



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-03

## *The Office Mishaps*

*“An office is as safe as the people in it. And sometimes those people can drive you to do crazy things to show the dangers of the office.” — Michael Scott, The Office TV series.*

Our safety management system is about managing risks and hazards to avoid people getting hurt or breaking things. While operational risk receives a lot of attention, safety hazards exist in any environment, including the office. In this third edition of office mishaps (under a slightly different title), we combed the database and found that our office warriors still hurt themselves similarly. As with our earlier research, judgment and inattention were the top two leading human factors.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, falls are the most common cause of office injury—*go figure, that's the number one cause of injuries in any environment*. Other common causes are muscle strains and hitting objects. As you will read, the naval services closely match the CDC's findings. Here in the Safety Awareness Division, we aim to “share the love” with all communities of practice, including the office, so have a read of some examples and key takeaways from the mishaps of our “Argonauts of Admin.”

- **The Office Python**. An employee was sitting at her computer and, as she stood up to answer the phone, her foot became tangled in the computer wires under her desk. With the serpent of cabling now firmly ahold of her leg, the employee had no place to go but the floor or her chair, which she missed and injured her knee. —*We've all likely seen it at some point: the snake nest of cables and wires under the desk. A few well-placed cable ties could have prevented this mishap. Check your workspace for trip hazards before you become the office python's next victim.*
- **“Breaking” Bad**. While returning to their workstation from stowing their lunch in the break room, an employee struck his right foot against a doorframe, fracturing his fifth (pinky) toe. He received two days of SIQ and seven days of restricted duty. In the immortal words of famous radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, “Now for the rest of the story.” As the employee departed the breakroom, he was distracted, thinking that his lunch box had fallen, so he turned to confirm. In a classic loss of situational awareness, he continued down the hallway while looking back into the breakroom when Bam! —*While we sometimes feel like our bodies are on autopilot (figuratively speaking), they're not self-driving. Inattention is one of the leading causes of office mishaps, so keep your eyes forward when you're walking, please. For more, see our safety awareness product, LL 20-24 Distracted Walking.*
- **Chairs Aren't Ladders**. A Sailor placed items on a high shelf while standing on a chair. —*What happened next shouldn't be a surprise, but we'll continue, so you might think twice before using a chair as a ladder.* The Sailor took a step back, lost his balance and fell, striking his head on the tile floor. He received SIQ for 24 hours and light duty for five days. —*This fall could have had a much worse outcome. Using the nearest chair as a step or a ladder may be tempting, but the risk isn't worth it. The time you think you will save may be spent in the emergency room or worse.*
- **A Falling Out**. A Sailor sat in a chair and decided to lean back—*seems normal, but...* As the Sailor leaned back, the chair “fell out,” according to the report and the Sailor hit her head on the floor. After the impact, the Sailor claimed loss of feeling in her lower back and leg (*Yikes, that's not good*). She was treated at the local hospital for a concussion. —*While the chair was of the type that leans back, the report noted that it might have*

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needed adjustment or repair. Chairs with moving parts can wear out just like any other equipment. Check your office chairs and other equipment **before** they launch someone onto the floor.

- **More than a Feeling.** While moving office furniture in the ship's office, a Sailor reached under a desk (without looking) to grab loose cabling and was shocked by a broken Universal Serial Bus (USB) adapter plugged into a surge suppressor. The ship's medical personnel took the Sailor to the emergency room, where he received an electrocardiogram and was released later that day. —*Feeling around under a desk with energized wires is asking for a shock. Take a few extra seconds to see where you are reaching. The broken USB in an energized circuit is a prime example of why office spaces shouldn't be immune from regular safety inspections, and they're required!*
- **A Shelf Too Far.** An employee attempted to relocate a printer from an elevated shelf to a desk. As she maneuvered the printer off the shelf, the printer shifted in her grasp and the employee experienced a sharp pain in her lower back. She was later diagnosed with a strained back muscle. —*Printers are awkward to lift and often heavy. This employee didn't realize the printer's weight until it was too late. If moving heavy office equipment isn't your regular job, ask for help. It will save you the pain of finding out how heavy printers are the hard way.*
- **Bursting with flavor.** A Sailor went to the break room to heat his lunch (noodles). Lacking a proper bowl, the Sailor improvised using a "shaker bottle" instead (the ones people make protein shakes in). After placing the noodles and water in the bottle and sealing it, he put it in the microwave for seven minutes—*Yikes, seven minutes?* The report details the Sailor's next steps in noodle-making: removing the bottle, mixing the spicy seasoning and then shaking the bottle to get an even mixture. Once satisfied with the mix, the Sailor re-opened the bottle and the contents splattered into his right eye. He was treated at the local clinic and prescribed eye drops for the pain. —*Sealing up liquid and microwaving it is never a good idea for the very reason our unfortunate Sailor demonstrated in this example. While we're talking microwaves, your coworkers will appreciate you **not** microwaving these items at work: 1) seafood, 2) eggs, 3) broccoli or Brussels sprouts, 4) grapes or anything that will explode. You're welcome.*
- **"I believe That's my Stapler."** An employee was using a giant stapler when one of the ½" long staples jammed. Aiming to remedy the situation quickly, the employee attempted to pull the staple out with her bare hand. Unsurprisingly, the employee sliced her finger on the staple deep enough that she could not stop the bleeding. She wrapped her finger and reported to her supervisor, who transported her to urgent care, where she received three stitches. —*Pulling out a jammed staple with your fingers isn't the safest method. It's probably the least safe method. Download all the staples; if the jam doesn't clear, we think pliers are a better option than your fingers.*

### Key Takeaways

1. **Safety standards aren't just for operators.** Occupational safety standards for office spaces include proper storage, keeping aisles and exits free of clutter, use of power strips and much more. Visit the Naval Safety Command's CAC-enabled site at <https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/navsafe> and select "on duty" then "workplace safety" for simple office safety checklists, tips and training.
2. **ORM isn't just for operators, either.** A little risk management could have saved the day in most, if not all, of our examples. We're not saying you need to do a formal risk assessment before moving furniture, but taking a moment to think the task through and consider alternatives could save time and pain.
3. **Invest in your workplace's safety.** Any daily work environment can induce a potentially false sense of safety over time as we become comfortable with our surroundings. Note the workplace safety tips from takeaway #1 and incorporate them into your daily routine. Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility and should be led by a solid safety program. If you aren't aware of your command's safety program, now is an excellent time to ask.

**Remember, "Let's be careful out there"**