Aircraft Jacking Hazards: The Risks of Using Aircraft Jacks Beyond Inspection Dates



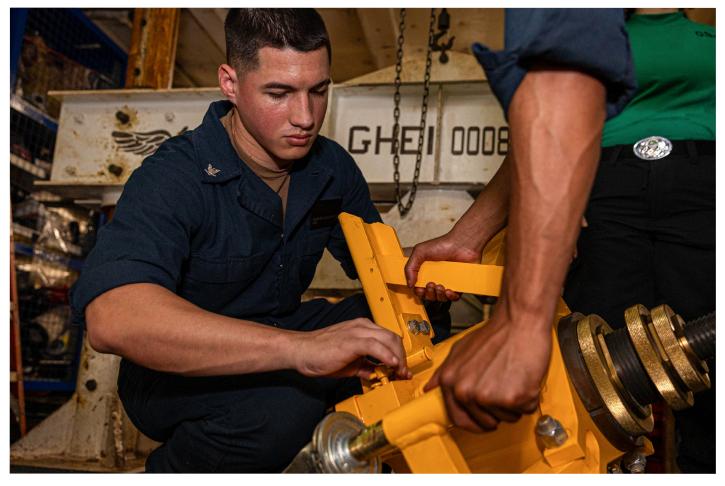
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AIRCRAFT JACKING HAZARDS



A concerning trend has been observed across Navy and Marine Corps units: the use of aircraft jacks beyond their inspection dates. While it may appear harmless, neglecting inspections introduces significant and immediate safety risks. In military aviation, safety and readiness are inseparable. From routine tire changes to major gear overhauls, specialized tools are essential for lifting and securing aircraft safely. Among the most critical yet often overlooked pieces of equipment on the flight line is the aircraft jack. Tripod jacks, axle jacks and multi-stage jacks all play vital roles in maintenance operations.

The Role of Aircraft Jacks in Military Aviation

Aircraft jacks are engineered to support substantial weight under rigorous conditions. Multistage jacks rely on multiple hydraulic pistons to achieve powerful, extended lifts. Tripod jacks provide stability during landing gear or tail maintenance. Axle jacks raise aircraft by the landing gear for tasks such as tire or brake replacement. Regardless of type, the purpose remains the same: to lift and secure the aircraft so maintenance can be performed safely. Given the demanding conditions aircraft face, these jacks must be properly rated, well-maintained and routinely inspected to ensure their structural and operational integrity.

Inspection Protocols and Standards

Inspections of aircraft jacks are not optional. They are mandatory and governed by manufacturer specifications and Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) technical publications. These inspections check for hydraulic fluid levels, corrosion, leaks, structural degradation and functionality of key components such as pistons and valves. Each inspection confirms a jack can safely carry the required load. Missing an inspection introduces the risk of failure, potentially endangering both personnel and equipment.

Hazards of Using Aircraft Jacks Beyond Inspection Dates

Continuing to use an uncertified jack may seem expedient, but the associated hazards are serious:

• Structural Failure: Prolonged use without inspection may allow cracks, weakened welds, or metal fatigue to go unnoticed. These flaws can lead to collapse under load, risking aircraft damage and injury to personnel.

• Hydraulic System Failure: Hydraulic seals and fluids degrade over time, particularly under exposure to temperature fluctuations and moisture. Failing to maintain or inspect these components can cause pressure loss and sudden jack failure.

• Incorrect Load Handling: Over time, jacks may lose their rated load-bearing capacity. Without regular inspections, this loss goes undetected, increasing the risk of overloading and catastrophic failure.

• Environmental Impact: Aircraft jacks exposed to salt air or high humidity corrode more rapidly. Improper storage, such as leaving jacks outside or uncovered, exacerbates deterioration. These effects are difficult to identify without routine inspection.

• Safety of Ground Personnel: This is the most critical concern. Jack failure can result in severe injuries or fatalities. A collapse endangers every crew member working around or beneath the aircraft.

Adhering to Maintenance Protocols

Risk can be minimized through disciplined adherence to established procedures:

• Conduct Timely Inspections: Perform inspections at the required intervals and document them accurately. Never assume a jack is serviceable without confirmation.

• Immediately Remove Defective Jacks: Remove any jack from service that fails inspection or shows signs of damage. Do not attempt unauthorized field repairs; return the jack to the designated repair authority.

• Ensure Ground Crew Training: Personnel should understand jack operation, load limitations and know the warning signs of mechanical failure. Routine training and safety drills reinforce these practices.

• Properly Store and Maintain: Protect jacks from environmental exposure. Store them indoors whenever possible, cover hydraulic fittings and maintain cleanliness to extend service life and reliability.

Why Inspections Matter

Aircraft jacks may not be high-profile tools, but they are essential to the safe execution of flight line operations. Overlooking an inspection or using a compromised jack can turn a routine task into a life-threatening incident. Every skipped inspection introduces unnecessary risk. As aviation professionals, our responsibility is to follow procedures, protect lives and uphold mission readiness. If a jack is overdue for inspection, it must not be used. No exceptions.

Before using any aircraft jack, confirm it is inspected, certified and safe. If you cannot answer with confidence, stop the job and seek clarification. For platform-specific guidance, consult the appropriate maintenance publications and NAVAIR technical manuals.

Cover: Aviation Support Equipment Technician 3rd Class Christopher Zeruto, assigned to USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), watches for movement of a hydraulic aircraft jack to see if extra weight needs to be applied during a maintenance check while underway March 14, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joseph T. Miller)

Facing page: A U.S. Navy aviation support equipment technician inspects a jack aboard USS Harry S Truman (CVN 75) in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility April 1, 2025. (Official U.S. Navy photo)