

# SUMMER LOADING AND CALA OPERATIONS

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Inclement weather can have various effects on ordnance handling operations. The NATOPS Conventional Weapons Handling Procedures Manual (NAVAIR-00-80T-103) mentions “Rain, snow, sleet, hail and other types of precipitation will impact the safe handling of ordnance.” The manual goes into greater detail on lightning, thunderstorms and high winds, explaining the limits and whether or not to cease ordnance handling evolutions.

Those of us that have handled ordnance in various geographical locations around the world such as Iraq, Afghanistan, “lovely” Yuma, Arizona, and even on flight decks know about another hazardous environment and how it affects ordnance handling operations: the heat.

In places like Yuma, temperatures average 110 degrees Fahrenheit; the city’s hottest day recorded was 124 degrees in 1995 and in August 2021, Yuma recorded multiple days above 110 degrees, topping out at 117. Having been stationed in Yuma a number of years with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan I know from experience that kind of heat can have multiple effects on people, both physically and psychologically.

With those kind of temperatures any job becomes tougher. Aircraft surfaces can become extremely hot and unbearable to touch with bare skin. The sun is beating down on you with little to no shade. Sometimes you’re in the middle of the combat aircraft loading area (CALA) loading an aircraft for the next event when suddenly another squadron’s aircraft starts nearby requiring you to don additional personal protective equipment (PPE). Now you have your cranial on, goggles down and strapped. Your coveralls are zipped up with sleeves down. It was already hot outside and with your PPE and the nearby aircraft, the temperature rises. These are the things ordnance technicians go through for hours on end during summer loading evolutions. Even though it might be a load out you’ve completed a hundred times before in cooler temperatures, this one is different. With the sun beating down on you all day, it becomes physically and mentally exhausting. However, you must still focus the same amount of energy toward these evolutions in high-temperature environments as in the cooler environments we work in.

A data pull in Risk Management Information showed the Navy and Marine Corps reported over 90 heat-related illnesses with service members from January 2020-March 2022. Now these are only the ones reported. We all know of those service members that try to tough it out when it comes to some illnesses or injuries even though they should not.

So what can ordnance technicians do to help prevent heat-related illnesses while they are performing ordnance handling evolutions? First, there is self-care. Ensure you are drinking plenty of water throughout the week, not just the day of the evolution. Eat a proper diet and don’t overindulge on alcohol. There are several articles on the correlation of heat exhaustion and proper diet, some recommend drinking half your body weight in ounces of water, eat leafy green vegetables and salty foods such as pretzels, etc. Also get plenty of rest, don’t stay up late at night binge watching a favorite show or trying to beat the next level on your video game. Wear gloves, sunscreen and tinted goggles during evolutions. Ensure you take a full water source with you.



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As leaders and quality assurance safety observers it's not only your responsibility to ensure the loading evolution is being performed safely and correctly but also to ensure your team's safety and well-being. Rotate personnel so they can get some rest in shade or a cool building; this includes your "bomb watch." If time permits and aircraft are ready, get with your officer in charge or operations division and discuss the possibility of loading aircraft earlier in the day before temperatures rise, or ideally, schedule these evolutions during periods of lower temperatures.

Heat-related illnesses include heat cramps, heat exhaustion, rhabdomyolysis, heat syncope and the most severe, heat stroke. It is crucial we take care of ourselves and watch out for each other while we are out on the flight line during these hotter months. For more information on the types of heat illnesses and their symptoms refer to [cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/heatreillness.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/heatreillness.html).

