

Taking a Turn on Looking Out for Each Other



Throughout my Navy career, I've seen what I like to call the goods and the bads of our day-to-day operations. I suspect we've all seen these things. On the good side, I think of all the safety programs and initiatives we've developed over the years to improve the lives of our Sailors, Marines, and civilians. These efforts produced safer working environments and lower mishap rates. They enhanced our ability to operate and to complete our mission. On the bad side, however, we've all seen the aircraft and ship mishaps and near-mishaps, as well as the traffic and recreational accidents, that cost us lives and valuable resources. In our profession, you can't do the things that we do so well every day without getting a first-hand introduction to the hazards and risks of naval life.

If you stop to think about what we learn throughout our lives, a lion's share of our knowledge comes from our parents. One of the most valuable lessons I learned from my parents was to look out for myself, as well as those around me. We could call those "growing up" lessons the beginnings of risk management, and, although it was different than today's operational risk management, the idea was there. Now that I've assumed command of the Naval Safety Center, I think of those early lessons and how they apply to this position and this command. Our job here is the same as the job of every command:

- to look out for the well-being of our Sailors, Marines and civilians,
- to ensure as safe a working environment as possible,

- to identify the hazards we all face in both our professional and personal lives,
- to educate everyone in the vital importance of risk management in everything we do, and
- to improve readiness so we can do what we do best—operate all over the world.

During the last 50 years, we've made some real progress in reducing our overall mishap rate. In the last 10 years, however, we've hit a fairly level plateau. The numbers change up and down a percentage point or two, but, overall, they're consistent. The bottom line is perhaps what has happened in the last five years: From FY98 to FY03, mishaps cost us 1,179 lives and \$4.3 billion.

Today, the challenge is to reduce mishaps by 50 percent in the next two years. This goal requires the leadership and dedicated efforts of everyone. It requires some changes in the way we do things, what we expect of each other, and what we accept as operations normal. Finally, it requires every Sailor, Marine and civilian to take a turn on looking out for each other. Along those lines, our goal at the Safety Center is to provide every command with the tools, data, advice, and guidance necessary to prevent the next mishap. Our focus is the fleet.

It's an honor to be here, and I look forward to working with all of you.

*RAdm. Dick Brooks
Commander, Naval Safety Center*