

Do-It-Yourself Disasters

Photo by PH2 Matthew J. Thomas

Got everything he needs? Not quite. Safety glasses would have completed the list of items required for this do-it-yourselfer to pass the critical eyes of a safety officer or OSHA inspector.

By Lt. Pete Berg
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"Honey, can you do a few things before you leave?" That is the mating cry of the soon-to-be-left-behind spouse of a deploying Sailor. Two months before you leave, and you have enough projects to keep even the master carpenter, Norm Abrams, busy for a whole season of *This Old House*.

For a moment you consider hiring professional help—not only for the chores but for yourself. But the specters of overpriced labor, long delays, and strangers in your house are depressing. Plus, you reason, "I come from a long line of handymen, do-it-yourselfers and self-sufficient hacks. Give me borrowed or inadequate tools, minimal knowledge and a roll of duct tape, and I can do just about anything, and under cost."

That's the way most home do-it-yourselfers think. After all, we do fine at our jobs and come home with all our limbs attached. But maybe that's because there's a government agency called the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that looks out for the pros in enforcing a safe work environment. But have you ever seen an OSHA inspector patrolling your yard? Or fining you or your spouse for code violations? "I didn't think so, Tim." However, based on what I've seen people do (and things I've done), maybe they should.

Here are some things I've seen friends do at home that they wouldn't be allowed to get away with at work:

✓ A lieutenant's wife came stumbling into the house after varnishing a bookcase in the garage. She seemed a little dazed and had a headache. Because of a cold, her sense of smell wasn't up to par, and she hadn't noticed the heavy fumes that had built up in the garage. Why? She didn't want dust blowing into the garage, so she closed it off while she was working.

✓ An officer was using a pick ax to dig a hole in the back yard for a new planter. When he hit a PVC pipe, he sent a fountain of water (which had been destined to return to his pool) into the air. Good thing he only grazed the metal pipe beside the PVC one; it held natural gas.

✓ To avoid paying \$15.99 for an oil change, an enterprising ensign jacked up his Honda Prelude. He was too cheap to buy ramps, but he did block the wheels. He slid under the precariously perched car to drain the oil. While unscrewing the filter, his hands slipped and sizzled momentarily on the still-hot exhaust manifold. Oil then spurted from the now-

loosened filter into the ensign's face. You probably thought I was going to say the car fell on him. It didn't, but it could have.

✓ An aviator's wife asked him to move a bathroom light fixture 4 inches to the right. Since it was a simple job, he didn't feel like he had to secure the power. As he installed the first mounting screw, the screwdriver touched the hot-wire terminal and the metallic base of the fixture. This created quite a blue-arc light show. The fixture was reattached all right, but only to the screwdriver.

✓ An efficient young Sailor was putting in new deck planks on his deck, unaware of a 220-volt surprise that awaited him. While trimming a piece of wood with a reciprocating saw, he didn't notice the three-phase, heavy-duty power line that ran directly under the deck. He cut right through it with a crackling blaze of blue. Even though the saw was insulated, he was left with a tingling, semi-numb arm and a racing heart.

✓ Finishing a drywall job, an officer was sanding the joint compound. It was dark in the work

area, so he didn't notice the cloud of ultra-fine dust that had filled the room. He was left with a dry throat and a hacking cough. It was only after the symptoms had passed that he bothered to look at the label on the compound. It read: "WARNING: Harmful if swallowed. Dust produced is known to the State of California to be carcinogenic if breathed."

What was missing from all these job? Common sense? Probably. Adequate tools? Maybe. The right protective gear? Certainly. If an OSHA inspector had seen these people at work, he would have suffered a stroke. And if your safety manager had to write mishap reports on these blunders, he would have thrown the book at all these people.

Being at home is no excuse for not following the rules you have to follow at work. At home, you have to be your own OSHA inspector. ❏

[Note: Remember that ORM applies not only to what you do at work, but to chores you do at home. You need to look at risks and ways to minimize them there as well.—Ed.]

Conference Time Again

The ninth annual Navy Occupational Safety and Health Professional Development Conference is tentatively scheduled for April 9-13, 2001 at the

DoubleTree Hotel in San Diego's Mission Valley. It will be open to all Navy and Marine Corps safety managers, safety officers and industrial hygienists, and will feature exhibits as well as training sessions.

The first day of the conference will be claimant meetings, with general sessions on the second and third days. The last two days of the conference will consist of professional-development training seminars.

If you have any questions about exhibits, contact Terri Mosteller at (757) 445-8878, Ext. 310 (DSN



565), or e-mail her at terrimosteller@cnet.navy.mil. For questions or comments on the conference, contact Jim Denyes, the conference coordinator. He can be reached at (757) 445-8878, Ext. 327

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The Navy Occupational Safety, Health, and Environmental Training Center has a web site: <http://www.norva.navy.mil/navosh/pdcpres.htm>. Visit it for information about the conference held in Norfolk last winter. In the near future, you will be able to view a complete agenda of the San Diego conference in April and register online for that one. ❏