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College hazing still leads to injuries – despite being officially banned

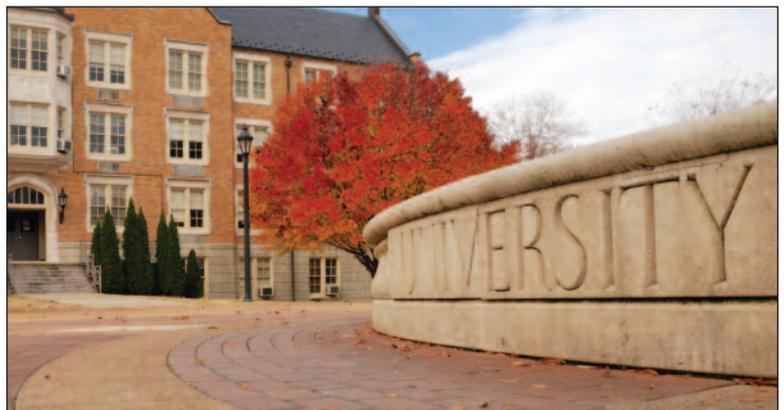
Officially, almost all colleges and universities, fraternities, sororities and sports teams have prohibited students from engaging in hazing activities. In addition, some 44 states have enacted anti-hazing laws.

But despite all this, each year there are reports of numerous injuries and deaths from initiation rites gone awry.

The official bans are a good thing, of course. But the sad fact is that many universities don't back them up with aggressive anti-hazing measures – until a tragedy occurs and a lawsuit is filed.

Utah State University is facing a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the parents of Michael Starks, an 18-year-old freshman who died of alcohol poisoning during a hazing ritual in November 2008.

Starks was “captured” by sorority and fraternity members during rush week at Utah State and taken to an off-campus house where he was encouraged to drink straight vodka. Even though his hands were bound with duct tape and he was clearly drunk, fraternity brothers continued to hold a bottle of vodka to his mouth.



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He was taken back to the fraternity house, thrown into a shower and then taken to a room where he was left on the floor to die.

City police records show the USU frat house had a long history of alcohol- and drug-fueled troubles, including arson, explosives, thefts, burglary, disorderly conduct, property damage and an alcohol-induced suicide.

Other college hazing lawsuits have been filed recently in Kentucky and North Carolina. The Kentucky case

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Some dosages are measured in drops, some in teaspoons, and some in milliliters. It can be easy for parents to mix these up and inadvertently give a child the wrong dosage.

More than 500,000 kids a year have bad drug reactions

Each year more than half a million children in the U.S. have bad reactions or side effects from widely used medicines that require medical treatment and sometimes hospitalization, new research shows.

Children younger than five are most commonly affected. Penicillin and other prescription antibiotics are among the drugs causing the most problems, including rashes, stomach aches and diarrhea.

Parents should pay close attention when their children are started on medicines for the first time, because first-time exposures may reveal an allergic reaction, the study noted.

For small children, one of the biggest problems involves liquid doses. Some dosages are measured in drops, some in teaspoons, and some in milliliters. It can be easy for parents to mix these up and inadvertently give a child the wrong dosage, the study suggested.

The study, funded by the National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, was based on national statistics on patients' visits to clinics and emergency rooms between 1995 and 2005.



Recall might not end Toyota acceleration crashes

Even though Toyota began a massive safety recall recently, it might not spell the end of accidents involving sudden, unexplained acceleration.

Toyota is recalling at least 3.8 million Toyota and Lexus vehicles to fix a potential safety problem caused by removable floor mats jamming the accelerators.

The announcement followed a crash in August that killed four people riding in a Lexus ES 350 in San Diego.

Mark Saylor, an off-duty California highway patrolman, and his wife were killed in the accident, along with their 13-year-old daughter and brother-in-law Chris Lastrella.

The crash occurred after they reported to a 911 operator that they couldn't stop their 2009 Lexus as it careened down a highway. In a tape of the call released in September, Lastrella told the operator that the car had no brakes. It plunged over an embankment and burst into flames.

The cause of the accident is still under investigation. But some experts believe that similar crashes have actually been caused by a defective engine throttle control system – not floor mats interfering with gas pedals. If this is true, removing floor mats won't stop those accidents.

Safety Research Strategies, a Massachusetts consulting firm, says initial investigations indicate that Toyota's electronic throttle control system is a factor in some similar accidents. It says the problem appears to have increased beginning with the 2002 Camry, when Toyota installed a new throttle control for a redesigned model. Since then, problems have been reported in the Camry, Camry Solara, Lexus ES 300 and ES 330s, Sienna, Tacoma and RAV4 vehicles, covering model years 2002 and later.

Bulent Ezal filed a lawsuit last year in California after his 2005 Camry sped off a cliff into the Pacific Ocean when he tried to park it at a restaurant. Ezal was seriously injured and his wife Anne was killed in the accident.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says it has received reports of 102 incidents in which the accelerator may have become stuck in Toyota vehicles, but it is unclear how many of the incidents led to crashes.

The recall affects the following vehicles: 2007-10 Toyota Camry, 2005-10 Toyota Avalon, 2004-09 Toyota Prius, 2005-10 Toyota Tacoma, 2007-10 Toyota Tundra, 2007-10 Lexus ES 350 and 2006-10 Lexus IS 250 and IS 350.

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College hazing still leads to injuries, despite bans

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was brought by Brent Whiteside, a student at Eastern Kentucky University, against Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

Whiteside claims he was repeatedly beaten by local chapter members who used hands, fists, feet, paddles and canes during a months-long hazing in 2008. Whiteside was later hospitalized with kidney failure.

In North Carolina, the parents of Harrison Kowiak, a 19-year-old sophomore, are suing Lenoir-Rhyne University, Theta Chi fraternity, the fraternity's faculty adviser, the associate dean of students, and 21 fraternity members.

Kowiak died during a violent hazing ritual known as "bulldogging" in November 2008. He and another pledge were taken to a farm where they were told to

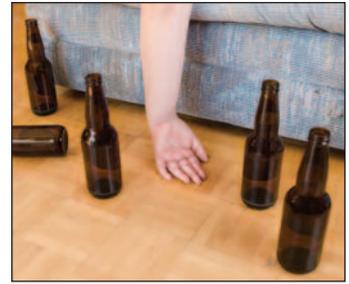
fetch rocks at the end of a field.

The pledges, who were dressed in white, were repeatedly tackled by fraternity members who wore dark clothing and sprang out at them from behind hay bales.

When Kowiak collapsed and was unable to get up, several of the fraternity brothers put him in a car and drove him to a local hospital. They told hospital personnel that Kowiak had been injured during a tag football game.

An autopsy revealed he died of a subdural brain hemorrhage.

Hopefully, the growing number of lawsuits will persuade other colleges and universities to take stronger preventive action against hazing.



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Yaz birth control pills linked to heart problems

Hundreds of lawsuits have been filed against the manufacturer of the birth control pills Yaz and Yasmin, alleging that the company concealed health risks associated with the pills – such as an increased risk of strokes, heart attacks and blood clots – and lied about their effectiveness.

Yaz and Yasmin are "fourth generation" birth control pills that contain a new ingredient – drospirenone – and combine estrogen and progesterin to prevent pregnancy.

The suits allege that drospirenone, a diuretic, causes an increase in potassium which can lead to "hyperkalemia" – an unsafe level of potassium that disrupts heart rhythms and slows the flow of blood, leading to clotting.

In addition to the lawsuits, the drugs remain under scrutiny by the Food and Drug Administration.

The manufacturer, Bayer, has been warned repeatedly about advertising for Yaz and Yasmin. Bayer has been cautioned that its ads may overstate the products' safety and inaccurately tout their effectiveness in treating acne and premenstrual syndrome.

Jury finds birth defects were caused by Paxil

A Philadelphia jury has ordered Glaxo-SmithKline to pay \$2.5 million to a woman whose son was born with serious heart defects after she took the antidepressant drug Paxil during her pregnancy.

This was the first such case to go to trial. About 600 similar cases are pending across the country, all of which blame Paxil for heart problems and other birth defects.

The jury found GlaxoSmithKline liable for negligence. The company vowed to appeal.

Paxil was first introduced in 1992. The Food and Drug Administration began warning in September 2005 that the drug may be associated with birth defects, and strengthened the warning four months later.

The Philadelphia case was brought by Michelle David, who gave birth to her son Lyam in October 2005. Lyam was diagnosed with heart defects two months later and spent five months in a hospital, undergoing surgery to repair two holes in his heart. He also has a third, separate heart defect and will need at least one more surgery as he grows.

About 600 lawsuits across the country blame the manufacturer of Paxil for heart problems and other birth defects.



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Bill in Congress could help protect cruise ship passengers

A bill currently navigating its way through Congress could help protect passengers on cruise ships.

The Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, H.R. 1485 and S. 588, requires new safety equipment onboard; technology on new ships to detect passengers who fall overboard; reporting of crimes, missing individuals and sexual harassment; video monitoring to reduce crime; and training of crew members in crime scene investigation and preserving evidence.

The bill is a good idea, but unfortunately it does little to help passengers who are injured by a cruise line's negligence and want to pursue a remedy in court.

Many passengers who try to sue a cruise line find that the fine print in their contracts creates legal loopholes that limit their ability to get fair compensation. For instance, cruise contracts often require that lawsuits must be brought in inconvenient places, that they must be brought within strict time limits, and that the amount a passenger can recover is limited.

A growing number of lawsuits are being brought by passengers who sign up for local excursions while off the cruise vessel, such as diving, horseback riding or sailing. It's not always clear what rules apply to these lawsuits.



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