



# THIS DAY IN NAVAL SAFETY HISTORY

MARCH 3, 2015

## USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44) FIRE ESTIMATED \$26 MILLION IN DAMAGES

**EVENT:** While in a maintenance availability at NASSCO/Earl Industries shipyard in Portsmouth, Virginia, a fire occurred at approximately 2 p.m. causing damage of approximately \$26 million.

The ship was at approximately 25 percent into a CNO-maintenance availability, and while a contractor was performing plasma-cutting operations to create a hole in the deck, a Class Alpha fire broke out involving ship's material left stored in an adjacent space. Prior to the plasma cutting beginning, ship fitters determined that structural interferences necessitated moving the location of the hole. Although the fitters notified the shipyard structural supervisor of the change, the supervisor did not prepare a hot work permit for the new spaces affected by the new location. Instead, workers posted a previously approved hot work permit for grinding only. Fitters began the unauthorized plasma cutting operations after ineffectively covering combustible material stored in the space. Shortly thereafter, the space filled with smoke to the point that workers could no longer see and the on-scene fire watch was unable to signal the fitter to stop.

A nearby project manager noticed the smoke and physically removed the fire watch, reentered the space and attempted to extinguish the fire with a CO2 bottle.



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The project manager then notified nearby crewmembers of the fire. The crew responded while all contractors evacuated the ship.

The fire began in a second deck storeroom at about 2 p.m. EST and was initially determined to be a Class Alpha fire — or a fire fueled by common materials like paper, wood or trash — and was fought mainly with water. The ship's in-port emergency fire team responded to the initial report and the Portsmouth Fire Department was notified and responded with multiple units. The fire spread to another adjacent space, causing a rupture of hydraulic piping and a Class Bravo fire, which also involved additional combustible material in the area. The fire spread aft into a passageway before the ship's force and the Portsmouth, Va. City Fire and Rescue personnel contained and extinguished the fire. The Sailors and Portsmouth Fire Department declared the fire out at approximately 5:25 p.m.

**LESSONS LEARNED/PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS:** Most significant causal factors included gross violations of hot work requirements to include no process for ship's force verification of hot work requests as required by NAVSEA Technical Publication Manual 8010 and failure to properly execute fire watch procedures.

Since the incident the following preventative changes have been implemented in the naval enterprise: 1) Mishap generated more stringent requirements for the Chapter 12 Fire Drills particularly for coordination between ship and civilian firefighters; 2) Quick Disconnect requirements were better defined to ensure the integrity of primary fire boundaries were better maintained; 3) Fire Safety Officer Responsibilities were clarified to better ensure proper fire safety oversight; and 4) Hotwork MOA requirements established to address RMC/ship's force roles in hot work verification and surveillance processes.