



U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center
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Snap, crackle, pop: perilous diving

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From fiscal 2011 to date, five Soldiers have perished and another eight have been injured in diving-related accidents, data from the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center show. Fortunately, observing just a few precautions before taking a plunge just might save your life or prevent serious injury.

“Assessing risks, knowing your limits and maintaining situational awareness are crucial components in avoiding a diving mishap,” said Tracey Russell, Ground Directorate, USACRC. “If Soldiers take just a few minutes to determine the depth of the water they’re about to dive into, we’d see fewer diving accidents.”

The following vignettes from recent years demonstrate how devastating a diving mishap can be.

- A Soldier was hiking with four friends when he decided to dive into a river from a rocky jut. The Soldier failed to resurface, and his friends were unable to find him. Authorities recovered his body several days later.
- A Soldier jumped from a pier into a lake and struck his head on the bottom. His injuries resulted in partial paralysis.

Careless diving isn’t a problem unique to the Army. Nearly 26,000 individuals receive treatment in emergency rooms, doctors’ offices and clinics for diving-related injuries in the United States each year, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Approximately 800 of those injuries, primarily teens and young adult males, result in paralysis due to diving in too-shallow water.

Alcohol is a common contributing factor in diving-related accidents, according to Lt. Col. Phillip Jenison, director, Ground Directorate, USACRC. He said individuals should limit their alcohol intake or avoid it altogether before a day on the water.

“Consuming alcohol impairs one’s ability to make good decisions,” he said. “It also affects swimming and diving skills.”

Russell stressed the importance of personal responsibility regardless of diving or swimming skill.

“Sadly, several Soldiers have lost their lives or been injured in seemingly harmless activities on the water,” Russell said. “Using the buddy system, not overestimating your swimming abilities and swimming in approved areas, preferably with lifeguards, are examples of how you can reduce your risk of becoming a fatality.”

The USACRC's Off-Duty Safety Awareness Presentation offers water-related safety tips and covers all facets of off-duty accidents in addition to providing preventive measures and best practices. To download a copy, visit <https://safety.army.mil/ODSAP>.