



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



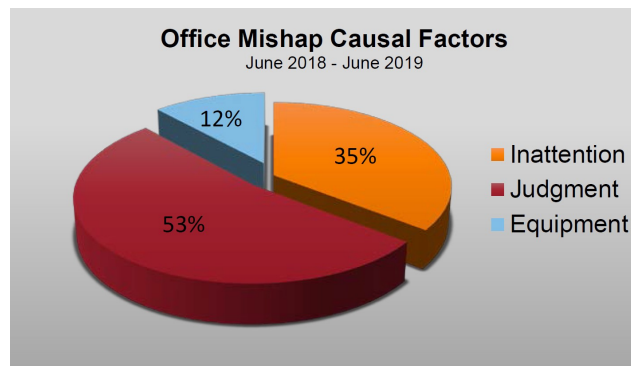
19-14

OFFICE SPACE MISHAPS

“We do safety training every year or after an accident...We've never made it a full year.”
— Darryl, *The Office* TV Series

Most of our Navy and Marine Corps safety effort focuses on operational safety or during our off-duty activities. We don't often stop to consider the hazards that surround us in the office because, what's the worst thing that can happen: a bad paper cut or you spill a caramel macchiato on your keyboard? Well, regardless of whether you are one of our tireless Admin warriors, a rifleman on recruiting duty, or a civilian manning the office, hidden hazards do actually await you. In the past year alone, over 100 office mishaps led to 460 lost work days and nearly 900 days of light duty. The lost work days equate to two and a half Sailor deployments or nearly 47 civilian pay periods. Incidentally, none involved coffee or keyboards.

It appears the office is not as safe as we might think. In case you doubt, here are a few examples to make our case. Hopefully, you will also take home a lesson or two. The top three categories of mishaps were lifting or moving objects, hitting heads, and chair fails (or falls...you can call them either). The leading causal factors in all the office mishaps is human error, with judgment and inattention leading the way. Equipment failures only accounted for a mere 12% of the total. So, read on. Page two provides a list of tips on how to keep out of our mishap database.



- While waiting in her work center, a Sailor was spinning herself around in her chair. The report doesn't tell us why—perhaps waiting for a program to load, or maybe another annoying reboot? The wheels slipped, she fell back, and hit her head on the floor. Thunk. One lost work day and 31 days on light duty. — *Next time you are “waiting” for something at your desk, may we suggest trying a one-minute meditation or a breathing exercise. There's even an app for that.*
- An employee was cutting a cardboard box with a retractable knife to prep it for recycling. He forgot (or never had) his scouting knife training and was cutting toward himself. He cut through the box and stuck the knife into his upper left thigh, requiring seven stitches. One of the nine rules of knife safety from Danger Ranger Bear is, always cut away from yourself. A review of those rules before performing cardboard surgery could have averted this mishap. —*We have seen this scenario so many times, it could be its own lessons learned topic. Stay tuned.*
- Sailor 1 was filing a binder in the lower drawer of a cabinet when Sailor 2 opened the top drawer. Sailor 1 did not see that the drawer above him was open. He stood up and hit his head on it. This is simply a case of lost situational awareness and being totally set up for failure by your coworker. Thanks shipmate!
- A service member was attempting to clear a paper jam on a heavy duty material shredder. Spoiler alert: He didn't unplug it. While trying to un-jam the shredder, the unit inadvertently activated. It caught, and shredded, one of his fingers. Base medical finished the shredder's work, amputating down to the second knuckle. After the fact, they discovered that the safety feature to disable the shredder for cleaning was circumvented, allowing the shredder to immediately resume operation once the unit had been cleared of the jam. Rule #1 for working on any electric gadget: unplug it first.
- “The employee strained her back while lifting a box of comics from the floor.” That is the entire narrative from the mishap report. We have more questions than answers for this one. Perhaps the box contained a complete set of the Ultimate X-Men series, or every issue of Spiderman. Whatever the case, if you are trying to pick up Thor's hammer, and you're not worthy, it won't go well. Remember, lift with your legs.

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- A medical technician was cleaning and reorganizing a medical record space. Upon turning the spinning medical record holder [*here we go with the spinning again*] a three ring binder that was sitting on the top fell down, striking him in the nose. — Now you know what happened to your medical record. The next time they can't find it, ask them to check the top of the spinning cabinet.

- A Marine went into the storeroom (not technically an office, but close enough) to assist another Marine with a sliding rack that had come off its track. In the process, a can of olives slid off the top shelf and landed on the Marine's head causing a 1½ inch laceration. He received six staples in his head...and probably went straight back to work. YUT!

- A Sailor was sitting in a rolling desk chair. The chair was designed with five wheels but was missing one. The Sailor leaned back in the chair...weight shifted...chair slipped...man down. Diagnosis: left elbow contusion and 15 days light duty. Well at least he wasn't spinning on it. Remember: the saying "He drove the wheels off that thing!" is reserved for NASCAR, monster trucks, etc. Please ensure all required chair parts are in place for optimum performance.



- When the employee reported to her desk for work, there was (quoting from the report) a large "centipede type of bug" (about "two inches long and one inch wide with lots of legs") on the wall right over her desk. She obtained a large fly swatter and used a chair to stand on, instead of a ladder, because [apparently] it would not fit in her desk area to reach the bug. When she swatted at the bug, it ran down the wall toward her. In the ensuing mayhem, the chair fell out from under her and she followed. Luckily, for this fearless insect slayer, her injury did not result in significant lost time from work; perhaps only a day or two while they tented the building and fumigated.

Lessons Learned and Key Take Aways

Office warriors deserve a safe environment while they work hard to support those who are keeping the nation safe. These bad days at the office can be avoided with a bit more situational awareness and good judgment. We're not suggesting you conduct time critical risk management before using the stapler or hold a safety brief before making copies, but there are a few things you can do to reduce the risk of injury in the office.

- 1. If there is a safety standard that applies, follow it.** Examples include: chairs are not ladders; lift with your legs, not your back; keep aisles and exits clear of clutter; and unplug electrical power before working on any office hardware. Check with your local unit fire protection or safety office for more guidance.
- 2. Maintain a culture of safety.** Safety culture, the pattern of behavior that determines the overall attitude toward safety in an organization, is built upon communication, mutual trust, and shared perceptions of the importance of safety. You can lead by example from anywhere in your organization by remaining vigilant and safety-minded at all times.
- 3. Safety inspections and assessments.** Over time, we can overlook safety hazards or become desensitized to the ones we see every day. The respective Navy and Marine Corps Safety and Occupational Health Program manuals (OPNAVINST 5100.23 and NAVMC 5100.8) contain specific requirements for formal safety inspections and annual self-assessments.

Visit the Naval Safety Center'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.

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