

Life On The Edge; Gargling While Stapling

Statistics show that every year, almost 16,000 people are injured while stapling paper. 4,000 more hurt themselves while brushing their teeth or gargling, and another 11,000 somehow become injured while engaged in the reckless act of reading.

I don't know about you, but I have better things to do than worry about being attacked by my stapler. If I spent too much time thinking about it I would never get out of bed, which no doubt carries its own statistical risk of injury.

I couldn't find comparable statistics for death related to these same causes, but it stands to reason that if 11,000 people can hurt themselves reading, some injuries will be more serious than others and a few of these people could conceivably have read themselves to death.

It's too early to consider giving up reading, though. Driving would be a better choice, with almost three million injuries each year.

If I DID give up reading, however, I'd start with the obituary section of the newspaper (or "Deaths" as they are now called, presumably for the benefit of people with monosyllabic vocabularies).

My grandfather used to say, "Any day you don't read your name in the obituaries is a good one." I would add that it's also a good day when I'm not reading the names of people who were younger than I am, but this is happening less and less frequently. Age 53 does not seem that old to me, but evidently I'm hanging in there longer than some.

That's despite daily opportunities to expire. For example, there are over 500,000 bicycling injuries each year – no surprise there. But over 40,000 people manage to hurt themselves on stationary bikes – the ones that don't actually go anywhere. I imagine that some of those stationary bikers are also recklessly increasing their chances of injury by reading while exercising.

That raises other questions about combining risky behaviors. I suppose it goes without saying that you should never read while driving, but how about barbecuing (16,000 ipy) while stapling? Or bowling (18,000 ipy) while gargling? That's life on the edge.

You'd have to imagine that - as alarming as these statistics are - they are probably grossly underreported. I know that if I was gargling and I actually injured myself badly enough to end up in an emergency room, I'd never be able to admit the truth.

I'd tell the E.R. nurse something like, "Oh, I had to jump in the Iowa River to save a busload of little old ladies and their 27 kittens from drowning. The mouthwash was just to get rid of the taste of the river water."

The data I'm quoting did not include injuries or death by accidental poisoning, but that's been on my mind lately. We have an ant problem on our back porch, which migrates indoors.

LuAnn hates ants. After the environment-friendly ant-killing options all failed, she had to resort to the industrial grade poisons that now cover our steps. Armies of ants lay where they died.

I started to sweep up the carnage the other day, but LuAnn stopped me. She said, "I want the rest of them to see the carcasses of their little friends."

Mental note to self: "Do not make LuAnn mad."

Anyway, if I were one of the almost 46 million Americans without any kind of health insurance (don't get me started), I would find these injury statistics very distressing. With an average Emergency Room visit expense in the vicinity of \$500, I'd hate to think that sitting in my house reading the Press-Citizen could be hazardous to my health and pocketbook.

And I can't for the life of me figure out what a reading-related injury might be. Paper cuts? Headache? Eyeball muscle cramp? Maybe it includes

things like walking off a cliff while reading a trail map. Or if you are a very slow reader, it could be while driving and reading signs like “Road Ends 100 Feet.”

So many unanswered questions! Until we get more details about what to watch out for, you’d be well-advised to put this paper down right now before you hurt yourself.