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.

• **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.
OFFICE SPACE MISHAPS II

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.”