

What to Expect During a Pierside Ordnance Transfer Evolution



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PIERSIDE ORDNANCE

On a seasonably warm January day, I observed ordnance transfer operations between USS Porter (DDG 78) and Navy Munitions Command (NMC) Det. Sewell's Point. I was accompanied by Dewey Smith, the safety loading officer for the day's event, who went over the schedule with me as we walked the pier to assess for hazards, clear paths of travel for trucks, forklifts and cranes, and conducted a general safety check of the area. While assessing the site, we made a stop to talk to personnel at the external control point to go over the schedule, authorized personnel, activities and the like before checking in with personnel from the ship, crane crew and NMC to ensure everyone was ready.

The ship had arrived earlier that morning, so external power issues must be addressed before any other preparations could begin onboard. While we waited, Dewey told me the ship's personnel reviewed the plan during a previous planning conference. The planning conference was held to ensure paperwork accurately reflected ordnance on-load or off-load, and special equipment, trucks, containers and personnel required for the evolution. Since there is always construction in the area, adjacent piers and ships were also notified to ensure everyone was aware of the day's events.

Once shore power was confirmed, we commenced a safety brief with the crane supervisor, who explained responsibilities, crane safety limits, how to stop the evolution and who could start it back up. NMC answered questions and confirmed the availability of trucks and forklifts. Dewey laid out the rules for a safe evolution including no hot work during the evolution, no visitors to the ship and the importance of keeping personnel out of the handling area. The safety briefing ended by confirming that the Bravo flag was raised, two fire parties were manned onboard with hoses flaked out and the ship's commanding officer was ready to handle ordnance.

Like a well-oiled machine, personnel from three separate organizations assumed their roles, keeping safety at the forefront. I always observed forklifts with directors and safety observers moving missile containers with precision. Some personnel kept the area free of Sailors and contractors who wanted to access the ship. The crane operator repeatedly placed large missile containers where they needed to be for maintenance, loading or transfer. The drivers from NMC drove tractor-trailers, flatbeds and forklifts around a small area that most would find difficult; however, they made the complex evolution look easy because they used spotters, removed all possible obstacles and took their time.

I would have to say, at the end of the day, the teamwork I witnessed during the pierside ordnance evolution was as good as it gets. I saw a team that effectively used plan, brief, execute and debrief, adapted to challenges and a changing schedule, but still took the time to do things correctly together.

Now, this was an example of a great evolution, but many things can go wrong during these highly sensitive events. This example was a great evolution because of proper planning, experience and everyone being on the same page. Knowing what to expect is important because sometimes the entire crew doesn't always get the word, or someone may be walking into a situation where an ordnance transfer evolution is happening.

The following are a few essential points people around an ordnance evolution need to know to be safe.

PIERSIDE ORDNANCE

Bravo flag: When a ship is flying the bright red bravo flag pierside, they are engaging in transferring dangerous goods, also known as ordnance. People near a ship flying the bravo flag should immediately pay attention to all cranes, forklifts, trucks, pallet jacks and munitions in the area.

Trucks with Explosive-laden vehicles: These trucks will have an orange diamond with a corresponding hazard class number. Just know that it involves a fire or explosive hazard and people who are not part of the evolution shouldn't be in the area.

Cranes: When crane operations commence, personnel must stay clear of the area. This practice is especially true with ordnance items that can present an additional danger if dropped. Never under any circumstances should anyone be underneath a suspended load.

Forklifts: These can be extremely dangerous because the operator can't always see what is in front of them. It's common for numerous forklifts to operate simultaneously during an ordnance transfer evolution, so it's imperative to stay out of the handling area if there isn't a reason to be there. Having to stop a forklift abruptly can cause heavy loads to slide off the forks, resulting in severe damage, catastrophic injury and even death. There is never a good reason to traverse a pier with headphones on, earbuds in or with anything obstructing vision. These practices have proven deadly in the past.

Everyone must know what's happening during these evolutions to make them successful and keep personnel safe. All personnel **MUST** review this information, and evolution leaders **MUST** ensure everyone is on the same page and working as a well-oiled machine. All hands involved must also look out for anyone unaware of what's happening during an ordnance transfer evolution and ensure personnel are kept out of possible harm's way.



Cover: Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Apprentice Luke Klering directs a forklift during an ammunition transfer pierside of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) Jan. 11, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jacqueline Orender)