

Lifesaving tips from a firefighter/paramedic

# **SAFETY TIPS THAT CAN SAVE YOUR BUTT!**

*Martin Lesperance*

---

Safety Health Publishing Inc.

## Table of Contents



Wear clean underwear; you never know when you'll be in an accident .....	8
The ripple effect of an injury .....	9
Don't become a victim yourself .....	11
Never be afraid to call an ambulance .....	13
Pay attention to warning signs .....	19
Misuse of the word "accident" .....	22
Injuries that appear minor can sometimes kill .....	24
Statistics .....	33
Use the proper tools and safety equipment for the job ...	36
Be prepared for an emergency .....	38
Fire safety .....	42
Safety is not only about life and death .....	50
It's not the fall that kills you; it's the sudden stop .....	51
Listen to your body .....	55
When you see a dangerous situation, fix it immediately ..	58
It's up to you .....	60
It's up to the other guy too .....	61
One more thing .....	62
About the author .....	63

## THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF AN INJURY

When most of us take a risk, whether it's running a yellow light in your vehicle or standing on the "this is not a step" warning on a step ladder, we rarely think about the consequences of our actions. The last thing we think about is "what will happen if things go wrong? If I get hurt, how will I be affected and who else will be affected?" When was the last time you had these thoughts before you took a risk?

The following is a story about a guy who never dreamed things would end up like they did.

*We were told to respond to a house where the 9-1-1 dispatcher said two young children were screaming hysterically in the front yard. As we pulled up we recognized the house. About eight months earlier, the man who lived there had fallen off a roof and fractured his pelvis, thighbone, knee and some vertebrae in his back. They were very serious fractures. This man, who was once very active and participated in running, hockey and fishing, suddenly became bedridden.*

*He didn't handle this situation very well and became addicted to the painkillers he was taking. He also started to drink heavily. He became very withdrawn because he didn't want his friends to see him in this condition. He ignored his wife's pleas for him to get help and thought he could handle his problem by himself. Finally she couldn't take it any longer so she packed up, took the kids and left. His substance abuse and anger increased until one afternoon he took his walker and shuffled across the living room down the hallway into the bathroom. He stepped into the bathtub, closed the shower curtain, placed the end of the barrel of the shotgun he was carrying in his mouth and pulled the trigger.*

*This was the day his kids decided to pay daddy a visit. They were the ones who found him.*

This example is extreme, but situations like this do happen. Below are some ways a person can be affected after a serious injury occurs whether it happens on or off the job.

- Injuries cause pain and suffering to the injured person.
- Injuries will add stress to the injured person and to the people close to them.
- Financial difficulties may result.
- Lowered self-esteem, a sense of worthlessness and withdrawal from society are possible.

## **An injury also affects your employer no matter where it happens**

Benefit plans are expensive privileges that are there when you need them. When a worker is injured, either on or off the job, a tremendous ripple effect occurs. The following are just a few of the added costs.

- The worker has to be replaced, sometimes at overtime wages.
- Replacement workers may have to be trained causing lost productivity.
- Managers have to devote more time to the training of the replacement worker.
- Administration costs rise.
- When an employee is off work for an extended period, it is often difficult for him or her to return to work.
- Disability insurance or workers' compensation rates rise.
- Morale problems — when someone is seriously injured or killed, everyone who was close to that person is affected.

As you can see, there are many hidden costs involved. This added expense makes it more difficult for an employer to compete in the global market. As a result, everyone's job security could be affected.

We should all try to reduce injuries whether we are at home, work or play. If we can do this, it's a win-win situation for everyone involved. Your employer reduces payout for needless injuries but more importantly, you live a longer, happier life.

*A plane blew up at 33,330 feet over Czechoslovakia. One of the flight attendants survived the fall. She was pronounced dead at the hospital but things changed. She was in a coma for 27 days. Sixteen months later she was discharged from the hospital.*

## DON'T BECOME A VICTIM YOURSELF

*A lady had a flat tire on a busy highway. She pulled over on to the shoulder and was attempting to change the flat. A man noticed her plight and pulled his vehicle over to offer assistance. As he attempted to help her he was struck by another vehicle and was killed instantly.*

*At a gas plant a man was overcome by hydrogen sulfide (a very poisonous gas) doing a procedure he had done many times before. A co-worker saw him lying unconscious and immediately ran to help him. He was also overcome. Another worker ran to help his friends. He, too, was overcome. Other workers saw this and took the appropriate emergency procedures which included putting on their self contained breathing apparatus. They pulled the men to safety. Unfortunately it was too late for two of them. They died.*

The most important part of any rescue is the safety of the rescuers. I cannot stress this enough. If you go to help someone and become a victim yourself, you are not only useless to the person who needs the help, you complicate matters. You have to be rescued also.

When an emergency situation occurs it is very easy for tunnel vision to occur. Tunnel vision is what happens when you see a situation and all your attention focuses on that situation. You become oblivious to your surroundings including your own safety. This kills many people every year and it can happen very easily.

If you ever come across an emergency such as a house fire, motor vehicle collision, shooting or anything else you can imagine, before you attempt to help you must stop, take a good look around, look for further danger that may be obvious or not, assess the situation and then decide how you are going to act.

In some cases the best thing you can do is run away. Protect yourself. Attempting to help a person when it's unsafe to do so can get you killed. Keeping yourself safe may be a difficult decision, but it is the right decision.

*A paramedic attended a small plane crash. The pilot was dead and the passenger had a serious head injury. Aviation fuel was everywhere. Without waiting for the fire truck to arrive to handle the possible fire, he crawled into the plane and dragged the injured person out. The passenger died shortly after.*

*This paramedic was suspended from work for putting himself in such danger. He was then nominated for a medal of bravery.*

There is a very fine line between being a hero and a person who made a horrible error in judgment. In this situation, the difference between a hero and a stupid person was a spark.

## **Don't become a victim yourself!**

---

*A British woman was suffering from chronic fatigue. She decided to fix herself so she took a drill and, in front of a mirror and video camera, drilled a two-centimeter hole in her skull. She not only survived but said she felt much better after doing it. I wouldn't recommend any of my readers, or anyone else, try this.*

---

## PAY ATTENTION TO WARNING SIGNS

*I was speaking to a group of safety professionals at a conference and, since it was early December, talked about the number of people injured every year after falling from stepladders while putting up their outside Christmas lights. After my talk, two safety professionals came up and quietly told me how they both had become injured in the same way. One of them admitted he was actually standing on the THIS IS NOT A STEP warning (how many times have you done this?), lost his balance and fell knocking himself unconscious. He would have frozen to death if the neighbor's child hadn't gone home and asked his mother why Mr. Smith was sleeping on the sidewalk. The second safety professional shattered his knee and was off work for four months.*

*A man was staying at his mother's house while attending his father's funeral. While cleaning up the kitchen, he tripped and fell onto the open door of the dishwasher. Two sharp utensils stabbed him. He died shortly after.*

Warning signs are there for a reason. Lawnmowers have warning signs telling people to keep their hands and feet away from underneath a running lawnmower. But every year, dozens and dozens of intelligent people will take a perfectly good hand and put it under a running lawnmower to grab something as valuable as an old stick or wet clump of grass.

Sometimes people will use lawnmowers for purposes they weren't designed for; such as hedge trimmers.

In theory, it may make sense to some. You get a willing helper to grab the other side of the running lawnmower, pick it up and carry it along the hedge but be very careful not to run (after all you could trip and hurt yourself). The scary part about this is people have actually done this. You have to



wonder, what is going through their heads when they come up with an idea like this.

*In Thunder Bay, Ontario, during 1998, eleven people came into city hospital emergency departments with serious hand injuries. The emergency physicians were wondering what the heck was going on but then realized it was the first heavy snowfall of the year and all the injuries were caused by snow blowers. So once again, seemingly intelligent people ignored the warning stickers and took a perfectly good hand and shoved it into a running snow blower to unplug the snow.*

A 33-year-old man walked to the store to buy some bread and milk. On the way, his buddy asked him in for a drink. After a few drinks, he attempted to swallow his friend's three-foot long sword. This was his first attempt at such a thing and he ended up cutting his throat and collapsing a lung. His wife, who was very understanding, said, "I love this man with all my heart but boy, what a jerk."

*One person was finishing his basement using glue to lay the tiles on the concrete floor. On the glue container was a warning not to use the product near open flame. Unfortunately he did not realize that the pilot light on his water tank was an open flame and was quite close. When the fumes reached the pilot light, they exploded. He received first and second degree burns to 25 percent of his body but was lucky! His injuries could have been more serious. Unfortunately, the resulting explosion and fire damaged his home extensively.*

## Warning signs are there for a reason

We see warning signs wherever we go: stop signs warn us to stop, takeout coffee cups warn us the coffee is hot, gasoline containers warn us that gasoline is flammable and every electrical device known to man warns us we could be electrocuted if not used properly. (My photocopier even has a warning telling me I should unplug it when not in use . . . a fire may result if left plugged in!) I think many of the warnings are to cover the manufacturers' butts in case someone sues. But I realize most warnings are there for a good reason.

If you see warning labels on chemical containers, machinery, tools, or any recreational piece of equipment,





pay attention to it. Remember they are there for a reason because people just as intelligent as you have been injured doing exactly what you plan on doing with that chemical or piece of equipment.

I once ignored a warning sign and, worse than that, I ignored a very smart local boy's advice.

*I was white water kayaking in Costa Rica for six weeks. One day I planned to go for a swim in the ocean. One of the local boys, who was about twelve years old, advised me in his broken English, that this part of the beach was “muy peligroso” (very dangerous) because of the riptide. Right behind him was a sign in Spanish and English warning of the riptide. But growing up in Winnipeg, and not having spent any time around the ocean, I figured I probably knew more about oceans than this twelve-year-old kid because I was older and the warning sign was for people who didn't know how to swim well. When the kid left, I ran into the water. But it wasn't long before I realized I was in trouble. The riptide was sucking me out to Africa and the shore was getting farther and farther away. Swimming against the current was useless because the current was stronger than me. At this point, I was very concerned and crying for momma. I wondered why I didn't listen to that kid or pay attention to the warning sign. Remembering what the sign said to do if caught in a riptide, I swam parallel to the beach for approximately one hundred yards and then swam into the shore. My little swim ended up becoming a forty-five minute scare. This event could have been avoided if I had listened to the boy and paid attention to the warning sign.*

## **Pay attention to warning signs**