

Unfiltered Madness

By AM3 Christopher Caraway



These photographs don't tell the whole story of damage done.

We've all thumbed through safety magazines, and I've chuckled a few times at the expense of the people involved in minor mishaps. Well, I can say that I'll never do it again, because I'm in that group now, and I know that "minor" mishaps are very **BIG** deals.

Here's what I've learned: If your gear doesn't work during a pre-operational inspection, down it and write a MAF against it **before** attempting maintenance. When you do maintenance, follow lockout/tagout procedures. I didn't do either, and someone else got burned (literally) because of it. This is how it all went down.

I was doing a pre-op on the large parts washer in 51B. All was going well until I reached the part of the inspection that says to check for clogged spray nozzles. This is a functional check, so I pushed the button but got no spray. Instead, a small trickle came from each nozzle. This is where mistake No. 1 developed. I went to the manual and found the alleged cause of the problem and was off to fix it. In hindsight, I should have at least told someone. Anyway, the probable cause that the publication pointed me to was a clogged filter. I gathered everything I would need for the filter removal and got started. I switched the breaker to the off position. Here's where mistake No. 2 occurred (I didn't lock it out). I then loosened the lid clamp on the filter can. After setting the lid and clamp aside, I pulled out the filter and went to rinse it.

I thought the operation was going quite smoothly as I rinsed the grime out of the filter. Meanwhile, at the parts washer, someone had flipped the breaker back to the "on" position. An airman, ready to clean some parts, loaded the washer, turned the dial to the desired time, and closed the door. When the door touched the switch, the machine sprang into action, causing a large amount (an estimated 60 gallons) of nearly 200-degree wastewater to spray out of the open fitting onto the airman. He suffered first-degree burns to his upper right arm and back. While the airman ran into the work center, yelling and ripping off his uniform, another airman hustled to secure the parts washer. He too got soaked with the wastewater but was not burned. The NASWI fire department was notified, and the hazardous-waste cleanup crew was dispatched. It took a few hours for the clean up to be completed, during which time we were unable to do any maintenance.

In the end, my two not-so-small errors in judgment caused a loss of around four hours of production and 24 hours of lost man-hours for the airman who had been scalded. I hope everyone reading this story learns from my mistakes, if only to prevent that dirt-bag feeling you get when you cause someone else to get hurt. 🙏🙏

Petty Officer Caraway works in the corrosion shop at AIMD, NAS Whidbey Island.