

By *Ens. Andrew R. Harris,*  
*USS Samuel B. Roberts*

**H**urricane seasons and bad weather pose risks to ships, whether the ships are underway or pierside. Put a ship in dry dock, up on keel blocks during Florida's unpredictable, hurricane-prone late summer and early fall months, and risks are compounded.

It's challenging enough when, during a dry-dock period, shipboard hazards are multiplied because hatches, ladders, and tank tops are removed. Increasing mishap potential are shipyard material, equipment, and workers. Even with preparation and safety-awareness training, a dry-docked ship's crew must be extra vigilant during hurricane season and thunderstorms.

USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58) completed a Jacksonville, Fla., dry-dock period that lasted throughout the hurricane season. Besides preparing for expected dry-dock hazards, the ship also readied for unexpected, nasty, seasonal storms that could pop up. Being safety-oriented before going up on keel blocks, *Sammuel B. Roberts* and her crew emphasized risk awareness with daily walk-throughs, and each crew member regularly reaffirmed his role in preventing mishaps.

The ship's executive officer, LCdr. Chris Thomas, said, "From early on, we emphasized our policy that every crew member is a safety observer, every petty officer is a safety petty offi-

# Docking Availability, Bad Weather *Are a* Tough Combination



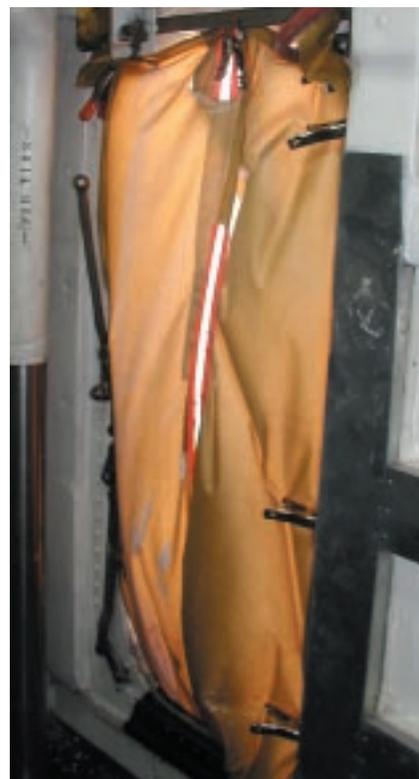
cer, and every officer is a safety officer.”

Among potential hazards requiring constant attention were hatches and doors: Many had been removed for repair or were kept open for ventilation and hose passage. This situation could have been a big problem during an afternoon downpour since each opening could have been an area where water could have entered. To fight this possibility, relatively simple but effective actions were initiated.

Smoke curtains were hung amidships where port and starboard doors had been removed. They kept rain out of the passageways and other unprotected spaces. Another potential danger existed where an escape scuttle to auxiliary machinery room 2 was removed to allow for ventilation and lowering hoses into the space. Contractors had placed a wooden cover over the opening to prevent anyone from falling through it, but rain easily could have entered the space, so a dam was placed around the opening.

While planned dams can keep water out of a space, people sometimes unknowingly can create dams that lead to unwanted water buildup. For instance, after removing the ship’s lifelines, contractors replaced them with plywood, which created a funnel and a dam around the entire ship. Ship’s force cut holes in the wood to allow for runoff and to avoid trapping water on the deck.

Storms also bring perils other than rain. Wind can blow open lockers and tool cabinets, and can rip away canopies, awnings, and brow skirts. During the ship’s dry-dock period, an 02-level storage locker was blown open and it



To keep rainwater and storms from entering openings where doors and hatches had been removed for maintenance, *Samuel B. Roberts’* Sailors used smoke curtains and other suitable material to cover the openings and keep the ship’s interior dry.

filled with water. On the dry dock’s wall, a large tool cabinet was blown over. Neither incident resulted in injury or damaged equipment, but each represented the dangers in failing to prepare for high winds. Besides, any time objects 50 feet above the ground interact with the earth’s gravity while people are below, you had better take the situation seriously because a real threat exists.

Despite its vigilance and situational awareness, the crew never forgot unpleasant surprises can happen when combining an overhaul with stormy weather. During hurricane season, you always must consider weather, prepare for the worst, and take extra measures to avoid mishaps, particularly when a ship rests on blocks in dry dock. Be prepared beforehand—don’t wait until high winds or a hurricane are imminent before you attempt to decide what to do. 🌀