

WORK ZONE

REDUCING MISHAPS BY 50%

Skateboarding

A 21-year-old E-2 is skateboarding when the wheels hit a rock, and he falls. He loses an estimated 90 workdays with a broken ankle... A 31-year-old E-6 trips and falls while skateboarding down a 3-foot wooden ramp. He loses 21 workdays with a broken leg... A 19-year-old E-2 loses his balance and falls while trying to slide down the handrail of a stairwell. He loses 30 workdays with a fractured ankle.

These Sailors are some of the more than 15,600 skateboarders, as reported by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, who make their way to emergency rooms each year for treatment. Fractures are a frequent type of injury, and some deaths occur as a result of collisions with motor vehicles and from falls. Irregular riding surfaces account for more than half the skateboarding injuries caused by falls. Wrist injury is the No. 1 injury—usually a sprain or a fracture. Skateboarders who have been skating for less than a week suffer one-third of the injuries.

The National Safety Council offers this guidance:

Protective Gear

✓ Boards have varying characteristics for different types of riding (e.g., slalom, freestyle or speed). Some boards are rated as to the weight of the user.

✓ Protective equipment, such as closed, slip-resistant shoes, helmets, and specially designed padding, may not fully protect skateboarders from fractures, but wearing the gear can reduce the number and severity of cuts and scrapes.

✓ Padded jackets and shorts are available for skateboarders, as well as padding for hips, knees and elbows. Wrist braces and special gloves also can help absorb the impact of a fall.

✓ The protective equipment currently on the market is not subject to government performance standards, and careful selection is necessary.

✓ In a helmet, look for proper fit and a chin-strap; notice whether the helmet blocks vision and hearing. If padding is too tight, it could restrict circulation and reduce the ability to move freely. Loose-fitting padding, on the other hand, could slip off or slide out of position.

How to Fall

✓ If you are losing your balance, crouch down on the skateboard so you won't have as far to fall.

✓ In a fall, the idea is to land on the fleshy parts of your body.

✓ If you fall, try to roll, rather than absorb the force with your arms.

✓ Even though it may be difficult during a fall, try to relax your body, rather than go stiff.

Tips for Using a Skateboard

✓ Give your board a safety check each time before you ride.

✓ Always wear safety gear.

✓ Never ride in the street.

✓ Obey the city laws. Observe traffic and areas where you can and cannot skate.

✓ Don't skate in crowds of non-skaters.

✓ Never have more than one person on a skateboard.

✓ Never hitch a ride from a car, bicycle or other such means.

✓ Don't take chances; complicated tricks require careful practice and a specially designated area.

✓ Learn to fall—practice falling on a soft surface or grass. ■