



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



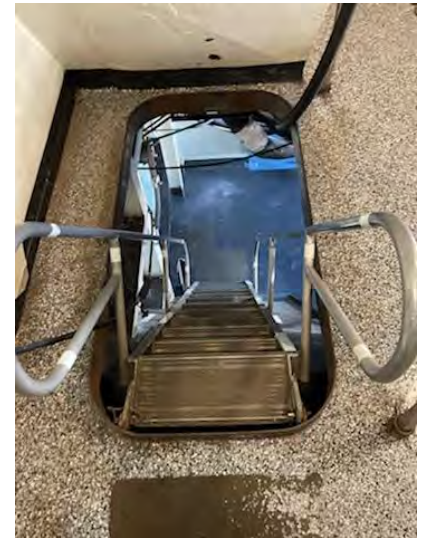
SA 24-26

Shipboard Ladder Mishaps V

“Don’t fear the fall; fear the sudden stop at the end.”

The Safety Command is disappointed that we have to write this fifth edition, but we have to accept reality. While looking through archived safety articles for perspective, we found a Fathom magazine article from 1972 on—you’ll never guess—shipboard ladders. Their design is practical and essential on our naval vessels, but the hazards are real (*and pretty much unchanged in more than 100 years*). Based on our unofficial divisional count, for yet another year, we had around 325 reported mishaps from Sailors, Marines, and civilians on shipboard ladders. That’s about the average every year. Historical stats hold true that these ladder mishaps lead to more lost workdays each year than any other type of afloat mishap.

To help you avoid pain and to keep our trained warfighters on the job, we want to help you NOT be one of the ladder injuries this coming year. Please read and remember these true stories as you go up, down, and around ladderwells. A little healthy fear can be good for you.



- Watch That First Step. It’s a Doozy. A Sailor was walking down the ladderwell “when they missed the first step and fell to the bottom.” The Sailor landed on their upper back and suffered a back contusion. —*That’s a long way to fall. Please have a solid hold of the handrails.*
- The Last Step Can Hurt Too. A Sailor was leaving the main machinery room. Upon approaching the top of a ladder, he missed a step and fell onto the knife edge of the hatch. The report says he “felt a weird snap and sharp pain” in his arm. The weird snap was his ulna breaking (*Ouch!*). The next day, the ship medevaced him. He received 30 days sick in quarters. —*Please use the available hand-holds and watch where you’re stepping.*
- Handrails Anyone? A Sailor was walking up a ladder, when he missed a step, “falling face first onto the ladderwell.” As you might expect, he “experienced some facial lacerations.” —*If your hands are on the handrails, it’s nearly impossible to fall face-first onto the steps. Are you sensing a theme here? This isn’t soccer. You can (and should) use your hands.*
- Too Painful For Comment. A Sailor slipped while descending a ladderwell. During his uncontrolled fall, his legs somehow straddled the handrail vertical post. The holding pin for the handrail struck and caused a laceration to a place he would have preferred to not have lacerated. —*Unimaginable pain. Unspecified number of lost workdays. Embarrassing story. We’ve read three similar mishaps in the past few years. You definitely don’t want to be the next one. Three points of contact, please.*
- This Is Why We Hold On. According to the report, a Sailor was descending a ladderwell “using a three-point stance” (*that means both hands and at least one foot are on the ladder at any time*). Even so, because the ladder rails and steps were slick, he slipped and slid down the ladder, landing on the next level. —*Well done for using three points of contact! He couldn’t stop his slide down, but he was able to control his fall and ended up with only a bruised hand. Without three points of contact, it could’ve been much worse (as you will see in other examples).*
- Was It Expensive Coffee? A Sailor was descending a ship’s ladder with his coffee cup in hand. He missed the third step from the top and fell approximately five feet to the deck (*the report doesn’t mention whether he spilled his coffee or not*). Two bystanders rendered aid and delivered him to ship’s medical. He earned a lateral ankle sprain and 14 days of light duty. —*The report sums things up nicely: “[He] failed to*

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properly assess the risk of carrying an item down the ladder...SVM lacked full use of one hand while carrying a coffee mug and did not take time to correct his speed and/or control [his] descent...to minimize risk of a fall." We hope the coffee was good – but we doubt it was that good.

- What's Worse Than the "Glass Ceiling"? A Sailor "was rushing up a ladderwell." His hurry came to a sudden stop when he got to the top of the ladder and bashed his head on the closed hatch. "How hard," you ask? Enough to require trip to the emergency room and six stitches. The report says he "was unaware that the hatch was in the modified material condition ZEBRA for a drill." —*The steel ceiling hurts. Please look where you are going before you get there. Eyes front, please. Eyes front.*

- Trash Will Get You, Coming or Going.

In one instance, a Sailor was going down a ladderwell "carrying trash with both hands" (SMH). The trash bag blocked his vision, and with two hands for the trash, he had none for the handrails. With no vision, he missed a step, and with no hand holds, he fell...injuring his wrist when he landed. On a different ship in a different event, a Sailor was coming up a ladderwell with a trash bag in hand. The trash bag was so heavy and large that it was stretching as he went, so as he ascended, he caught one foot on the bag and fell backwards down the ladderwell (Ouch!). —*We'll borrow the words from one of the two reports: The service*



member was "overconfident in their ability to transit the ladder; a task they perform at least ten times each day. Service member is now aware of the hazards associated with being complacent with tasks. Even simple ones." Please make yourself aware by reading and remembering. As we've said before, it's better to read and learn than bleed and learn.

Key Takeaways

Remember these real-life lessons and takeaways:

- 1. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.** Rushing may feel faster, but falling or smashing your head will slow you down way more than walking. Just like you learned in school fire drills, "Walk, don't run."
- 2. Two slow trips on the ladders are better than one fast trip to medical.** If there's too much to carry and hold the rail at the same time, make another trip or get help. Supervisors, do some of that supervisor stuff to help a Sailor or Marine stay out of medical.
- 3. This isn't soccer. Use your hands.** If there are handrails on the ladder, use them. They're there for more than decoration. It'll save you from a list of injuries and it'll save your ship or squadron a lot of lost workdays.

We say this every time, but it's not a tagline; it's really what we want you to do:

"Let's be careful out there."