



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED



LL 22-02

### OFFICE SPACE MISHAPS II

**"Working safely may get old, but so do those who practice it."  
—Anonymous**

It is widely understood (*by most of us*) that safety hazards exist while living and working in and around machinery, ships, aircraft, weapons, tactical vehicles, and (*insert your operational environment here*), but what about the office? Working at a desk in a climate-controlled space is less dangerous, but it is not hazard-free. In 2019 we published our first edition of office space mishaps, LL 19-14, and a quick look in our database showed that our warriors are still hurting themselves when in the "safety" of their offices.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the top three causes of office injuries are: overexertion; slips, trips and falls; and contact with objects (*running into stuff*). As you'll read here, the naval services align with that assessment. We found more than 200 office mishaps to choose from over the last two years, but in the interest of brevity, here are just a few examples and some key takeaways to inspire the inner safety officer in you.



***An office mishap waiting to happen...***

- **Four Wheelin'**. A Sailor was in their office and "tried to sit in a five-wheel chair." During the attempted sitting, one of the wheels broke off, sending the Sailor to the floor, injuring their shoulder and elbow. — *With their arm in a sling for 48 hours and five days on light duty, this Sailor learned the painful way to make sure their office equipment was in good working order.*
- **"I Believe You Have My Stapler."** – *Milton, Office Space*. A Sailor was using a stapler to connect several sheets of paper. The report says while the Sailor was "rushing through their task, they were not paying attention to where their hand was." Then (*you guessed it*), they stapled their thumb. Making the situation worse, the Sailor "yanked their hand out from under the stapler," causing the staple to rip out of their thumb, leaving a one-inch cut. Fortunately for this admin warrior, stitches were not required and they were back to collating with no lost workdays. — *Oh, the painful irony if the Sailor required staples to close the wound. Relax, slow down, focus.*
- **In Through The Out Door**. A Marine was about to open the door to the hallway of his building when a junior Marine walked up to the door from the other side and kicked the door open. The door hit the first (*and more senior*) Marine's face hard enough to cause a laceration to his forehead and a minor concussion. — *We may never know the fate of that junior Marine door-kicker, but it's safe to assume he won't be kicking in office doors in the future. Please save the door kicking for tactical entry.*
- **"Head" Injury**. A civilian employee was in a restroom stall, when they bent over to pick up a piece of paper. Upon standing up, they struck their head on a protruding broken metal coat hook (*Ouch!*). The resulting laceration required two staples to close (*Yikes!*). — *Knocking your head on a coat hook certainly hurts, but the sharp edges of a broken one will ruin your day even more. This mishap is another case for finding and fixing hazards in your workspace. Look for hazards and get them fixed.*

- **“All Back!”** A Sailor was leaning backward on the “aft” two legs of a standard four-legged chair (*this report was clearly written by a salty Sailor, but we digress*). We’re not going to assume he was catching a quick “z” or two, but at some point, he was “startled by another Sailor entering the office.” He lost his balance, fell backward, and hit his head, causing a one-inch laceration. The Sailor was escorted to ship’s medical, where he received five staples (*yeesh, more staples!*). — *Please keep all four chair legs on the floor.*
- **It takes a Village.** A group of civilian employees was moving a four-drawer filing cabinet to “a couple different spots in the room to find the best location.” The team used a hand truck to move the cabinet around, but once it was in the “perfect spot,” they noticed that it was not sitting straight against the wall. Enter the soloist. Our “I got this” employee opened a drawer, grabbed it with both hands, crouched down, and began to slide the cabinet sideways to straighten it against the wall. Then came the ankle pain. He “hobbled over to a chair” nearby but didn’t think he needed medical attention. When the pain persisted into the following day, the employee revised his self-diagnosis and went to the hospital. They diagnosed him with a strained ankle and placed him on four days light duty. — *If you’re hobbling after an injury, you should probably seek medical help. Use two people to lift the heavy stuff.*
- **“Pesky” Safety Features.** This mishap takes place on a ship, but involves a common piece of office equipment, a shredder. The hinges on this shredder were broken off, preventing the door from securely closing. A safety interlock attached to the inside of the door prevented the shredder from operating when the door was open, so in order to use the shredder, the ship’s force would override the interlock by inserting a folded paper wedge into the mechanism (*the risk management alarms should be deafening right about now...and it gets worse!*). At some point during a Sailor’s shredding session (*the paper kind, not guitar*), the shredder jammed, and he attempted to clear it by reaching inside to free the paper (*oh, it gets worse yet!*). The Sailor energized the safety-bypassed shredder in an attempt to assist in clearing the jam. However, it was set for the reverse direction, catching two of his fingers in the blades. He immediately pulled his hand out, but all too late. The Sailor was evacuated to a shore hospital where the two fingers were amputated to the first knuckle due to severe damage. — *We’re practically speechless. Leaders, don’t put your teams in a position to require skirting safety mechanisms. Teams, report deficiencies to your chain of command.*

### Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

As this lesson learned shows, hazards exist even in the most seemingly benign environments, and our workstation warriors are not immune to mishaps. Just as in the field and at sea, we must all keep our figurative “safety hat” on, be mindful of the risks around us, and report safety deficiencies up the chain of command. All the mishaps described here were preventable. Here are a few tips to help make your workplace safer:

1. **Relax and slow down.** Rushing your movement at whatever physical task you’re involved in will only take more time in the end; especially when you factor in a trip to the emergency room.
2. **Risk management isn’t just for the operators.** Risk doesn’t discriminate. It exists nearly everywhere. Maintaining a culture of safety in every work environment is a great way to reduce risk and prevent avoidable mishaps. Consider risks if you’re doing a self-help project like moving around furniture, painting, putting up shelves, etc.
3. **How’s your safety program?** If you had to think about that question for a minute, you might need to ask about it. Workplace safety involves everyone, and part of a solid program is to have safety inspections and assessments. They will assist you in identifying hazards like the broken coat hook, chair, and faulty shredder mentioned in our examples. See your respective Navy and Marine Corps Safety and Occupational Health Program manuals (OPNAVINST 5100.23 and NAVMC 5100.8) for requirements for formal safety inspections and annual self-assessments.

*And remember, “Let’s be careful out there.”*