

Fame and

A Glance at Safety Successes and

Ladder safety: How soon they forget! Shipboard Sailors too often take ladders for granted and go up and down them in all manners, including occasionally grabbing the “monkey bar” when they’re two-thirds of the way down, then swinging to land on the deck.

☛ If you don’t always hold onto both handrails, maybe the case of the Sailor who had to have five steel pins temporarily inserted into his wrist because of a ladder mishap will convert you. He was descending a ladder when his right foot slipped as he stepped down, and he lost his balance. He grabbed a rail with his right hand, but his left hand apparently balled into a fist and it hit the overhead (one wonders if he was holding onto either ladder rail when he initially started down). This hit rotated his wrist and gave him a sharp pain. A corpsman wrapped the wrist and gave the Sailor medication, but pain persisted for two days so he returned to sick bay.

Further examination determined the crew member had fractured his wrist; he was transferred to another ship where an orthopedic surgeon inserted the pins. Doctors don’t predict any permanent disability for the Sailor, but his pain and surgery could have been avoided had he used both handrails when he stepped onto that ladder.

☛ Speaking of ladders: Use them when they’re available. One impatient Sailor couldn’t wait and paid a dear price. He and three shipmates had completed training in a forward diesel classroom and were exiting the space. Three of the Sailors used a ladder but momentarily had to wait for a stores breakout in the ladder’s vicinity. The fourth Sailor decided he would speed up his exit by using an emergency-escape scuttle. He ended up falling 35 feet into a forward JP-5 pumphouse where he was found unconscious. He also was bleeding from four lacerations to his head, which required 18 stitches. He bruised his face and back, and had no memory of events leading

to the fall. Don’t use an emergency escape scuttle because you’re in a hurry, or because the ladder you were going to use is crowded with activity which temporarily might delay your transit.

☛ Sailors’ pet peeves probably would be Cinderella liberty, working parties, and yard periods. Yard periods undoubtedly would be at the top of that list. While Sailors might loathe having their ship on keel blocks while workers cut, scrape, weld, and hammer away—overhauls, nonetheless, are accepted as necessary evils since they give a ship a period for refurbishment. Yard periods bring with them increased hazards because shipyards are such intense, industrial environments. Yet, despite its dangers, an overhaul and all its inconveniences quickly can become routine with Sailors unwittingly letting down their guard. This can result in injury or even death.

Take, for instance, the PO1 who was exiting his second-deck berthing compartment through a scuttle, when he shocked himself. The scuttle handle crew members normally grabbed when exiting the compartment had been removed during the overhaul. However, there were some pipes and an electrical cable running across the deck by the scuttle and Sailors had been grabbing them all to pull themselves out of the compartment. The cable had been used so much as a handle that its insulation had worn, and the mishap victim was the unlucky one to be the first to grab the exposed, “hot” wire. After receiving his jolt, he immediately reported to medical and, fortunately, was found fit for duty. Meanwhile, the scuttle handle was quickly replaced. Be especially alert when your ship is in the yards because unseen hazards exist there, along with the obvious ones. You are the person ultimately responsible for avoiding injury to yourself. Never lower your guard, and always maintain situational awareness.

☛ Situational awareness was certainly lacking when a young Sailor was tasked with cleaning a

Pain

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Shortcomings Throughout the Fleet

ladder well. The seaman apprentice meant well but never should have used oven cleaner on a ladder well. As she sprayed the cleaner, she accidentally got some on herself. The oven cleaner began to irritate and burn her skin, so she went to sick bay for treatment. Fortunately, she suffered no serious injury or permanent disfigurement. Two mistakes occurred here: The Sailor should have been familiar with her cleaning agent she was about to use (actually, she should have known oven cleaner is not used to clean ladder wells), and she wasn't wearing proper protective clothing. Poor supervision contributed to the mishap, since her supervisor should have educated her about using the appropriate cleaner for the task at hand.

• Sometimes machinery can get the better of you if you're not paying attention. Take the Sailor who wasn't concentrating on her work and lost her situational awareness while buffing a deck. The buffer's power cord wrapped around her leg and pulled her off balance, causing her to fall onto her buttocks and right side. Although only soreness and bruises resulted, it could have been worse had she fallen onto a protruding fitting, hatch coaming, or other sharp object.

• Not all hazards are physical or visible. In this situation, shipyard workers were cutting into a CHT pumproom discharge pipe when residual sewage spilled from the pipe. A pipe blockage had prevented draining the sewage earlier. A Sailor in the CHT shop heard the alarm and quickly responded, coming into contact with the sewage and breathing its toxic vapors when arriving on the spill scene. He managed to call DC central, and a member of the ship's flying squad responded and was dressed in correct PPE, including wearing a self-contained breathing apparatus. Unfortunately, he stood underneath the pipe spewing the sewage and became covered with it. Both he and his shipmate, who inhaled some of the toxic gases, reported to medical for checkups—both were found fit for duty.

Not only does sewage give off toxic gases, but it also can cause hepatitis if you come into contact with it. Never enter a potentially toxic space until given the OK by a gas-free engineer. Always wear required protective equipment, whether it's a special suit for working with sewage or something as simple as approved electrical gloves when working with energized equipment.

• Mishaps don't take place just aboard ship. Even something as fun and seemingly harmless as snowboarding can result in injury—as one West Coast-based Sailor found out. During weekend liberty at a California ski resort, the Sailor was snowboarding down a mountain late in the evening after a full day of activity, when the front of the snowboard caught something and dug itself into the snow. The snowboard's forward motion stopped but the Sailor's didn't. He lost control and tumbled forward, hitting his head in the snow. The mishap report indicated the impact rendered him unconscious, and he tumbled uncontrollably down the mountain. A ski patrol found him with injuries, including scrapes to his head and two twisted ankles. When he regained consciousness, he could not walk. The ski patrol administered primary first aid and transferred the Sailor to Balboa Naval Hospital. The hospital exam and X-rays showed no serious head trauma, but he did break his left ankle bone. Most sports require PPE—the Sailor was lucky in not suffering any serious head trauma, but he should have worn a helmet.

Think about potential risks involved in what you're about to do, whether you're aboard ship or at home, on liberty or on leave. Never underestimate mishap potential, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant a task might be—don't take anything for granted. When learning a profession, experience is a great and valued teacher, but no one wants to experience pain. Don't let a bad work or play habit become a "painful" teacher. ☹