

Never Assume

By ATAN Chadwick Richards, VQ-1

Assumptions are dangerous, and assumptions concerning work that you should have completed yourself are the worst. Everybody knows this, but can you say you've never allowed yourself to assume something critical in a job you've done or a responsibility placed upon you? I did, and it cost my squadron greatly.

A second class CD/QAR, an AD2, and I were directed to take a propeller from the Prop Shop to the shipping center. The prop was needed for a P-3C that was stranded at McChord AFB in Tacoma, Wash. We put it on a stand-up prop dolly and delivered it to the shipping center, but were told that the prop and dolly were too tall for highway underpasses.

We returned to the Prop Shop and moved the propeller onto a fly-away dolly that held it lower. I jumped into a tow tractor, and backed it up to the trailer. I thought the AD2 stayed out to connect and pre-op the fly-away dolly. I assumed the AD2 had readied the stand for the move and I didn't verify that it had been done. As the tow-tractor driver, the pre-op inspection of the stand was my responsibility. The importance of the phrases "never assume" and "check and recheck" had been thoroughly impressed upon me since I joined the Navy. However, I chose not to abide by these sayings.

I started the tow-tractor and moved forward slowly. I was wary of driving an expensive piece of equipment



on the streets since my experience with a tow-tractor was limited to the flight line. In the AIMD parking lot, I slowed the tow-tractor to make a right turn around the corner of the building. As soon as I applied the brakes, the fly-away dolly slid around to the left and jack-knifed.

I stopped the tow-tractor and began to ask the AD2 if this particular trailer had wheels that needed to be locked. Before I could finish my question, he was out of the tow-tractor, locking the wheels in place. I thought, "Thank God we caught this early!"

My relief was short-lived. We discovered an 18-inch long dent on the back of a minivan next to the fly-away dolly. The license plate was crumpled like an accordion. I asked AD2 if we had done that, and he looked back at me with wide eyes and said, "I think so." When he finished locking the wheels, I moved the tractor and fly-away dolly to the side, chocked it, and joined AD2 to find the owner of the van: a chief petty officer, who wasn't happy.

What could have been done to prevent this? First, I could have used more training on the both dollies. I also should have told my supervisor that I was uncomfortable with this move. I had never dealt with the fly-





away dolly before, or driven the tractor off of the flight line. I shouldn't have assumed the pre-operational checks had been done. As the driver, I should have made sure everything I was towing was ready for the move.

Everyone, regardless of their rank, experience, or expertise, is liable to make mistakes. The solution is communication—not assumptions.

This incident caused the Maintenance Department to carefully look at the training syllabus for support equipment safety and handling. Our Sailors deserve the opportunity to be properly trained and receive enough hands-on experience to be comfortable performing their duties. The incident and its lessons learned were thoroughly briefed and reviewed in each shop.

Work Package 14 (Maintenance Platforms) of the U.S. Navy Support Equipment Basic Handling and Safety Manual (NAVAIR 00-80T-96) was added to the required reading board in every shop. We also recommended to the local AIMD that this Work Package be included in their tow-tractor course.

Three technical publications deficiency reports (TPDRs) were submitted, recommending the following warning be placed in NAVAIR 19-600-284-6-1 (Pre-Op Tow Tractor), NAVAIR 19-600-19-6-6 (Pre-Op Maintenance Stands), and NAVAIR 19-600-178-6-1 (Pre-Op Prop Dolly Universal): “Warning: Failure to properly secure castors on stands/platforms prior to towing could result in uncontrolled operation and damage/injury to adjacent aircraft, equipment, or personnel.”

We recommended the AIMD include this warning in their local Fly-away Dolly Pre-op Card.

Ground mishaps such as this one could be avoided by stressing the importance of pre-operational checks and incorporating ORM into our everyday operations. Making sure the proper information is taught and available is essential. Taking the time to thoroughly assess all hazards and take precautions will serve to reduce the number of these unfortunate incidents.—Lt.

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