

# The Outtake on This Uptake Is That There Was a **Big** Mistake

**A** million dollars recently went up in smoke aboard a Navy gas-turbine ship that was underway for what was to have been routine, pre-deployment work-ups. That's what it cost to repair the ship when unauthorized stowage of combustible material near a heat source in the ship's No. 1 uptake resulted in a pre-dawn fire.

An observant bridge team and quick response by the ships' fire party combined to limit damage to the forward uptake space and its immediate surrounding area.

Bridge watchstanders had first smelled smoke and noticed sparks shooting from the forward stacks at 0430. They immediately called away the fire party and sounded general quarters. GQ was set at 0436, and the fire party reported the fire

out and the reflash watch set at 0454—a mere 24 minutes after the fire initially was discovered.

The subsequent investigation revealed unauthorized stowage of combustible material in the uptake had been going on for some time. This problem is not limited to this ship—unauthorized material stowage in uptakes is endemic to Navy ships throughout the fleet. Aboard this ship, the combustible material included manila and nylon line and miscellaneous deck-department equipment (deck owned the uptake space).

Ironically, a previous zone-inspection report had noted this material was stowed in the uptake. Yet, no specific discrepancy documented that the material was unauthorized for uptake stowage.

Investigators determined key personnel were unaware of the requirements in paragraph 555-10.3.1 of NSTM 555, Vol. 1, Surface Ship Fire-fighting. The publication mandates that the engineer, his principal assistants, or the fire marshal regularly and frequently should inspect uptakes to make sure they are not used as storerooms for combustible materials. Those inspection results are to be reported.

Meanwhile, you need to ask yourself how your ship would fare in a similar situation. Here are some points to ponder—they are part of the lessons-learned from this million-dollar mishap:



Looking from the main deck to the top of the stacks, one can see the extent of the uptake fire aboard this ship. Repairs cost \$1 million. *(Naval Safety Center photo)*



In both photos, improperly stowed combustible material in the uptake spaces is clearly visible. Such improper stowage habits are common throughout the fleet.



- Is your ship's damage-control training effective, and could your fire party respond quickly and extinguish an intense fire in the early morning hours while the ship is underway? This ship's crew set general quarters, secured affected equipment, maneuvered to control smoke and flames, and extinguished the fire within 24 minutes from the time the fire was detected.

- What drives the ownership of spaces on board your ship? Do space assignments make sense? Are personnel who own spaces familiar with the hazards and required precautions associated with equipment stowed in their spaces and with the space in general?

- Are your ship's designated zone inspectors experienced and knowledgeable enough to identify discrepancies and recommend their resolution? Zone inspections offer an opportunity to scrutinize spaces and the equipment in them. Maximum benefits can be reaped from these inspections only if the most qualified personnel are leading them.

- When you pass solutions to discrepancies to the responsible division, are the recommendations realistic? Do you track discrepancies and make sure they are taken care of in a timely manner?

- Does your shipboard training program include a regular review of key instructions, notices, and other written guidance, and are individuals designated to track and incorporate updates? CD ROMs and Internet access have greatly improved the availability of up-to-date instructions and technical documentation, but accessibility to this documentation has not kept pace with that availability. Some ships have a required-reading notebook, which combines this documentation with night orders to assure written publications are reviewed regularly .

Merely addressing these questions won't, by itself, guarantee success. However, building on the lessons learned from this million-dollar lesson significantly can reduce the potential for overlooking existing requirements, and, through knowledge and situational awareness, your crew will identify hazards before they lead to a mishap.

The Navy cannot afford expensive repair bills—whether measured in dollars like the one for this ship, or in human resources, such as injury or loss of life. 🌐