

Importance of the Aviation Safety Specialist



Aviation Safety Blog
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AVIATION SAFETY SPECIALIST

Who is the Enlisted Aviation Safety Specialist (AVSS)?

Most people still label this person as the command “Safety Petty Officer” or “Safety Representative.” The AVSS manages quite a few on- and off-duty safety-related programs in the command while working alongside the Safety Officer (SO), the Aviation Safety Officer (ASO) and Ground Safety Officer (GSO).

In the helicopter community, Naval Safety Command (NAVSAFECOM) assessment team members have seen the AVSS work directly under the Safety Department. In contrast, in the fixed-wing community, the AVSS works in Quality Assurance (QA) under the maintenance department while collaborating with the SO, ASO and GSO.

The AVSS role is significant to the aviation Safety Management System (SMS). As noted in the Naval Aviation Safety Management System instruction (OPNAVINST 3750.6S), the AVSS is responsible for:

- Assessing risks
- Training work center personnel in mishap prevention
- Maintaining records of the use, storage, labeling and disposal of hazardous material
- Monitoring surveillance programs applicable to hearing and sight conservation and respiratory protection
- Teaching new personnel about specific safety hazards
- Identifying and properly marking all hazard areas
- Overseeing the selection, care and use of personal protective equipment
- Ensuring machine guards are in place and safety precautions posted
- Investigating and maintaining records of all injuries and mishaps
- Investigating in-house reports of hazards
- Evaluating safety and occupational health performance
- Coordinating programs, such as private and government motor vehicle, recreation and off-duty safety
- Representing the command at the base and ship safety meetings

If we were to take a quick dive into the Naval Aviation Maintenance Program (NAMP), COMNAVAIRFORINST 4790.2D, Chapter 10 Section 41, we would see a lot of similarities between the AVSS and the Quality Assurance Supervisor (QAS) roles. Maintenance officers are required to designate the QAS as the Maintenance Department safety program manager. Why do we bring up this critical requirement?

Would the Maintenance Officer designate just anyone in the command (inexperienced, limited duty, unqualified or just not fit for the role) as the QAS? The answer is no. Why is this a trend for the AVSS? While conducting local area assessments (LAA) in multiple fleet concentration areas, NAVSAFECOM assessment team members have seen a trend in personnel who have been designated as the AVSS. Due to manpower issues or high operations tempo, commands are filling this position with what they have on hand versus the proper fit/fill. As a result, the AVSS billet takes a backseat to operations and maintenance. The indicators we see on assessments are failing programs, command safety program instructions not up-to-date, the Enlisted Safety Committee (ESC) meetings not happening and/or no buy-in from all of the work centers, lack of program management or commitment, inconsistent safety enforcement (SO, ASO, GSO or AVSS not on the flight line/flight deck observing flight ops), nonexistent or

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Aviation Support Equipment Technician 2nd Class Issac Contreas, and Aviation Support Equipment Technician 2nd Class Juan Vaulkens, both assigned to USS Gerald R. Ford's (CVN 78) aircraft intermediate maintenance department, perform routine maintenance on a static frequency converter, Oct. 11, 2022. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Grant Gorzocoski)

inadequate personnel safety training, and the lack of a “safety” culture are some examples.

A best practice NAVSAFECOM recommends is for a command to have a fully qualified and experienced maintenance-rated Sailor designated as the AVSS. This arrangement systematically makes sense and fulfills the four pillars of our aviation SMS (safety policy, safety risk management, safety assurance and safety promotion).

Most unit manning documents identify an E-6 maintenance-rated Sailor for this billet with the Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC) code of 825A. The AVSS must attend the resident or global online Aviation Safety Specialist course and complete NAVEDTRA 43460-4D Personnel Qualification Standard (PQS) before receiving the 825A NEC. Units who have a QAS educated in the instructions referenced in the NAMP Chapter 10 Section 41 and who is engaged in supporting an effective SMS as well as safety and quality assurance working closely together, tend to be the best units we assess.

In keeping with the Chief of Naval Operations' “Get Real, Get Better” initiative, commands cannot be content with the status quo they are given. Assigning the right personnel and maintaining program management compliance ensures safety is at the forefront of what we own as leaders and stakeholders in naval aviation. Ensuring an effective safety culture is not achieved through quarterly safety stand-downs, a poster or two affixed to a work center wall or a forgettable CO's safety statement that few personnel in the command are even aware of. Instead, an effective safety culture is born and sustained by people who are educated in and support all four pillars of the SMS daily.

Promote safety across the fleet by sending photos of Safety Officers, Ground Safety Officers, and Enlisted Aviation Safety Specialists in action! Email your photos to safe-pao@navy.mil.



Cover: Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) 2nd Class Lacarsha Mitchell, assigned to USS Gerald R. Ford's (CVN 78) air department, signals safe to launch for an E/A-18G Growler, attached to the “Gray Wolves” of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 142, on the flight deck, Oct. 11, 2022. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Grant Gorzocoski)