



## Enjoy Alaska...



but first **understand**  
**the risks!**



## SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH POLICY STATEMENT

The Coast Guard has operated in a complex maritime environment for more than 200 years, exercising our unique authorities while deploying a broad range of capabilities to guarantee U.S. maritime safety, security and stewardship. We are a military, multi-mission, and maritime service committed to ensuring the safety and environmental health of the public we serve as well as our own people. Superior mission execution is our primary objective. A vital condition of successful mission execution is the safety and environmental health of our people and the equipment they are entrusted with operating. Without it, we endanger our people and jeopardize the mission.

Successful mission execution begins with a thorough understanding of the environment in which we operate. Based on that understanding, we employ tested operational concepts, acquire and employ equipment suitable for the mission, and ensure our people have adequate training and education needed to do their jobs. We build on that foundation by conducting continuous drills and exercises, by improving our personal skills, and by maintaining our equipment at the highest state of readiness. In short, consistently successful performance requires thorough preparation.

The Coast Guard's fundamental safety and environmental health principle, applicable at every level in the organization for every mission or activity, is to continually manage the safety and environmental health risks confronting Coast Guard personnel in their professional and private lives. While we cannot reasonably remove all levels of risk inherent in our daily operations, we can strive to reduce those risks to keep them within acceptable limits. Unnecessary risks, however, have no place in the workplace or our daily lives. This principle is applied by identifying potential hazards, assessing the risks associated with those hazards, and controlling risks to acceptable levels, consistent with the mission or activity being performed. Reducing risks protects individual members while reducing fatalities, the incidence of injury and disease, and the loss of property, ultimately preserving mission readiness.

Every commanding officer, officer-in-charge, and supervisor is responsible and accountable for ensuring that effective safety risk management principles are incorporated into the planning and execution of every evolution and activity. Each member of the Coast Guard has a personal responsibility for effectively managing risks associated with their own activities, both on and off duty, and to safeguard themselves, their families and their fellow workers from harm. These responsibilities cannot be delegated and must not be compromised.

Sustaining superior mission execution requires that we all employ safe tactics and doctrine to preserve the health and safety of our personnel. I charge each of you with joining me in honoring this commitment.



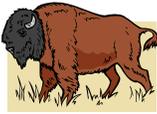
THAD W. ALLEN  
Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard  
Commandant



This brochure is  
dedicated to those Coast Guard men and  
women who lost their lives while in pursuit  
of great Alaskan wilderness adventures.



*"Regardless of our pursuit, we must all be prepared to meet the  
challenges of an unforgiving environment."*



**September 2006 – Member collided** with a **buffalo** while driving in Kodiak. Member was recalled back to duty and while driving back to the station, collided with a buffalo that was lying down in a blind spot on the roadway. The recall occurred in the late evening. The driving conditions were normal for this time of night. While operating the vehicle, member encountered a sharp turn in the road that created the blind spot where the animal was lying down. Member attempted to stop, but due to the close proximity of the animal, the collision was unavoidable. Fortunately, member was wearing his seatbelt and was not seriously injured. However, the animal was killed. Member was driving below the speed limit when the accident occurred. It is common for animals to cross or rest on roadways in Alaska.

- ⇒ When driving, keep alert of your situational surroundings.
- ⇒ Always wear a seatbelt when riding or operating a vehicle.



**August 2006 – Member** from the CGC HICKORY was **injured while descending a mountain**. Member was descending a mountain to meet a small boat for pick up and then return to the Cutter. He suddenly lost his footing and fell. His knee impacted a rock, causing great pain and the inability to continue. Member's companion stabilized his condition, built a small camp, and left for assistance. The Cutter dispatched a rescue team and reached the injured member at sunset. He was then strapped to a litter and transported, but the terrain became impassable in the darkness. As the Rescue Team prepared to spend the night in the woods with the member, his condition rapidly worsened, showing signs of early shock. The command center was notified, and a medevac was coordinated. Member was then transported to a nearby hospital and diagnosed with a torn MCL and ACL of the right knee. The long-term result is that the member will require reconstructive surgery and physical therapy.

- ⇒ Use properly maintained trails.
- ⇒ Wear the appropriate foot gear and clothing for whatever outdoor activity you plan.
- ⇒ Don't climb/hike through unknown terrain as a shortcut.
- ⇒ Be prepared to construct shelter if injured in a remote area, especially if you know it will take some time to get help.



Welcome to Alaska! Conducting operations in a treacherous environment requires extensive safety precautions and risk mitigating measures at every unit throughout District 17. While safety precautions are meticulously followed to successfully conduct Coast Guard operations, we must extend that same level of precaution when we venture out on outdoor endeavors. Our adventuresome people seek the excitement of the wilderness, but the Alaskan environment can prove unforgiving. Carelessness or poor judgment may have grave consequences.

This pamphlet contains stories of shipmates who perished or were seriously injured in Alaska. The best way to honor these individuals is to do whatever you can to prevent these types of accidents from occurring.

Take nothing for granted when preparing for your adventures. Seek guidance from those more experienced and exercise your best judgment. Be properly equipped; understand the weather forecast. Don't assume that past experience alone is enough to prepare you for a trip into an often-unpredictable environment.

Carelessness or poor judgment have been involved in most Coast Guard deaths that occurred during outdoor recreational activities. Assess your risks, plan accordingly, and be Semper Paratus.

*M.A. Neussl*

M. A. NEUSSL  
 Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
 Chief of Staff, Seventeenth Coast Guard District

# INJURIES



**Summer 1984 – Two young Petty Officers** from Support Center Kodiak **were involved in a life altering hiking accident.** They decided to climb Pyramid Mountain to take some pictures. Wearing street shoes, jeans, gloves, light jackets and wool caps, they set out. Approximately two-thirds of the way up the mountain they encountered ice. One Petty Officer decided to turn around because he believed he was not properly equipped to climb on ice and hard packed snow without crampons. He was correct. Unfortunately, the other Petty Officer chose to continue his climb without the necessary gear. After a while the first Petty Officer looked for his friend who continued to climb, but could not locate him, so he went back down the mountain and sought help. A helo soon located the injured Petty Officer who had fallen and sustained severe head injuries resulting in permanent partial brain damage.

- ⇒ Regardless of your pursuit, make sure you are always outfitted with the proper gear.
- ⇒ Don't climb/hike through snow and ice unless you are properly equipped.



**November 1998 – a First Class Petty Officer** from Air Station Kodiak was **mauled by a Kodiak bear** near Terror Bay, on the northwest side of Kodiak Island. The petty officer encountered the sow and her four cubs while on a hunting trip. The Petty Officer was attacked suffering multiple lacerations and a severe eye injury. A nearby fishing vessel heard the Petty Officer's distress call over a radio and relayed the information to the Coast Guard, who was able to rescue him. Bears are common in Alaska and are most times unpredictable.

- ⇒ If you're going to spend a lot of time in the woods, be prepared to encounter a bear.
- ⇒ Learn what you should do if a bear charges you.
- ⇒ Understand what courses of action you can and should take if an attack is inevitable.

**January 2005 – A student sustained fractured fingers** on his right hand during a Use of Force Tactics training in Anchorage. Training was held indoors due to extreme cold weather conditions in Alaska, and the floor was protected with a large padded mat. The trainer was in a full Redman suit while trainees wore Redman helmets, ODU uniform, LE tactical vest and belt. Training was conducted as normal. Later, the student reported that he could not bend his fingers and that he might have injured them, but he did not remember how or when during the training. It was assumed that the injury occurred while the students were attempting to handcuff the trainer. By reporting the injury early, the student obtained a quick diagnosis and ensured proper future treatment.

- ⇒ Immediately seek medical attention for any symptoms of pain and/or injuries.

**August 2006 – Member dislocated shoulder** while carrying ammunition.

Prior to dry docking the ship, the cutter conducted an offload of all small arm ammunition. A safety brief was conducted one hour before the scheduled offload, and all personnel were instructed to two-man carry all cases of ammunition weighing more than 75 lbs across the brow. A case of 50 cal weighed approximately 55 lbs. Member requested that the case be handed directly to him from the ship to the pier, bypassing the brow. The person in charge asked if member was sure he could handle the weight and member confirmed. The case was passed directly to the member. With the added weight, member's shoulder dislocated and he began to fall forward off the pier's edge. Member dropped the case of ammunition into the water. Fortunately, he was caught by shipmates before falling into the water. The weather was not a factor.

- ⇒ Always follow procedures outlined in any safety brief.
- ⇒ Know your limitations and consider your surroundings when lifting heavy objects.



**January 2005 – A civilian electrician** from CG AIRSTA Sitka was **injured when he slipped on ice.** While walking out the back door of the unit's public works department, a Petty Officer saw the civilian electrician laying on his back near the doorway. The electrician was non-responsive and the Petty Officer immediately called for medical assistance. Soon after the EMT and corpsman arrived, the electrician began to regain consciousness and was stabilized for a possible head injury before being taken to the hospital via ambulance. Later, the electrician recalled walking from his vehicle to the back door, where he subsequently slipped on the ice, his head and shoulders hitting first. His next recollection was seeing several people standing over him and being transported to the hospital. Upon a doctor's examination, he was diagnosed with a mild concussion and released from the hospital that evening. Slips and falls are common mishaps aggravated by poor weather conditions. If the Petty Officer had not spotted the electrician, his condition may have worsened.

- ⇒ Plan ahead and wear appropriate clothing and foot gear for predicted weather.
- ⇒ Watch your step even when entering your workplace or home.

# Training and Work Related Incidents



**February 2006—Member was injured during survival training in Valdez.** Every year new members are encouraged to participate in cold weather survival training in Alaska. Training consists of two days of classroom instruction followed by three days of outdoor survival. Personnel are split into groups of five, and are to survive using techniques and methods learned inside the classroom. During the first day outdoors, the group was collecting materials for shelter. One person was up in a tree sawing branches while others were dragging them into a pile. Member heard the words, “Heads up”, looked up and was hit in the face with a branch, resulting in a facial laceration. Member applied snow to wound to control swelling. Member was then escorted to the base camp. The decision was made to take the member to a local hospital in Valdez. Member was eventually released fit for full duty.

- ⇒ If you’re going to spend a lot of time in the woods, be prepared for worst case scenario.
- ⇒ Bring a portable/compact first aid kit to treat minor injuries.
- ⇒ Never underestimate even the minor injuries, get checked out at your local CG clinic or hospital.



**June 2006 – Member and passenger survived rapids** during a recreation trip near Juneau. Member was operating his newly acquired 16’ jet skiff in an extremely remote, shallow, white-water river in Alaska. Member was navigating downstream in a difficult part of the river when, immediately after jumping a log-jam, his engine began cavitating and would not provide propulsion. Member attempted to fix the problem, while the jet skiff drifted in the current towards several boulders and rapids. Member and passenger started paddling. The two were able to navigate the skiff through most of the rapids before being caught in an eddy, pushed up against two boulders and eventually swamping and sinking the skiff. After struggling for 30 to 45 minutes in the frigid glacier-runoff to free the skiff, the two gave up and body surfed down the remaining rapids. The two began making preparations for survival in accordance with D17 Cold Weather Survival Training and activated an EPIRB. At 0100, a CG helo from AIRSTA Sitka arrived and hoisted both parties to safety. Member was able to recover his skiff with minimal damage the next day.

- ⇒ Regardless of how much training and experience you have, ensure you are always equipped to construct shelter when conducting an activity in a remote area.
- ⇒ Always let someone know where you’re going and when you’re expecting to return.
- ⇒ Remember to have a CG approved life vest for every passenger conducting water activities.





**July 2001** -an **Active Duty Coast Guard Lieutenant** from Marine Safety Office Anchorage **sustained significant injuries while biking** in Anchorage, AK. The Lieutenant was biking on a well-known coastal trail when he came around a corner, quickly encountering a moose and her calf in the middle of the path. He swerved to avoid the moose and quickly hit his brakes. In doing so, he was thrown over the handlebars of his bike, landing on his head and arms. The Lieutenant's bike helmet probably saved his life. Unfortunately, however, the fall did result in two broken arms. Luckily, the moose did not charge and the Lieutenant was able to find help from a passersby.

- ⇒ Reduce speed when biking in limited visibility, and always wear the proper safety gear.
- ⇒ Remember that wildlife in Alaska can present real hazards regardless of where you enjoy your activity.



**September 2006** – Four people, including two **Active Duty Members** stationed in Kodiak, were on an ATV outing near Anton Larson Bay. During the course of the excursion, one active duty member drove over a large hole in the ground, lost control of the ATV, jumped from the ATV, and then the ATV fell on the member's leg. Luckily, the **first class petty officer** only **suffered a fractured ankle** and was on light duty for 30 days.

- ⇒ Take an approved ATV safety course.
- ⇒ Always assess trail and weather conditions.
- ⇒ Understand the inherent risks when your on unfamiliar terrain.



**October 2005** – **Member** was **shocked while cleaning fish** in Ketchikan. Member had just returned home from a long day of fishing. In an attempt to quickly process his plentiful fish, he decided to clean them right away with a water pump. He proceeded to clean his fish while still wearing his rain gear, rain boots, and dressed in wool clothing. The water pressure from the garden hose was lost. Member assumed his water pump had tripped off line. While reaching out with his right hand to re-set the water pump, a blue arc jumped from the pump to the member, shocking him and knocking him down.

- ⇒ Water and electricity don't mix. Use common sense when operating electrical machinery.
- ⇒ Before starting a project, assess your situation and make safety your first priority.



**Nov 2001** -**FA Ian Rogers** of CGC Firebush **died in a hiking accident** on Pyramid Mountain, Kodiak Island. FA Rogers and his climbing partner SA David Losh, also of CGC Firebush, lost their way in the dark, blowing snow on their way back down the mountain after a long day of climbing. They encountered strong gusty winds that caused them to lose their footing and fall into a ravine. FA Ian Rogers was killed following a 300' fall. SA Losh suffered a compound leg fracture from falling 100'. FA Rogers, a very avid hiker and outdoorsman, and his partner were well equipped for the hike. Rogers also left a note for his roommate that indicated where they had gone and asked his roommate to notify the police if they didn't return by midnight. The two hikers might have made it back by then if not for the changing weather conditions, which they had not anticipated. The weather was cold with calm winds when the two set out, but changed to snow showers with gusty 40 – 50 knot winds on their descent. Whatever activity you plan in the outdoors in Alaska, be prepared for the weather; it can change in an instant.

- ⇒ Always check the forecast before heading out.
- ⇒ Carry a radio with a weather band.
- ⇒ File a trip plan.



**May 2000** - **AMT3 Jared Pfeifer** of Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak **died in an ATV (all terrain vehicle) accident** in Chiniak on Kodiak Island. Petty Officer Pfeifer with 10 friends and co-workers were on an over-night camping trip in a well-known recreation area when the accident occurred. While riding his ATV alone on a trail near Bunker Hill, Petty Officer Pfeifer attempted to turn left to avoid a cliff edge but was unable to negotiate the turn. Petty Officer Jared Pfeifer drove his ATV off the cliff, fell 150 feet, and struck a boulder at the base of the cliff. He was found dead by his friends. While ATV's can be safely operated, they do pose a greater risk than many other activities. The terrain in Alaska is rugged and unpredictable; don't underestimate it.

- ⇒ Take an approved ATV safety course.
- ⇒ Know the area where you will be riding.
- ⇒ Ride on established trails.
- ⇒ If at all possible, never ride alone.



**1989 – MK1 Randy Mendoza** from the CGC YOCONA **died in a boating/hunting accident** at Near Island near Woman’s Bay in Kodiak. Petty Officer Mendoza was duck hunting on a typical rainy, windy day in Kodiak when the accident occurred. It appeared that he was either setting or retrieving decoys when his canoe overturned. Petty Officer Mendoza’s waders quickly filled with water, and he was unable to keep himself afloat in the flooding tide. A fellow Coastie, also from Yocona, came upon the scene shortly after it occurred. He immediately arranged to get a small boat launched to search for his shipmate. The body of Petty Officer Randy Mendoza was not found, however, until low tide, approximately 6 hours later. He died less than 50 yards from the beach. Like so many of the Coasties mentioned in this brochure, Petty Officer Mendoza was physically fit, experienced, and comfortable in the outdoors. However, given the extreme environment, those things are not always enough. Petty Officer Mendoza is survived by his wife and 5 children.

- ⇒ Always obtain a weather forecast before heading out.
- ⇒ Don’t become complacent because of familiarity.
- ⇒ Although waders provide protection from the elements, they can fill quickly preventing any type of egress.



**October 2004 – Member died in an ATV accident** in Bell’s Flats area of Kodiak. Member and host family’s son rode their ATVs into a private industrial area that was restricted with “No Trespassing” signs. The two began to jump gravel piles approximately 21 feet high. Member approached a pile at a high rate of speed, and both member and ATV were airborne. The ATV landed on top of her and the handlebar struck her head. She suffered massive injuries and died. After the accident, it was discovered that they were told not to take their ATVs in the private industrial area and to wear a helmet which the member refused.

- ⇒ Take an approved ATV safety course.
- ⇒ Always wear a helmet and appropriate safety gear.
- ⇒ Ride on established trails.

## Deaths

**March 1995 -SN Lisagor** of USCGC Storis **died while at a party/bonfire** in a clearing on the coast of Monashka Bay on Kodiak Island. According to his friends, SN Lisagor had been drinking quite heavily and was inebriated. His friends, concerned about his condition, sat him down near a bonfire so they could keep an eye on him. Some time later, SN Lisagor stood up and began to walk away. His friends tried to stop him. SN Lisagor was evasive and ran into the woods. Although a search was started immediately, SN Lisagor was not found for over 7 hours. His body was located at the base of a 200’ cliff near the site of the party. Excess alcohol consumption prevented SN Lisagor from considering the risks and making sound and reasonable decisions. Hazards encountered in the Alaskan wilderness can be extreme. Improper or inadequate consideration of these hazards can and in this case did mean the difference in life and death.



- ⇒ Limit your intake of alcohol, especially in unfamiliar surroundings.
- ⇒ At all cost, don’t let your friends who have been drinking wander off alone.



**Oct 1992 -YN3 Nick Frangos** and Coast Guard Civil Engineer **Norman Dornbrier III** **died in a boating accident** while returning from a hunting trip on an island near Juneau. Petty Officer Frangos, the Coast Guard’s 1992 Male Athlete of the Year, was a very avid cyclist and enjoyed outdoors sports. Mr. Dornbrier was also an avid outdoorsman and runner. While returning from their hunting trip, they noticed that their boat was drifting away. In hope of catching the drifting boat, they launched their beached skiff into choppy seas. Waves swamped their skiff, subjecting the men to bone-chilling cold Alaskan water. CG Station Juneau personnel found them deceased, several hours later. No decision regarding boating activities in Alaskan waters should be taken without first weighing the consequences. In this incident, a quick decision to rush to their boat in choppy seas cost them their lives. Your boat isn’t worth your life.

- ⇒ Exposure to frigid waters anytime during the year can lead to frostbite, hypothermia, and death.
- ⇒ Don’t go boating in questionable conditions.
- ⇒ Regardless of how fit and prepared you think you are, take some time to weigh your decisions and manage the risks.



**Feb 2001 - Coast Guard Reservist MST1 Brian D. Ruetten** of MSO Valdez **died in a snowmobile accident** that occurred in his home town of Tok, Alaska. Petty Officer Ruetten was riding his snowmobile at the back of a pack of his friends when he struck a submerged object in the snow. As a result of the impact, Petty Officer Ruetten was severely injured but managed to make his way to a nearby road, where he collapsed from his injuries. Once his friends realized he wasn't following them, they turned around to search for him. They were too late. He died before making it to a hospital for emergency care. Although Petty Officer Ruetten was wearing the proper safety gear including a helmet, these were not able to protect him from the substantial trauma to his body. The circumstances surrounding Petty Officer Ruetten's fatal outcome is all too common to those who enjoy riding snowmobiles. Several Alaskan riders die or are seriously injured every year when they hit snow-covered hazards.

- ⇒ Get to know the area where you will be riding well in advance of snowfall.
- ⇒ Watch your speed.
- ⇒ Ride safely.



**Feb 1995 - ASM2 Russ Eyles** of Air Station San Francisco **and his civilian climbing partner died while ice climbing** in Valdez, Alaska. Both were accomplished ice climbers and had decided to climb in Valdez, an area well known for the activity. The two men were tied off to an alder tree, which gave way during their climb. As a result, the two men fell down the face of the 200' frozen waterfall to the river below. Their fatal mistake was not knowing the established anchor points on the local climbing routes; not aware of the pitons embedded in the rocks upstream from the waterfall. If Petty Officer Eyles and his climbing partner had used these anchors instead of the alder tree, they would most likely be alive today.

- ⇒ Take time to get to know local routes and anchors.
- ⇒ Seek advice from local climbers on best locations.
- ⇒ Never assume that past experience is all you need to ensure your safety.



**June 1995 – Seaman Steven McGill** from a visiting Coast Guard Cutter **died in a tragic hiking accident** on Pyramid Peak on the island of Unalaska, AK. While the visiting cutter entertained a port call in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, Seaman McGill was on liberty and decided to go for a hike with a shipmate. Hiking above the snow line on the mountain, Seaman McGill, who had just turned 19 a week earlier, fell from a cliff. As a result of the fall, he suffered severe head and back injuries. He survived a short while, but passed away while on a medical evacuation flight. The circumstances surrounding his untimely death are not totally clear. We do know, however, that he was not accustomed to hiking on the local terrain and may not have been equipped to hike in snow.

- ⇒ When hiking new areas, take your time.
- ⇒ Talk with a local guide or someone familiar with the terrain who can direct you to a good place to hike.
- ⇒ Always consider weather conditions, your experience & technical skill level, and equipment availability.

