

# Stop Sucking Soap!

By ABH3(AW/SW) Travis M. Ward

While deployed on board an LHD, I was involved in a mishap with two junior Sailors, a hose, and a bucket of flight-deck soap. This soap, also known as Calijen Fast Clean, is a highly concentrated liquid detergent containing 4 to 5 percent potassium hydroxide. The MSDS (which I didn't read) lists potassium hydroxide as "highly corrosive" and "a severe poison." Unaware of these dangerous and potentially fatal characteristics, I was the first of three personnel who tried to siphon the soap by mouth with a hose.

While refueling a helicopter, a small fuel spill occurred. As part of the crash and salvage team (V-1), I was assigned the task of assisting the aviation fuels (V-4) personnel. I had to obtain some flight-deck soap to wash down the deck at the site of the spill.

The plastic hand pump normally used to siphon soap was broken. Thus, I felt I had to resort to the only other technique I knew for retrieving soap from the 55-gallon barrel. I led two impressionable, junior airmen over to the catwalk, where the soap barrel was secured. Considering the fact I had wrongly, yet successfully, siphoned flight-deck soap before, I wasn't aware of the harm in doing it "just one more time" would cause.

Like before, I started to suck the liquid detergent through the hose with my mouth and achieved more than the desired vacuum. I got soap in my mouth and



immediately dropped the hose to go rinse with water. In my absence, the two junior airmen picked up right where I left off. One was unsuccessful; the other airman, though, actually swallowed a mouthful of soap. His throat began to burn. The active ingredients of the soap were attacking the surface of his esophagus. In the meantime, someone showed up on the scene with an operating pump. We took our shipmate to medical, where doctors informed us flight-deck soap is toxic enough to burn right through an esophagus or even kill you.

Fortunately for all of us, the amount of fluid the airman swallowed was not enough to seriously injure him. The end result was one night in the medical ward and a weeklong bad taste in his mouth. A swollen esophagus and a week of painful swallowing sure beat going to a funeral.

Improper, unauthorized procedures are not only wrong; in this case, they could have been fatal. This incident demonstrates how junior personnel often will follow blindly the lead of someone in a senior position. I knew I was doing

something wrong; yet, I persisted, and someone else was harmed as a result. I learned from the experience why it's so important to train everyone the correct way. Be smart, and learn from my mistake. Don't cut corners; do things by the book, and stop sucking soap! 

ABH3(AW/SW) Travis M. Ward is assigned to USS *Essex*, V-1 Division.