

Availabilities: A Great Time To Use ORM

By LCdr. Jennifer Gelker,
Naval Safety Center

Over the years, the names of maintenance and repair periods have changed, but the hazards have remained constant. Repairs used to be done primarily in separate, distinct periods (regular overhaul). Today, though, some upkeep and maintenance almost always is occurring when a ship is pierside (continuous maintenance availability). This issue focuses on these hazards and risks with a series of articles on safety during availabilities, upkeeps, overhauls, and shipyard periods.

Our series highlights some lessons learned and best practices from several ships over the last few years. If you look at these articles and compare them to the statistics described in the article entitled “Casualties in Availabilities,” you’ll see direct correlations. We don’t kill many people during actual overhaul work, but we certainly injure a lot and create a large burden on our shipmates.

Think of it this way: With 2,472 injuries in 10 years, even if only one day was lost per event, that amounts to 2,472 lost workdays (or about 250 lost days per year over a 10-year period). In other words, we’re losing one individual for the entire year, every year.

Some of the key safety-related items to consider in availabilities also show up negatively in our statistics. Availabilities always generate unsafe

walking conditions and housekeeping problems in the form of tripping hazards, missing ladders, slippery or uneven deck surfaces, and excessive staged material. Electrical maintenance and tag-out procedures become even more critical as equipment is taken off-line, repaired, replaced, and brought back up. Proper gas-free engineering practices are critical when spaces are opened. Contractors and their personnel disrupt our normal routines and affect things like fire watches, tag outs, and work-control packages.

Availabilities, upkeeps, overhauls, repair periods, or whatever you call them, create a dynamic environment where the hazards are constantly changing and ever-present. We have to keep a close eye on our shipmates and the conditions they work in to ensure everyone’s safety and well-being. It’s a great time to use risk management: Identify the hazards, assess the hazards, make risk decisions, implement controls, supervise (and watch constantly for changes). ■

If your command has some additional best practices or ideas about staying safe during an availability or upkeep, send them to safe-afloat@navy.mil. We will add submitted items to our best-practices website or consider them for future Sea&Shore articles. Please be sure to include contact information, so we can reach you if we have questions.

The bow of USS *Winston S. Churchill* (DDG-81) looms over the dry dock at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine.

Navy photo by IS1 Holly Hogan