

# Back to the Basics

By Cdr. John C. Minners,  
USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71)

We recently finished a 10-and-a-half-month, \$330-million, docked planned incremental availability (DPIA) without a single on- or off-duty Class A or B injury or mishap. How did the crew of 3,600 accomplish this feat? It didn't involve any magic formula. Rather, we simply used tools in the safety toolbox—ones that everybody knew about.

At the beginning of the DPIA, we implemented an aggressive training program, which included presentations on SITE-TV. Many of the Sailors in ship's company never had been through a yard period and, therefore, didn't understand the magnitude of potential new hazards they would be exposed to daily.

The crew knew about operational risk management (ORM), though, and we applied it to everything during the DPIA. When Sailors first walked into the hangar bay of our ship, they saw two huge banners. One read, "Our mission is to deliver our ship by 17 Dec, so we can go out and kick dirt-ball, dirt-bag Al Qeida terrorist butt." The other banner read, "Ask yourself throughout the workday: 1. What is going to hurt me? 2. What am I going to do about it? 3. If I can't do anything, who do I tell? Operational risk management at NNSY."

Our mission in the yards was to deliver our ship back to the fleet, but we had to do it safely. We stressed risk management at all levels of the crew, as well as with the shipyard and contractor personnel working on board. The crew always was ready for challenges after using in-depth and deliberate ORM. At execution time, we carried out the plans in a "world class" manner, using operational-excellence principles, on-the-fly risk management, and time-critical risk mitigation.

All hands aboard USS *Theodore Roosevelt* took pride in a job well done, and the leadership recognized them regularly for it during our DPIA. The CO and shipyard superintendent in charge of the *Theodore*



*Roosevelt* project hosted "Rough Rider of the Week" Award ceremonies in the hangar bay. Each awards ceremony recognized a Sailor and shipyard worker in the propulsion arena, a Sailor and shipyard worker in a non-propulsion arena, and a contractor who had exhibited exceptional work all week. The CO and superintendent then covered injuries from the previous week and discussed how the use of ORM could keep them from recurring.

All levels—department heads, departmental leading chiefs, khaki leaders, and engaged senior petty officers—used intrusive leadership to ensure the welfare of our Sailors. The payoff was fewer injuries, coupled with the ship's winning the Retention Excellence and Golden Anchor Awards. The CO regularly got on the 1MC for "Atta Sailors," where he commended jobs well done, then discussed safety and risk management. A top-down culture of safety was and is the driving force behind our successful program.

The ship's safety department integrated fully with the Norfolk Naval Shipyard safety department during our DPIA. This relationship ensured a good flow of information and helped solve both ship's force and shipyard safety issues. It also increased the number of personnel on the safety team.

When incidents or close calls occurred, the shipyard held a critique—a non-retributive investigation, which culminated in a formal hearing. Senior leadership from the ship, the shipyard, and any involved contractors always attended. The involved personnel and immediate supervisors discussed what had happened, and the group then came up with recommendations to

prevent recurrences. These sessions provided numerous improvements to training programs, procedures, and work-integration processes. In most cases, communications improved, too. Because this project involved thousands of people, communications was one of our biggest problems.

Sailors always wore personal protective equipment (PPE), including hard hats and safety goggles, throughout our yard period. During such jobs as grinding, painting, and needle-gunning, they also regularly wore other required types of PPE (e.g., gloves, respirators and protective suits). And, while the hot summer months became rather uncomfortable, considering the limited air-conditioning available, we never relaxed the policy. Our leadership continued to aggressively enforce the PPE requirements.

Near the end of the DPIA, when the amount of industrial work had decreased significantly, the ship could have relaxed PPE requirements. The choices were to stop wearing PPE, to develop a policy on specific instances when it would be required, or to keep wearing it all the time. Because some risk remained from sporadic industrial work throughout the ship, we opted for the most conservative—but extremely unpopular—approach and kept all hands wearing PPE.

By far, the toughest area to influence was off-duty safety, specifically motor-vehicle safety. Intrusive leadership again came to the forefront. We required our Sailors to fill out driving risk assessments before going on leave. During our pre-holiday safety stand-down, half the time was spent in small groups, performing

Navy photo by PH3 Danielle Trevant



ORM exercises. One dealt with driving home on leave and another with an on-duty stores on-load scenario. After completing these exercises, the groups answered questions and took quizzes.

Two *Theodore Roosevelt* crew members who are qualified as Motorcycle Safety Foundation instructors led the ship's aggressive motorcycle-safety program. They proctored the required motorcycle-safety classes for the crew, which greatly increased class availability and ensured the classes were given during the best times in the ship's schedule.

Last summer, the ship hosted a riding get-together in the shipyard parking lot for *Theodore Roosevelt* motorcyclists on National Ride-to-Work Day. Festivities included discussions, demonstrations and exercises on riding safety and techniques. Many senior

*Theodore Roosevelt* leaders who ride and promote proper riding safety attended the event.

No one “silver bullet” exists to promote safety. It requires a top-down culture, and leadership at all levels must stay fully engaged. The shipyard is a loud, hot, dynamic environment to work in, but major mishaps can be prevented. ■

*The author is the ship's safety officer.*

Navy photo by PH2 Larry Hess



The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) transits the Elizabeth River.