

QA PRESENCE PROMOTES SAFETY-CONSCIOUS CULTURE

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In an effort to explain to a classroom full of junior Marines and Sailors what to expect from quality assurance (QA) upon reaching the fleet, a young motivated staff sergeant puts on the performance of a lifetime. He demonstrates a quality assurance representative (QAR) sprinting across the hangar deck, diving under aircraft, hurdling drop tanks, avoiding support equipment and arriving on the scene, bent over at the waist trying to catch his breath. Looking up at the maintainer on top of the aircraft he says, "Strap your cranial!" No, this was not me. But I will never forget how my "C" school instructor introduced the concept of QA to our class almost 20 years ago. He painted a picture that said QARs are the enforcers in the aviation maintenance world, and they are always there to ensure publications, policies and procedures are being adhered to. In order to take on this all-too-important and never-ending task, QA must make an effort to be present whenever and wherever maintenance evolutions take place.

No matter what type, model or series of aircraft you maintain, QA is undoubtedly making an impact on your unit's daily maintenance routine. The intensity of that impact will vary depending on how engaged they are with maintenance actions throughout each shift. QA's workload can fluctuate from day to day and it greatly depends on the maintenance department's workload. During work-ups, heavy operations cycles, and the months leading up to an inspection, there are often more tasks generated for QA due to the amount of flight hours or in-depth program monitoring. In general, routine items, such as audits and foreign object debris walk-downs, don't take up an enormous amount of time; however, but one of the routines that should always be considered is "touring the flight line." Throughout my career, I've seen this done any number of ways, to include a lack of it being done. A tour of the flight line can be conducted by any QAR and is not complicated, yet it is something that seemingly doesn't get done nearly as often as it should. If your unit is conducting aviation maintenance or flight operations, then a QAR should be on the flight line, ensuring the quality and safety of evolutions. The same holds to be true for maintenance in the hangar.

During my time at the Naval Safety Command, I've been a part of nearly 50 assessments, and from my observation, many squadrons can improve their efforts to maintain a consistent QA presence. In the last three years of assessments, 48 incidents were observed where publications were not present, 49 where there was an unidentified risk or hazard and 132 evolutions where there was NO supervisor present. That means if there had been a QAR on the flight line or hangar deck for these incidents, there is a good chance these violations would have been caught or prevented. When QA shows a consistent, engaged presence wherever maintenance evolutions are happening, the entire maintenance department shows a tendency to violate fewer policies and procedures. The engaged QAR presence creates a



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safety-conscious culture that has a high potential to prevent mishaps. Additionally, QARs hold a wealth of knowledge and are there to assist in any instance that could be considered questionable or misunderstood.

The Naval Aviation Maintenance Program (NAMP) 4790.2D states, “As often as possible, QA personnel will be ‘out and about’ monitoring ongoing maintenance for compliance with the NAMP, tech manual procedures, and safety precautions. QA’s involvement is a critical element of Operational Risk Management (ORM) and is especially important during high-tempo flight operations ashore and afloat.”

Scheduling a QA presence is the responsibility of the QA division and should be taken seriously. The method will depend on personnel availability, but it must be given a high priority. As a good, standard rule to support an engaged QA presence, typical squadrons should have a minimum of four QARs per primary production shift. This will allow one QAR to be on the flight line, one in the hangar, one the QA work center and one to tour work centers and conduct audits, monitors and spot checks. The QARs on the flight line and in the hangar are needed to ensure basic maintenance and safety compliance, provide oversight for higher-risks evolutions, assist in performing QA final personnel qualification walk-arounds and maintenance evolutions, and they can also conduct spot checks and monitors. These two QARs should be focused on ensuring safe and quality maintenance in the two areas where most work gets done and most mishaps occur. One QAR should be free to conduct audits, spot-check tool and pass-down logs and perform administrative work, such as logging audits, monitors and spot checks. The fourth QAR would primarily man the QA work center to assist with tests, help conduct research, help with discrepancy reports and maintain QA program binders. When deployed aboard the carrier, most air wing commanders require a maintenance quality and safety observer along with a flight deck/line coordinator and hangar deck chief to ensure safe and quality maintenance operations in the hangar, so why wouldn't we practice the same things ashore?

These duties can be daily or weekly assignments. The important part is that there are senior leaders assigned the task of oversight who maintain both a detail-oriented and a big picture view of maintenance operations. Collateral duty QARs and collateral duty inspectors must also maintain a risk-based perspective, but they are typically focused on the tasks at hand, which includes getting inspections, troubleshooting and discrepancies signed off. Therefore, the overall safety and reliability of day-to-day, shift-to-shift aircraft maintenance support primarily falls on the QA work center, and that is why QA is separate from the production work centers.

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Another element to keep in mind is QA is an all-hands responsibility, according to the NAMP. Leaders at every level are “equally responsible for maintenance quality within their areas of responsibility.” If there aren’t enough QARs to cover these areas at any given time, there is no policy stating a senior leader from another work center cannot be a safety observer. However, the responsibility still lies with QA to ensure their presence is consistent and effective.

What do you do to create a safety-conscious culture in your maintenance department?