

Complacency & the Importance of Checklists



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Complacency can easily set in when tasks become repetitive. Our work relies on strict adherence to established policies and procedures to ensure the safety and proper functioning of our systems. However, the monotony of repetitive tasks can tempt even the best-intentioned maintainers to cut corners, which underscores the need for the mantra of “back to the basics” of safety.

Let’s take a general example: A squadron was preparing for inspection by practicing loading two types of inert-guided weapons. During one exercise, the team failed to properly configure the suspension equipment during the downloading process. As a result, the weapon fell on the flight line, causing thousands of dollars in damage. Fortunately, there were no injuries.

In another instance, the team leader manually released a guided weapon, a task outside of his responsibilities. His role was to lead the evolution, not to participate in it. Again, the weapon fell, resulting in significant damage similar to the first incident.

Both events shared one key factor: failure to use a checklist. Had the team followed a checklist, remained in their assigned roles and verified each step, these accidents could have been prevented. When Sailors and Marines become overconfident, thinking they’ve performed a task so many times a checklist is unnecessary, they set themselves up for failure.

Arming and de-arming aircraft, loading weapons and performing release and control checks all require checklists for a reason.

A Hard Lesson Learned

Nearly 20 years ago, an issue arose aboard an amphibious assault ship when guided weapons failed to detonate after being dropped from AV-8B Harrier II aircraft at an undisclosed



Engineman 1st Class Michael Martinez, assigned to USS Paul Ignatius (DDG 117), fills out an engineering checklist as Senior Chief Gas Turbine Systems Technician Jan Esequie watches during an Engineering Training Team drill, Sept. 13, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Zac Shea)

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location. To prevent these weapons from becoming improvised explosive devices, Explosive Ordnance Disposal had to conduct high-risk detonations. This situation required an immediate investigation.

The Aviation Combat Element (ACE) gunner and Ordnance Handling Officer (OHO) decided to trace the steps of the entire process — from weapon assembly to loading — to identify any potential mistakes.

They observed the assembly crew using the correct manuals, tools and components. Then, they followed the weapons to the flight deck to monitor the loading process where it was revealed the arming wires were being routed incorrectly because no one was using a checklist.

Thankfully, the OHO and ACE gunner were immediately able to address the issue. From that point forward, every guided weapon functioned as intended. Subsequently, every time the OHO stepped onto the flight deck thereafter, the crew greeted him with a checklist in hand.

The Bottom Line

Checklists exist for one critical reason: to ensure systems and processes are executed correctly. Ignoring them can result in reliability issues, catastrophic safety failures and potentially deadly consequences. These failures can lead to serious injury, loss of life or significant damage to aircraft, ships and other structures. Additionally, it's vital checklists are regularly reviewed and verified to ensure they remain current and applicable.

For a list of up-to-date NAVAIR checklists, visit <https://mynatec.navair.navy.mil>.

Safety: Key component in Air Boss' 2025 plan

In the Naval Aviation 2025 communication playbook, Air Boss highlights several key areas of focus: Professionalism, Combat Readiness, Safety and Stewardship. From the Safety pillar perspective, this publication supports the core principle that, "Our professional safety culture is a fleet fundamental that must be ingrained and fostered through professional behavior at all ranks and disciplined leadership by example."

This year marks the Navy's 250th anniversary of protecting our nation's borders and interests. Our naval organization is always looking to not only learn from our mistakes, but continually improve on how we accomplish the mission - while reducing the number of mishaps to keep our warfighters in the fight.

Cover: Marines assigned to the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) adjust loading adapters to a joint standoff weapon on an AV-8B Harrier aircraft, attached to Marine Medium Tilt Rotor Squadron 162, aboard the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5) in the Arabian Gulf, Oct. 8, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Danilo Reynoso)