



The Safety Corner

From the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
February 12, 2007



Ballast Fire Hazards

This issue of the Safety Corner highlights lessons and observations about Ballast Fires noticed during operations in the War on Terror.

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From the Director:

For every issue of the Safety Corner, we continue to work to provide up to date and relevant safety information.

A string of recent electrical fires aboard Al Asad led to the discovery of a serious safety hazard. Faulty ballasts produced by Schwabe are installed in light fixtures in numerous buildings currently on Al Asad and possibly in other locations throughout Iraq. These ballasts have triggered several fires, fortunately with no serious injuries to date. The latest fire, which is reported in this issue, occurred in an ammo storage facility. The quick actions of 2 Air Force ammo personnel helped to prevent the spread of the fire.

Since 1 Jan 2007, Al Asad Air Base has reported 5 Ballast Fires. Fortunately, these fires have been controlled quickly. I strongly encourage all personnel to inspect their work areas to see if they have any of these ballasts installed. The Safety Alert in this issue (Page 3) explains how to inspect your light fixtures.

The importance of Emergency Action Plans (EAPs), Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs), and quick reaction drills can not be stressed enough. These need to be practiced and refined. Knowing how to react in an emergency situation will reduce injuries and help to preserve workspaces and equipment. Contact your local safety office or fire department if you need help with your plans.

Please read, pass on, and post the newsletter for widest dissemination.

I look forward to your comments, observations, and concerns.

Semper Fidelis,

Col Monte Dunard,

Director MCCLL

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Headquarters Safety Division Posts Safety Corners

Headquarters' Safety Division has posted the safety corners for all users by creating a page off of the Safety Division's Webpage. You can visit the [SD webpage](http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/sd/index.htm) (<http://hqinet001.hqmc.usmc.mil/sd/index.htm>) and click on the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned logo on the left to view past issues of the Safety Corner.

Don't miss a single issue of the Safety Corner! Log onto www.mccll.usmc.mil and register to be added to the distribution of the Safety Corner and our monthly newsletter.

You can also log in and view additional lessons and observations, as well as, input your safety lessons, briefs, photos, TTPs, and SOPs. By doing so, you are passing this information along to help current and future Marines.





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By LtCol NELSON McLEOD, USAF
Al Asad Spoke Commander
557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron

On Thursday, January 18th, 2007, ammo personnel were in a new SWA Hut and smelled something burning. They turned off the breaker and returned to their office to witness the light fixture catch fire. They were able to put out the fire with a handheld extinguisher.

Upon notification, I visited the site, interviewed ammo personnel, and took pictures. One of the ballast had overheated and caused the plastic light fixture housing to melt and eventually catch fire. The light fixture was installed with spacers. The overheating ballast did not trip the breaker indicating that the ballast and plastic fixture can catch fire without shorting out and tripping the breaker. Power had been on to the facility for about 28 hours and power had been on in that room for less than twelve hours.

We continue to risk the safety of our personnel, equipment, and facilities by installing dangerous light fixtures. Since our arrival on 26 November, we have had ballast fires in two huts and one near ballast fire in our office.

The attached Safety Alert contains information on how to inspect light fixtures to determine if you are at risk. Please post and distribute the Safety Alert to ensure everyone is aware of this hazard.



Contact your local Safety Office, Facilities Maintenance Office, or Fire Department if you have any questions about your light fixtures.

Electrical Fires

Electrical fires need to be handled with special care. If an electrical fire breaks out, follow these instructions:

- **DO NOT throw water on an electrical fire. You could be electrocuted.**
- Evacuate all personnel to a safe location
- Call for emergency personnel.
- If an appliance catches fire, unplug it as soon as possible.
- If you see smoke or fire, or smell a strange odor coming from wires, appliances, electric motors, lights or outlets: turn off the appliance and the main switch at the circuit breaker or fuse box.
- Use a fire extinguisher rated for class "C" fires. The majority of extinguishers today are class "A:B:C". Halon fire extinguishers are rated typically B:C.





SAFETY ALERT

Recently there have been several fires in containers and ablution units. The cause has been traced to the 36-40 watt Schwabe ballasts in fluorescent light fixtures. These fixtures should be grounded. However, if the fixture is ungrounded, excessive amperage may cause the ballasts to over heat. This may cause premature failure of the ballast and fires. To inspect for this problem do the following:

- 1) Remove the lens cover from the fluorescent light fixture.
- 2) Remove the metal hood that covers the center where the ballast is located.
- 3) Look at the ballast for heat damage. Brown discolored areas indicate overheating, black discolored areas are also an indicator of excessive heat.

If you see either of these situations, turn off power to the fixture and contact an electrician to conduct a more thorough inspection of the ballast, light fixture, wiring and ground. **THESE BALLASTS CAN GET VERY HOT.** Use caution when removing the metal cover. The fires have only occurred with Schwabe Ballasts, manufactured in Germany.



SAFETY ALERT