



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-06

Inattention

*“The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus.”
— Bruce Lee*

“Not paying attention” falls into the mental awareness section of the Human Factors and Analysis Classification System (HFACS). It’s a commonly used description of the “why” behind the “what” that someone did, resulting in a mishap. In a search of on and off-duty mishap reports from fiscal year 2022, we found more than 1,200 mishaps where not paying attention was a factor. Those are only the reports where members owned up to not paying attention, so there were likely more. Hopefully, that number got your *attention* and you’ll read on to see how some of our service members, whose cuts and bumps reinforced (*albeit, too late*) the reasons for paying attention.



- Talk to The Hand. A Marine was talking with his hands while holding a knife (*SMH already*). That’s “shaking my head” for the older crowd. While hand-talking, he stabbed himself in the forearm. He applied a Band-Aid at first, but the bleeding persisted and he eventually went to the emergency room, where he received three stitches.
— *Even if he was lecturing on knife handling, we recommend not using a real knife. Knives deserve your full attention. If you can’t provide it, keep them sheathed or closed.*
- Off to a Bad Start. “A Sailor was just starting PT on a treadmill in the hangar bay when she fell off and struck her head.” The event factors of the report said that the Sailor probably wasn’t paying attention as the treadmill started. That misstep earned her a possible mild concussion and 7 days on light duty — *You are in control of the treadmill, so it should be no surprise when it starts moving.*
- Kids, This is Why You Don’t Run When There is a Fire. A fire inspector fell down the stairs on his way out of the building. He stated he wasn’t paying attention to what he was doing, or holding the handrail. The report gets confusing regarding which foot stepped where and which hand grabbed what handrail, but his Fire Marshall Bill-like stumble down the stairs, accompanied by his futile effort to recover, landed him at the bottom with a twisted ankle. — *Actions as routine as transiting stairs can still be hazardous. Just because you’ve done it a million times doesn’t mean you don’t need to pay attention. Handrails are your friend.*
- “Alexander And The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day” A Sailor wasn’t feeling well and was on his way to sick call. He wasn’t paying attention when he passed the coffee shop and hit his head on a shutoff valve. With blood running down his face and a more urgent need to seek medical care, he continued to sickbay, requiring two staples to close the wound. — *We imagine that whatever ailed this Sailor was overshadowed by knocking his head on a valve in the passageway. Any Sailor will attest to the head and knee knockers waiting to reach out and ruin your day. Be aware of your path as you transit ship so you don’t add insult to injury or “injury to sickness” in this case.*
- The Elephant Forklift in The Room. The entire narrative reads, “SNM [Marine] was not paying attention while walking and tripped over the forklift.” — *This mishap begs the question, was the forklift a LEGO toy? It seems like a considerable object not to see. All we know is that the Marine suffered an unspecified injury to his wrist. Heavy equipment has inherent hazards, and if you’re unaware of your surroundings while walking, it can injure you just by being in your path.*

Inattention



- **Attack of The Inanimate Object.** A Sailor was racing another Sailor on foot in a recreation area on the pier. Somewhere down the pier race, he ran into a shipping container resulting in a sprained left ankle (*how?*). — *As with our forklift story, we're wondering just how unaware one must be to run into a shipping container; they don't just appear like a supply airdrop in Call of Duty. We're only guessing here, but the Sailor would likely have missed the container if he'd been looking where he was running.*

- **Have a Grate Day.** A Sailor was walking on the lower level of the vertical launch system aboard the ship. He did not notice an open grating and fell through, landed on his side and bruised several ribs. The grate was supposed to be closed by the previous technician, but to this Sailor's detriment, it wasn't. This mishap highlights one of the many hazards when moving about Navy ships. — *The unfortunate reality is that even though grates should be closed when not in use, sometimes they aren't. Every Sailor is responsible for ensuring proper securing of gratings, hatches and doors, and to looking out for their safety when transiting through the ship.*

- **"OK honey, I'll talk to You Late...AAAAHHHHH!"** A Sailor was walking down the pier while talking on his cell phone, not paying attention to where he was going and walked off the pier. The report doesn't elaborate on his injuries other than he injured his shoulder, but the 31 days on light duty signifies it wasn't a short fall. — *We have enough cell phone-related mishaps in our database to have their own safety awareness dispatch. If the call is that important, stop, finish the call, and then walk.*

- **Maverick's Demise.** A Sailor (*we'll call him Maverick*) had just finished playing a competitive volleyball match with friends, Goose, Iceman, and Slider (*for the younger crowd, the reference is from the first Top Gun Movie, not the second*). After the match, and presumably the winner, Maverick was celebrating "with excitement and adrenaline pumping," according to the report. During the post-match celebration — *and while walking* — Maverick was "not paying attention to foot placement, stepped off the curb and rolled his ankle," fracturing it. — *Although this Sailor wasn't an aviator, he was technically grounded with significant pain and a minimum of six weeks on light duty, and that's nothing to celebrate. Don't let the "thrill of victory" become the "agony of defeat."*¹

Key Takeaways

It's easy to Monday-morning quarterback the mishaps in our dispatches and think, "I would never have done that," but more than a thousand of our service members and civilian employees did precisely "that" in FY 2022. All the bumps, cuts and broken bones in this dispatch were preventable with a little focus and situational awareness.

1. **Pay attention.** Inattention is best countered by its opposite, attention, which is why it's the primary takeaway from this dispatch. A low state of alertness, self-confidence (also called overconfidence), a perceived absence of risk or even boredom can lead to inattention. Note that most of the mishaps in this dispatch occurred during everyday tasks like walking or climbing stairs. Those are the times when we tend to become too comfortable with the activity and add in concurrent activities like looking at our phones. Sometimes, "multitasking" is just a fancy word for "distracted."

2. **Rushing only gets you to sickbay faster.** Sometimes we just need to slow down, take a breath and focus. It's OK to move with a purpose, but to be in such a hurry to complete a mundane task without focusing is asking for a slip, trip, fall, head bump, etc.

¹Note: If you don't remember the "agony of defeat" reference, do a web search for "Wide World of Sports", to see the old TV network intro. You'll appreciate the video.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"