



Photo by LCpl. Michael Gonzalez

Too Many Marines Don't Know When to Say When

By Carol Parks

On television, guys drinking beer always end up in cheerful bars, with good-looking women. In real life, some end up in emergency rooms or morgues.

The Facts

Alcohol consumption was a factor in 31 percent of all Marine Corps off-duty/recreational deaths from FY97 to 01. A recent case of alcohol poisoning killed a 21-year-old lance corporal. He drank until he was incapacitated and died with a BAC of 0.528. Alcohol is expected to be a factor in the latest fall that killed a 22-year-old lance corporal. Following a card game, this Marine fell

through a third-story window and landed headfirst on a concrete sidewalk.

Although drinking initially makes people rowdy, alcohol is a depressant that can interfere with nerves that control breathing, heartbeat and the gag reflex. When you reach a BAC level of 0.41, you're probably going to die. Keeping the 0.41 BAC in mind, you can easily see that a private first class didn't stand a chance with an alcohol level of 0.57. This Marine literally drank himself to death, consuming amounts of alcohol that are ridiculous. In less than five hours, this PFC drank the following: 16 12-ounce beers, 32 ounces of saki, seven shots

of 80-proof brandy and coke mix, and 200 milliliters of 80-proof tequila.

The Symptoms

Alcohol poisoning produces confusion, vomiting while sleeping, seizures, slow or irregular breathing, and cold, clammy, pale, bluish-colored skin. Victims often can not be aroused.

Binge drinking, consuming a large quantity of alcohol in a short period of time, is extremely dangerous because a fatal dose can be ingested before becoming unconscious. Often, drunk Marines are sent to bed to sleep it off, only to be found dead the next morning.

Take Action

If you suspect alcohol poisoning, don't waste time!

Call 911 immediately. Stay with the victims and turn them on their side to prevent choking on vomit. Quick action on your part can save lives. Sleeping it off, taking a cold shower or drinking coffee will not reverse the effects of alcohol.

Command Culture

Is the problem a cultural one? It is if individuals in leadership positions are aware of alcohol abuse or underage drinking and ignore the problem. Commands must take an aggressive stance on alcohol abuse and educate Marines on the negative effects of too much alcohol. It is also essential to stress that Marines call for medical attention. Potential embarrassment is hardly a concern when the choice is sending a fellow Marine on a simple trip to the emergency room or a trip to the morgue. Take your pick, and choose wisely; it can be a life-or-death decision.

Manage the Risks

If you drink, don't exceed your limits. Moderation is key. Take it slow; one drink per hour, don't drink on an empty stomach, use the buddy system, and leave driving to the designated driver. Never leave Marines alone to sleep it off if you suspect they've had too much to drink. They may not wake up. Drinking to the point where you pass out, choke on your own vomit, or fall from a barracks catwalk is not macho, cool, or funny. 🍷

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