

# Execute the Plan

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Photo by PH1 John Collins

By Cdr. Drew Kenny

The Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance (MPR) Force is involved in an ongoing effort to reassess our vulnerabilities, identify risks, and implement controls to prevent mishaps. As this self-evaluation continues, we have identified two weak areas we must focus on and improve: using existing tools properly and fully exercising our collective responsibility to monitor and report violations.

Commander Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, RDML Brian Prindle, stated in a recent safety message that “following the plan the first time, every time, is our path to continued success, and will improve our safety culture across the force.” Simply put, he said we need to “execute the plan.”

Since summer 2005, the MPR force has reaped the benefits from reinstituting a back-to-the-basics campaign, which focuses on using naval-aviation fundamentals and the tenets of ORM to prevent mishaps. Despite these successes, the MPR Force has had their fair share of close calls, incidents resulting in a hazrep, and a Class C-flight mishap that involved an aircraft departing the runway during landing roll-out. Well-instituted safety programs, emphasis from command leadership, open lines of communication, and safety stand-downs can help squadrons address hazards and mitigate risks, but real progress in safety and risk management comes from learning and energetically applying the lessons of failure.

Near-misses have been called the hidden seeds of the next disaster. The MPR Force is working to identify and eliminate all these hidden seeds, and we want to share three simple, proactive measures we’re using with the MPR Force to prevent the next incident and properly execute the plan.

1. Increase reporting of miscues using hazreps.
2. Use more formal and rigorous aircrew-training-record reviews as a risk-management strategy.
3. Increase recognition and commendation of personnel executing procedures by the book.

These measures are positive actions to develop a more proactive, not reactive, safety culture. Just talking about one’s safety culture will not develop what RDML Prindle has termed “a critical mass of proactive safety thinkers.”

When everyone on our flight lines, hangar decks, aircraft, and those who plan the evolutions and look for ways to mitigate risks become proactive thinkers, then procedural non-compliance never will go unnoticed and never will fail to be corrected. Without a critical mass of people, we will continue to subject ourselves to the random mishap or hazard. The MPR Force knows these measures to improve our behavior will make us better. The effort we take now to eliminate causal factors to prevent mishaps and to avoid costly losses certainly will save time, pain, and money in the future. We want to reduce the need for less efficient reactions.

Our leadership believes there never has been a more important time in the community’s history for increased focus on robust, proactive, communication-rich, and ORM-centric programs that emphasize the right bal-

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ance between reporting our errors and upholding a high standard of personal accountability and responsibility. One such program is reporting our errors through hazreps, via the web-enabled safety system (WESS). Hazrep reporting across naval aviation has declined seriously over the past decade, and this also was true for the MPR Force. However, during FY06, MPR hazrep submissions dramatically increased. This increased reporting is a positive sign we are willing to openly communicate so others can benefit. We can avoid reoccurrences, and we proactively can address potential mishaps and their causal factors.

Hazreps afford squadrons an opportunity to discuss pertinent issues and to offer feedback and suggestions on how to improve. Hazreps are used during hangar-flying training sessions by both experienced and inexperienced personnel to facilitate ORM and CRM discussions before being challenged with circumstances

similar to those where others have gone astray. Completing a hazrep reinforces that everything we do and say with respect to safety is vital. A hazrep also emphasizes individual accountability, so all hands clearly know what is expected of them. We never must waver in expectation or execution of the plan.

In addition to conventional hazreps via WESS, the MPR Force uses “visual hazreps,” which are short PowerPoint presentations, using digital pictures to enhance retention of lessons learned from the hazrep incident. Visual hazreps are distributed across the MPR Force as incidents occur, and they also are discussed in working-group sessions and formal presentations during commander’s conferences, operational-advisory groups (OAGs), and similar community forums.

**A**s we follow through on our collective responsibility to monitor and report errors, we expand our awareness scan so human error doesn’t go unnoticed. We have reassessed the effectiveness of our aircrew-training programs to make sure complacency hasn’t set in to a point where we simply are going through the motions. Complacency easily can lead to overlooking an individual’s negative tendency, which, if identified and remedied, can prevent a mishap.

Changes to the MPR Wing Training Manual have made sure careful, rigorous aircrew training-jacket reviews are conducted monthly and before qualification milestones. Such reviews lead to early identification of aircrew difficulties and negative trends, which then are discussed at monthly positional-instructor meetings (or potentially at human-factors boards). The appropriate level of the chain of command then can be proactive and make prudent use of resources for additional training or remediation as necessary. All training jackets must receive the same level of scrutiny, including those of individuals widely considered to be above-average performers. With thorough documentation of deficiencies, chain of command visibility, and permanent filing of critical information, we monitor trends and make sure we use our existing tools properly to execute the plan.

To go along with admitting our shortcomings, it

is important to publicly recognize what we do right. Everyone in the MPR Force has a voice when it comes to safety issues. Active, all-hands involvement is required to eliminate the errors that lead to mishaps. As an aid to building the critical mass of safety thinkers, RDML Prindle recognizes individuals at the squadron level through Safety Pro Flag Letters of Commendation. At least one person in every squadron is recognized monthly. The abundant nominations are a great indicator the MPR Force is made up of confident, well-trained Sailors who know safety-related issues and are willing to point out unsafe practices,

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procedures, or environments. Safety pros take the lead to root out and eliminate non-compliance and serve as role models with an ongoing demonstration that commands truly are committed to developing a vibrant safety culture.

The measures detailed in this article were easy to implement, and they work. By employing basic risk-mitigation strategies and continuously emphasizing by-the-book execution of the plan, we have enhanced productivity and raised safety awareness. While we have made good progress developing and sustaining a critical mass of proactive safety thinkers, we still have more work to do.

For any measure to continually be successful, repetitive attention from the most junior Sailors to the highest levels of leadership is essential. The MPR Force is very aware that for each “hidden seed of the next disaster” we successfully eliminate, several more are waiting to grow. All hands must understand and embrace their responsibility to continually search for these seeds and, when found, take positive action. 

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