

Bent, Folded and Now



Story and photos by Ron Campbell,
Naval Safety Center

It's fairly safe to bet that Fred had been bent and folded a few times, but, because of me, he now has been mutilated, too.

After a week of on-and-off-again rain, the grass in my backyard had become thicker and taller than usual. My neighbor joked that her tiny dog had gotten lost in it and couldn't find its way home. You always can count on your neighbors to tell you it's time to mow the lawn. With a sigh, I accepted the fact it had to be done and went to get the necessary equipment.

I didn't start the job until I had done my usual risk management—a quick but complete mental assessment of all the risks involved. “After all,” I thought, “I don't want to end up as the subject in the photo of the week on the website where I work.” I considered the possibility of a thunderstorm, but the local weather showed the nearest storm still was two hours away.

I also considered the possibility of running over something that might shoot across the yard and injure someone or damage property. I reduced the chances of this hazard by walking around the yard and picking up potential missiles. I found a couple of rocks, a thick stick, and two Matchbox cars. I figured I had everything but knew objects still could be lurking in the thicker grass.

My children were playing on the backyard patio, so I made the unpopular decision to move the little “rug rats” until I was done. I didn't want an object shooting out from under the lawnmower and hitting one of them.

With my risk assessment complete, I unceremoniously dragged out the mower and did a little pre-flight check: Handle tight? Check. Plenty of gas? Check. Shoes, safety glasses and dust mask on? Check, check and check. I was satisfied things were as safe as I could get them, so I fired up the trusty ol'

Mutilated

grass-eater, placed it on the “jack rabbit” setting, and entered the jungle otherwise known as my backyard.

Halfway through the job and dreaming of all the other things I’d rather be doing, a big *kerchunk, clank, bang!* snapped me back to reality. I immediately stopped the mower and moved it back to see what I had run over. Relieved that I didn’t find my neighbor’s dog, I picked up the top half of my one kid’s favorite toy: a hard, rubber Fred figure from the Scooby Doo gang. “Where’s the other half?” I wondered.

A brief search ended with my finding the other half about 20 feet away. It had flown from under the mower and had hit the sliding glass door.

“Wow!” was all I could think of when I considered what could have happened if the rubber man had been a rock. Then I shuddered a little as I realized something else. My kids had been playing on the patio just moments earlier—in the same area where Fred’s legs

had been shot like a big, rubber bullet.

To think I’d made them go inside just in case something like this happened was like a cosmic revelation. “The risk-management process really works!” I thought to myself. I accurately had identified two potential hazards, one of which actually happened, even though I had put controls in place. I had eliminated the other hazard by moving my kids from the danger area.

As I reflected on what had happened, I was thankful for several things. The most important item, however, was that I had listened to my inner safety voice and had followed through with the risk-management process.

I sat down with my family for dinner just as the forecasted wind and rain arrived. While we were gathered, I showed Fred’s remains to my children. They thought it was cool, but I proceeded with a teaching opportunity. I emphasized why I had made them move somewhere else before I started mowing. I also explained that the blades of a lawnmower are unforgiving. “If that toy had been a person’s foot,” I said, “it would have hurt really bad.”

Risk management isn’t all that difficult, and, take it from me, it really works. Use it yourself, and you just might prevent a serious mishap one day. ■



Yikes and Yuks!



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