

Why You Must Read Those Warning Labels



By Rae Mack

When we receive mishap reports at the Naval Safety Center, we study them to see what caused the mishap, what learned lessons we can pass on, and how the mishap could have been prevented.

One of the more common (and easily remedied) causes we find is that people ignore warning labels. They mix incompatible cleaning agents, such as toilet cleaner and Clorox; they use flammable liquids and light a cigarette; they paint rooms with the windows closed.

We decided to read some warning labels to see if we could find out why people don't pay attention to them. Were the warnings clear? Could people even see the warning? On some labels, they were printed in big, bold letters. On others, we really had to hunt to find the warnings. One almost required a magnifying glass to see. However, most of the messages were large and legible. But some of those warnings left something to be desired. Here are some examples:

- *On an electric hair dryer:* Do not use while sleeping.
- *On a sealed bag of snacks:* You could be a winner! No purchase necessary. Details inside.
- *On a frozen dinner:* Serving suggestion: Defrost.
- *On a box of dessert:* Do not turn upside down. (This message was printed on the bottom of the box.)
- *On a box containing an electric iron:* Do not iron clothes on body.
- *On a bottle of children's cough medicine:* Do not drive car or operate machinery while taking this medication.
- *On a package of sleep-aids:* Warning: May cause drowsiness.
- *On a bread-pudding package:* Product will be hot after heating.
- *On a string of Chinese-made Christmas lights:* For indoor and outdoor use only.
- *On a chain saw:* Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands.

Maybe people are so tired of seeing these silly warnings that they don't pay attention to the legitimate ones. However, it does show why you should read each one. No matter how silly the warning is, one may save your life. Or at least, you could have a good laugh. 