

# If You Think Hazing

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A young Navy airman recruit entered service in 1987, excited about completing the Navy's SAR School that candidates must take to become a rescue swimmer. A few months later, though, in what some described as an illegal hazing incident, the Sailor died when he ran out of strength and air, with instructors allegedly holding him underwater. The other members of his class, meanwhile, were ordered to turn around and place their backs to the pool, then sing the national anthem while standing at attention.

In late 1994, a total of 18 Sailors from two Norfolk-based ships appeared at non-judicial proceedings for their involvement in unrelated hazing incidents aboard the two ships. Six Sailors aboard the one ship were disciplined for assault, which resulted in one of two victims requiring four days' hospitalization for deep leg bruises. The second victim required one day's bed rest. Aboard the other ship, the lone victim escaped without any injuries that required treatment, but the eight junior Sailors who assaulted him were disciplined.

A hazing incident the following year involved a young Sailor who was the victim of a "tacking on" after receiving his silver dolphins warfare insignia. When leadership in his command noticed his dolphins were bent, an investigation was started, but the victim declined to identify the shipmates involved.

According to the investigation report, the victim was subjected to undue pressure to reveal who was responsible. Then-CNO Adm. Jay Johnson said in his endorsement, "The chain of command was responsible for this pressure." The victim subsequently took his own life. At that



This kind of behavior isn't just unacceptable in today's Navy—it's illegal.

point, Adm. Johnson directed the chief of naval personnel to issue guidance in properly handling victims of hazing and other forms of harassment.

This kind of behavior became taboo in August 1997, when then-Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton issued an order prohibiting hazing. Navy leadership today continue to take SecNav Instruction 1610.2 (Department of the Navy Policy on Hazing) seriously. Twice in 2004, Commander Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, VAdm. Timothy LaFleur, reminded commanders and commanding officers under him to get out the word that hazing won't be tolerated.

# Is OK, Think Again!



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His most recent reminder described reports from various levels of verbal abuse, unwarranted physical contact and restraint. "Whether they are called initiations, 'welcome to the division' parties, or otherwise," said VAdm. LaFleur, "they all constitute hazing in one form or another. Investigations indicate there still is a prevailing attitude that as long as everything is consensual, it is OK. This is not OK and is an attitude that needs to change..."

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"...Hazing and horseplay can and have resulted in serious physical injury or death... In addition to the unwarranted physical and verbal acts, hazing is demoralizing in nature and undermines military readiness by alienating its victims and discouraging them through fear, shame or reprisal from reporting the injustice that has occurred to them. Unwillingness to participate in hazing or horseplay can place a Sailor in a difficult position within his or her environment.

"I am very pleased with the actions of commands who have identified hazing and the actions they have taken," noted VAdm. LaFleur. "Continue to take pro-active and timely action against participants and responsible bystanders in cases

you discover. Re-engage your khaki leadership to communicate persistently that hazing, no matter how minor, is unacceptable behavior that undermines a healthy command climate. Effective enforcement of the rules and pointed education, training and professionalism continue to be the key elements in preventing hazing. With your active engagement and personal involvement, we can make our fleet hazing-free."

Marine Corps Commandant, Gen. Michael W. Hagee, shared similar sentiments in a 2003 message. "Marines are our most precious asset," he said. "I will not tolerate any instance where one Marine inflicts any form of physical or psychological abuse that degrades, insults, dehumanizes, or injures another Marine. We will protect our Marines through fair, scrupulous and unbiased treatment as individuals—caring for them, teaching them, and leading them. It is the obligation of each member in the chain of command to ensure that hazing in any form is not allowed and that Marines are treated, at all times, with genuine dignity, fairness and respect."

And, finally, there's this note from a Navy CO, "As commanding officer, I am firmly committed to the Department of the Navy's zero-tolerance objective in hazing... It is the responsibility of every Sailor to ensure that hazing does not occur in any form at any level... There is no place for inappropriate and/or unlawful behavior that detracts from the accomplishment of our mission." **S**