



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-05

PPE Related Mishaps

As the Naval Safety Command continues to perform local area assessments, we are noticing an alarming number discrepancies in personal protective equipment (PPE) and the ineffectiveness of commands enforcing PPE standards. The military services are exposed to specific hazards the civilian workforce may not often encounter. If a hazard cannot be eliminated, we create a means of mitigating that hazard, often through the use of PPE. The following cases illustrate the importance of PPE and the potential consequences of not using it correctly or at all.



- You can't help if you can't breathe. During a general quarters drill on the ship, a Sailor did not don their Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) properly. The object of the drill was to don a firefighting suit (*correctly*) and go "on air" wearing an SCBA. During the drill, another Sailor noticed their shipmate was having trouble breathing and appeared to be having a panic attack. After removing the troubled Sailor's facemask, they found he had flash gear over his face. For those not familiar with firefighting PPE, having flash gear over your mouth while wearing the SCBA will block your breathing. Adding to his woes, the Sailor neglected to turn the SCBA's air valve on — which is essential if going "on air" is a goal of the exercise. This Sailor can't assume all the blame, though, as this was their first time donning the firefighting suit, he had not been effectively trained and no one checked him. — *As leaders, we must ensure our crews completely understand their equipment. Had this incident occurred during an actual fire, this crew would have had an incapacitated Sailor and a fire.*
- Even the most mundane of tasks. During chipping paint, a paint chip fell into a petty officer's eye (*if only there were some type of ocular shield device to keep errant debris from getting into one's eye... we could call it eye-protection, or eye-pro for short*). The petty officer attempted to wash the paint debris from his eye at the sink but unknowingly missed some. The next day his eye became irritated, but it was the weekend, so he waited an additional two days to see a corpsman who took the Sailor to optometry to remove additional small paint chips. — There are two lessons here; 1) Don't get complacent when performing mundane work like chipping paint, and 2) Don't wait to seek medical treatment. *This mishap was easily preventable if Sailors and their supervisors enforced the use of protective eyewear.*
- If Only He Were Wearing Gloves. A motor transportation Marine was using a hammer to remove a pin from the hook arm of a logistics vehicle. They missed the pin, though, and smashed their finger instead. A fellow Marine jumped down from the vehicle to assess the injured Marine and told him to sit on the flat rack. The injured Marine must have had an aversion to blood because he then passed out in a Larry, Moe, and Curly-esk moment, hit his head on the flat rack, rolled onto the ground, and hit the back of his head on the ground. The Marine was taken to the hospital for a concussion assessment and was released the same day. The report stated if he had been wearing gloves, he would have avoided injuring his finger to the degree he did. — *It is all too easy to neglect PPE when doing routine tasks like this, but we must police each other and ourselves.*
- Listen To The Instructors. During the leadership exercise course at Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, a candidate was given a problem involving lifting a 14-foot metal pole onto a higher platform. He was instructed to wear gloves but claimed the pressure of completing the task caused him to forget to put them on. When the candidates began lifting the pole, the evaluator looked up from his notes and noticed the candidate's gloves were tucked in his load-bearing vest. The evaluator was about to stop the exercise to correct the situation when the pole slipped in the candidate's grip. He tried to catch it and got his finger pinched between the pole and the platform, resulting in a partially de-gloved middle finger. — *Take the time to ensure your personnel are adequately prepared for the task and monitor them throughout.*

* Local Area Assessments are completed by multidisciplinary teams focused on day-to-day unit level standards and compliance. The teams visit multiple units including ships, submarines air stations and facilities in a given fleet concentration area.

PPE Related Mishaps



- Can you hear me now? A Marine (and current employee of the Naval Safety Command) can vouch for the importance of ear protection PPE from a personal mishap. As a young lieutenant, he was the Officer in Charge (OIC) of a live fire and maneuver range that culminated in an AT-4 rocket shot. The lieutenant was concerned about not being able to hear his radio with ear-pro in, so he opted to power through the small arms fire without this PPE. When it came time for the rocket shot, he would plug his ears with his fingers. This method worked well for the first few evolutions of the range (*so he thought*). The lieutenant would wait for the signature

call from the a-gunner yelling, “back blast area all clear” before the gunner fired the rocket, then would plug his ears just before the blast. However, on one run-through, while standing only several feet from the rocket, he looked down the maneuver line and yelled at one of the assistant range safety officers, not realizing the AT-4 gunner was about to fire. He looked back up just as the deafening blast figuratively rang his bell, leaving a literal ringing in his ears. He later learned his reward for his misstep was a perforated eardrum. — *No one is infallible when it comes to complacency. OIC and Rang Safety Officers (RSOs) are a team and as in the previous example, we must look out for each other and ourselves.*

- Sometimes It Takes A Good Knock On The Head To Make A Point. This incident is a simple one but is too on the nose, not to mention. A Sailor was underneath an LCAC conducting bag work. As he crawled out and stood up, he struck his head on a forklift fork. The report stated the policy was that the maintainers wear a hard hat while working. Had he adhered to this policy, the Sailor would have saved himself a lost workday and a trip to medical for a CT scan.

- And You Thought The Warhead Was The Only Dangerous Part. A Sailor was loading an Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile (ESSM) RIM162D into the missile tube. While using a hook to attach the missile to the rail, the Sailor dropped the hook in the tube. When he reached his arm down the tube to retrieve the hook, the missile fin cut the Sailor’s hand open. The report noted the Sailor should have been wearing leather gloves while handling the missile. — *We must ensure our Sailors and Marines know the hazards involved with their work. It can be easy to look at a missile and not consider the sharpness of the fins. In guidance and pre-briefs, ensure you address all hazards and that the team understands them.*

Key Takeaways

PPE is vital to keeping our Marines and Sailors in the fight. From what we sometimes see as trivial equipment like ear protection devices to much more comprehensive equipment like firefighting gear, all of it is important. Injuries reduce the efficiency of our units and distract us from ensuring our combat readiness. For this reason, we encourage the following:

1. **If there’s PPE for the job, wear it!** There are too many examples in our database of people not wearing their PPE. The familiar adage “complacency kills” applies here. PPE exists for a reason and we have regulations on wearing it for a reason. We have seen too many injuries from people not wearing it.
2. **Know how to wear PPE.** This equipment is only as effective as its proper use. If you are unsure, ask your colleagues or supervisors. No one is above the rules, so spot-check yourself too. For example, a surprising number of service members wear their soft foam ear-pro incorrectly, placing it loosely in the early instead of stuffed all the way firmly in the ear canal. Also, see sanitized report SSIR 23-01 Man Overboard for details on a Marine whose flight deck float coat wasn’t properly rigged, resulting in no signal received from his man overboard indicator.
3. **Look out for your subordinates and each other.** We must be vigilant in ensuring those around us correctly use the prescribed PPE. One of our prime duties as leaders is to protect the service members under our charge. Thus, ensuring they wear their protective equipment is an a principal responsibility. Sometimes our Marines and Sailors don’t know better, or perhaps they are trying to stay under the radar. One Marine lost the Small Arms Protective Insert (SAPI) plates to his plate carrier body armor. Rather than report the issue and get in trouble for losing the SAPI plates, he stuffed textbooks in his plate carrier (*true story*). We doubt that books would hold up against an actual bullet. Again, be vigilant to ensure those we are responsible for are sufficiently protected.

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