* factor leading to this reduction. It was simply one part of a comprehensive approach to motorcycle safety that sought to prevent crashes and

# Ground Mishaps

## Motorcycle Fatalities (FY 2000 as of 30 Aug 00)



crash-related injuries.

Other current DOD and Air Force traffic safety program requirements for riders include:

- Motorcycle operators must be properly licensed.
- Motorcycle operators must attend an approved motorcycle training course.
- Motorcycle operators must use personal protective equipment such as a helmet, eye protection, brightly colored/reflective jacket or vest, gloves and leather footwear.

These requirements are directly tied to the causes of most motorcycle crashes, which are listed below:

- Lack of basic riding skills
- Failure to understand the motorcycle's operating

characteristics.

- Failure to appreciate the motorcycle's limitations.
- Failure to use special precautions while riding.
- Failure to use defensive driving techniques.
- Lack of specific braking and cornering skills.
- Failure to follow posted speed limits.

Our motorcycle safety programs seek to accomplish several things. First, that motorcycle operators know their limits and ride within them. Second, that riders are aware of, and understand, their motorcycle's limitations. Third, that riders take into account the environment in which they ride. Finally — and most important of all — that riders take the precautions needed to prevent themselves from becoming mishap statistics. ■

# Short Circuits



## AUTO RECALLS

*The following vehicle recalls have recently been announced by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.*

**1996-2000 Dodge Caravan, Grand Caravan; Plymouth Voyager, Grand Voyager; Chrysler Town and Country. Defect:** On certain minivans built with the 3.3 and 3.8 Liter engines, the fuel injection system can leak fuel from some of the sealing O-rings in the fuel injection rail. Fuel leakage in the presence of an ignition source can result in a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V268, DaimlerChrysler Recall No. 895)

**2001 Ford Escape, also Mazda Tribute. Defect:** Some 4x2 sport utility vehicles not equipped with an antilock brake system (ABS) may have inadvertently been built with 4x4 rear hubs instead of 4x2 hubs. If the incorrect hubs were installed, the rear wheels can loosen, or, in some cases, separate from the vehicle. This could cause loss of control of the vehicle, increasing the risk of a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V60001, Ford Recall No. 00S25; Mazda — NHTSA Recall No. 96009)

**2001 Ford Windstar, Ford Crown Victoria, Lincoln Town Car, Mercury Grand Marquis. Defect:** Certain passenger cars and minivans were built with a newly designed restraint control module (RCM). In some cases, the RCM doesn't recognize certain system faults that could unexpectedly activate the air bag or seat belt pre-tensioner during the self-test sequence at vehicle start-up. This condition could result in personal injury. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V270,

Ford Recall No. 00S26)

**2000 Sonoma, Chevrolet S10, Oldsmobile Bravada. Defect:** Certain light duty pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles were built with incorrect payload information on the vehicle certification label. The payload shown on the label is greater than the vehicle's maximum validated payload. If the vehicle is loaded to the incorrectly labeled payload, it may not ride or handle in the manner the driver expects. This could result in a loss of vehicle control or the inability to stop the vehicle within expected stopping distances. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V258001, GM Recall No. 00063.

**2000 Gulf States Toyota Camry, Corolla, Tacoma, Echo. Defect:** Certain passenger vehicles and light duty trucks fitted with speed control devices at the Gulf States Toyota Vehicle Processing Center or installed by certain Toyota dealers in the Gulf States' region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas) were equipped with a faulty E-clip. The clip is designed to hold the speed control assembly to the accelerator linkage. If the E-clip breaks, the speed control attachment could come off the accelerator linkage and cause the speed control to stop working. This could cause the accelerator to stick, making it difficult to stop the vehicle. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V252)

**1999-2000 Hyundai Sonata, Elantra. Defect:** Certain Sonata's equipped with the 2.5 liter V-6 engine, and all Elantras, may experience intermittent low-speed engine stalling. This is caused when the Mass Air Flow (MAF) electrical signal is interrupted because of engine

vibration being transmitted to the MAF sensor connector wiring harness. This condition could increase the risk of a crash. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V259, Hyundai Recall Nos. 039/040)

**2000 Isuzu Trooper. Defect:** Some 4-wheel-drive Isuzu Troopers were equipped with automatic transmissions having Torque-On-Demand (TOD). In certain high-speed frontal crashes, an interior fuel line can separate and allow fuel to leak. Fuel leakage in the presence of an ignition source could cause a fire. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V253, Isuzu Recall No. 00-02-S004)

**2000-2001 Volkswagen Golf. Defect:** On certain passenger vehicles, one of the two brackets used to bolt the front suspension control arm to the vehicle body may have been inadequately welded. As a result, the control arm could gradually loosen and ultimately separate from its bracket. Should this happen, the vehicle would be either difficult or impossible to control. (NHTSA Recall No. 00V280, Volkswagen of America Recall No. UX)

**2001 Ford Escape, also Mazda Tribute. Defect:** On certain sport utility vehicles, the O-ring seals in the fuel line connector at the fuel filter's outlet end were damaged when the line was connected to the filter during vehicle assembly. This could result in drivers noticing a fuel odor and, possibly, fuel dripping from the connection. Fuel leakage in the presence of an ignition source could result in a fire. (Ford — NHTSA Recall No. 00V270, Ford Recall No. 00S26; Mazda — NHTSA Recall No. 00V277002, Mazda Recall No. 97010)

Owners who do not receive a free remedy for these recall defects within a reasonable time should call the following telephone numbers: **DaimlerChrysler, 1-800-992-1997; Ford Motor Company, 1-800-392-3673; General Motors Corporation, 1-800-462-8782; Chevrolet, 1-800-222-1020; Oldsmobile, 1-800-442-6537; Gulf States (Toyota), 1-800-444-1074; Hyundai, 1-800-633-5151; Mazda, 1-000-222-5500; Volkswagen, 1-800-822-8987.**

## PRODUCT RECALLS

### Compaq Battery Packs

In cooperation with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Compaq Computer Corporation of Houston, Texas, is voluntarily recalling for replacement approximately 55,000 battery packs used with Compaq's Armada notebook computers. These battery packs can short circuit, causing them to overheat, release smoke and, possibly, catch fire.

The recalled battery packs were sold with Compaq's Armada E500 and V300 notebook computers. The recalled battery packs can be identified by a date code and serial number on the white label to the right of the battery connector. The affected date codes and serial numbers are as follows: date code TCGK with serial numbers 00001 to 105000, 20001 to 21800, and 40001 to 83100; or date code TCHK with a serial number from 40001 to 44700.

Owners should immediately stop using these battery packs and contact Compaq to learn how to discharge these battery packs and return them. For more information, contact Compaq at 1-800-889-7613 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Central time Monday through Friday, or visit Compaq's recall web site at <http://www5.compaq.com/newsroom/pr/2000/pr200102701.html>.

### Power Strips/Extension Cords

The Howard Berger Company, Inc. of Brooklyn, N.Y., is voluntarily recalling approximately 17,500 power strips and 10,000 extension

cords. The power strips have a two-prong plug with a plastic base containing six outlets. The extension cords are approximately 6 feet long and have a two-prong plug. The power strips and extension cords have undersized wires and lack over-current protection. As a result, they can overheat, potentially causing electrocution, shock and fire hazards.

The power strips and extension cords were made in China and sold at discount stores in the eastern United States and Puerto Rico. Consumers having these power strips or extension cords should stop using them immediately and return them to the store where purchased for a full refund. For more information, consumers can call the Howard Berger Company, Inc. at 1-800-221-6895 Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time.

### Two Brands of Scooters Recalled

In cooperation with the CPSC, Kent International, Inc. of Parsippany, N.J.; and Kash 'N Gold Ltd., of Ronkonkoma, N.Y., are voluntarily recalling some 97,500 scooters because of problems with the steering and handlebars.

Kent is recalling approximately 90,000 **Kickin' Mini Scooters** because the handles can unexpectedly come out of the steering column if the clamp holding them is not tight. This can cause the rider to lose control and possibly fall and be injured.

The scooters were sold nationwide from May through September 2000 by Toys-R-Us stores.

Consumers should stop using these Kent scooters immediately and call Kent International Inc. at 1-800-451-KENT Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time. Consumers will be given a free replacement handlebar.

Kash 'N Gold is recalling some 7,500 **Racer X20™** scooters because the plastic "T" joint between the handlebars can break. This can cause the rider to lose control and possibly fall and be injured.

These scooters were sold at Discovery and Mervyn's stores and

the Discovery web site from August through September 2000. Consumers should stop riding these scooters and return them to the store where they were purchased for refund or for a new scooter with a metal "T" joint. For more information, consumers may call Kash 'N Gold at 1-800-354-8785 Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Eastern time.

### "Urban Legend" E-mail Hoaxes

Chances are you have received an e-mail at home or at work warning you of some new or bizarre crime or danger. Often, the e-mail ends with the request that you forward it to as many friends as possible.

The truth is, most of these e-mails are pure fabrications. These "urban legends," as they are called, have included things such as HIV-infected needles being placed in theater seats to infect the unsuspecting.

We've been bitten by this here. We unsuspectingly published one of these urban legends in the fall 2000 *Road & Rec* in our "Letters To The Editor" column. The urban legend was titled "Microwave Water Woes" and discussed the danger of microwave-heated exploding when removed from the oven. While it is possible to cause water to erupt from a cup in a microwave (the editor has done it), the "story" we received concerning an actual injury was, in fact, a fabrication.

An astute reader contacted us to let us know that this was an urban legend, one that had spread remarkably and been reprinted in a number of publications. The reader also provided us with an Internet web site that tracks and identifies these urban legends. That web site address is <http://urbanlegends.miningco.com/science/urbanlegends/>.

The next time you get an e-mail warning you of some bizarre danger or crime being perpetrated and asks you to forward the e-mail to as many people as possible, check out the Internet address above. Don't let yourself become the unwitting accomplice of someone who takes pleasure in scaring people needlessly. ■

# Wheeling Into Spring

Courtesy *Safety Times*

**B**icycles are back in vogue. You'll find them in parks, city streets, residential areas, and even in the mountains. They are great for touring, exercise, or socialization. They get you out of the house and into the fresh air. However, they can also get you into the hospital emergency room, or worse. *In fact, about 550,000 people annually require medical treatment due to bicycle crashes, and 950 people die. Approximately 80 percent of the deaths result from a brain injury.*

The following are some simple, easy to follow guidelines that will keep the pleasure in biking.

## Keep the Basics

*Each year nearly 50,000 bicyclists suffer serious head injuries. Many never recover. The proper helmet can reduce head injuries by 85 percent.*

- Always wear an approved helmet (ANSI or SNELL). Select a helmet that fits snugly and sits flat on your head.

- Take a safety course. One organization offering courses for all ages is the League of American Bicyclists. To contact them you may call (202) 822-1333 or by e-mail ([bikeleague@bikeleague.org](mailto:bikeleague@bikeleague.org)).

- Ride a bicycle that "fits" your body and riding needs. You should be able to stand over the top tube,



with the tube one or two inches below your crotch. Find a qualified salesperson to help you determine which bicycle, safety features and accessories are best for you.

- Before riding, make sure all the parts are secure and working.
- Check your brakes before stepping onto your bicycle, and keep your brakes properly adjusted.

#### Pedal Pushers

- Find a safe place to ride. Many cities or bicycle clubs have maps of recommended routes.
- Cycle defensively by looking out for the other guy. More than 70 percent of car-bicycle accidents occur at driveways or other intersections.

Expect a car to pull out from a side street or turn left in front of you.

- If traffic is heavy, walk your bike across an intersection.
- Focus on drivers' eyes. Make eye contact and signal your intentions.
- Wear bright or fluorescent clothing during the day.
- Cycle with the flow of traffic, and never against it.
- In a group, it's best to ride single file, unless you are off the road or on quiet, secondary roads.
- Don't carry passengers or items that interfere with your control.
- Stay alert at all times. Look out for hazardous surfaces or obstacles in your path such as potholes, loose gravel, manhole covers, cracks, rail-

road tracks, or wet leaves.

- Give yourself at least three feet of clearance when passing parked cars to avoid being struck by doors being opened.
- Be predictable. Maintain a straight line when you're cruising.
- Never wear headphones.
- Stay at least three feet to the right of cars if you can. If there is a wide, clean shoulder, use it.
- Watch for pedestrians, especially children, or animals that might dart in front of you. If a dog chases you, stop, dismount and use your bike as a shield.
- Before turning, look back, check all directions for traffic, and use hand signals.
- Know and obey traffic regulations, signals and markings.
- Avoid provocative actions that might irritate drivers.
- When in danger, shout!
- The bike will be less stable with a child in a seat. A cart towed by a bike is far safer. Plan to go slower and take turns gently. Avoid busy streets.
- Carry loads at the rear of the bike in cases designed for bicycles.



## Nighttime Safety Gear

#### Night Riders

The best advice is avoid biking at night. It is 20 times more dangerous than riding during the day. Remember that most bicycles need to be adapted for nighttime use.

- Add the brightest lights and largest reflectors you can find to the front and rear of your bicycle.
- Wear retro-reflective clothing or material, especially on your ankles, wrists, back and helmet. White or fluorescent are not good enough.
- Ride only in areas that are familiar to you. Streets with bright lighting are best.
- Always assume a driver does not see you. ■

**Note:** AFI 91-207: The U.S. Air Force Traffic Safety program requires all personnel (including dependents, contractors, retirees, etc.) who ride bicycles on an installation to wear an ANSI or SNELL-approved bicycle helmet.

Mr. Charles Ervin, owner of the *Two Wheel Drive* bicycle shop, Albuquerque, N.M., models both day and nighttime safety apparel for bicyclists.

# Day or Night ... Be Seen When You Ride

