

Don't let summer bring out risky behavior By Lisa Gonzales

Summer starts soon, bringing warmer weather and longer days. Many families are beginning to plan outdoor activities like swimming, boating, camping and road trips. Remember to use risk management in all summer activities to help mitigate mishaps.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, every year in the United States an estimated 3,960 fatal unintentional drownings occur, with children ages 1-4 having the highest drowning rates.

In fiscal year 2021 the Department of the Air Force lost seven members to drowning. Could these deaths have been avoided? Were risks assessed and life jackets considered? Asking the right question and assessing risks is key to staying safe.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, in 2020, there were 5,265 recreational boating accidents resulting in 767 deaths, and 3,191 injuries. Where the cause of death was known, 75 percent of fatal boating accident victims drowned. Of those drowning victims, 86 percent were not wearing a life jacket.

Being in, on, or around the water can be dangerous. Know your limitations and always remember to have adults and children wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. To build skills, be prepared and stay physically fit, considering signing up for swimming lessons.

“Every Airmen and Guardian needs the proper training before participating in summer activities. It is important that we remain aware and assess the risks of each activity we participate in,” said William Walkowiak, chief of occupational safety for the Department of the Air Force, “Be responsible and weigh the risks to stay safe this summer.”

If plans include traveling by vehicle or motorcycle, inspect them before hitting the road. Check all fluids and ensure tires are in good condition. Keep a safety kit, extra water, snacks, or extra riding gear in case of an emergency.

The U. S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration showed that 38,824 lives were lost in traffic crashes nationwide in 2020. That number marks the highest number of fatalities since 2007. Reducing risks is as simple as making a plan before you head out and sharing it with family or friends, checking the weather and mapping out your trip to avoid construction or storms.

The National Safety Council's Injury Facts listed 5,579 motorcycle deaths for 2020. The factor that directly influenced motorcycle fatality trends is helmet use. Motorcycle helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatal injuries to operators and 41 percent for passengers.

The DAF lost 18 motorcycle riders and 14 members in motor vehicle accidents in fiscal year 2021. Inexperience, alcohol, and speed were often the root causes. Motorcycle riders and drivers

must never drink and drive. Additionally, motorcycle riders must commit to practicing riding skills every time they ride by wearing the proper protective gear and thinking beyond the ride. Vehicle drivers should never drive distracted, always wear a seat belt, and follow all traffic laws.

The Air Force Safety Center launched the Preseason Kickoff of the DAFRider page and DAFRider motorcycle video series this spring. It gives riders another way to learn about current standards and techniques, acquire skills, and help build a rider mentality. The series will run throughout the year with new videos highlighting a multitude of motorcycle topics.

“Wearing a motorcycle airbag jacket or vest along with a Department of Transportation approved helmet can potentially eliminate injuries or even death,” said Dave Brandt, the Department of the Air Force, motorcycle safety program manager. “Having a rider’s mentality and practicing every time you ride can help build riding skills for when you need them – and you will definitely need them if you continue to ride.”

Kirtland Air Force Base will be the first base to receive motorcycle airbag vests to utilize during classes and demonstrate how they can help reduce or mitigate blunt force trauma. Just like airbags in a vehicle, motorcycle airbags have been proven to save lives and help keep motorcycle riders from serious injuries or death by using a variety of on-board airbags that detect a crash in real time or a tethered system that deploys after the rider has fallen off a moving motorcycle.

During summer, camping can be a great break, but remember to always prepare for the unexpected by checking the weather report, following all local laws on fire hazards and wildlife and telling family or friends your plans. Never leave food or trash where animals can get it.

One can easily become dehydrated or sunburned while out enjoying the summer sun. Make sure to hydrate often and wear a broad spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF15.

“I’m asking each of you to use sound risk management this summer to help minimize risks” said Walkowiak. “Ask yourself, do I have the right skills or do I need to take a refresher course? Do I have the right equipment for the activity to make sure I get back safely? Asking yourself these and others questions might just save your life or the life of someone you love.”

Don’t be a statistic! Use sound risk management in all your summer activities to stay safe.

For additional summer safety tips: <https://www.safety.af.mil/Divisions/Occupational-Safety-Division/Summer-Safety/>