

MATERIAL HANDLING EQUIPMENT



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Material Handling Equipment (MHE) is a leading cause of afloat Class Charlie and Delta mishaps due to equipment damage and personnel injury, particularly during pierside availabilities and supply replenishments.

During fleet local area assessments, Naval Safety Command (NAVSAFECOM) continues to witness Sailors, Marines and civilians operating MHE unsafely. In October 2020 on Naval Station Norfolk, a U.S. Navy Chief was struck and killed by a forklift operating on the pier. In October 2022 on Naval Station Norfolk, pier operations were halted due to multiple equipment operators driving at excessive speed, without a safety observer and without proper qualifications. Similar unsafe operations were observed on piers in Mayport, Florida, Everett/Bremerton, Washington, and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Reference(s):

- a. OPNAVINST 5100.19F, Section C, Ch. 2 Navy Safety and Occupational Health Program Manual Forces Afloat
- b. OPNAV M-5100.23
- c. NAVSUP PUBLICATION 538
- d. Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHA) 1910.178, Powered Industrial Trucks

MHE licensing, operation requirements and guidance are clearly spelled out in references (a) thru (d). Common to all units are standardized procedures for safe operation and a crew who actively and vigorously monitors and fixes their program. During NAVSAFECOM assessments, we routinely observe non-compliance with shipboard forklift, pallet trucks, JLG and crane operations. The discrepancies include the lack of safety observers during operations, operator and crew errors to include speed, clearance and safety calls, maintenance checks of equipment before and after operation, and lack of training and qualifications for operators and safety observers. Each of these non-compliances unnecessarily adds to our risk, and yet each of them is well within the submarines'/ships' capability to self-assess and self-correct.

Recommendations:

The best way to avert a material handling equipment mishap is to have an aggressive and proactive program, which goes beyond just the handling/operating crew. Material handling is an all-hands effort, all of the time.

1. Develop a licensing and reoccurring training program to ensure conformance.
2. While operating MHE, ensure operators, safety observers, riggers, handlers and personnel are monitoring and periodically assessing the area, load and speed of equipment involved onboard your ship and pier.
3. Use required safety observers, as the lack of these key personnel is the top cause of shipboard material handling equipment mishaps. Safety observers must use visual and audible communication while covering all blind spots. This action alone, can reduce MHE mishaps.



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