

# Things Aren't Always As Simple As They Appear

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“It was just a stupid accident! I was rushing to get down from the flight deck to the hangar bay for an emergency, slipped on the ladder, and jammed my finger. When I was finished with what I was doing, I went to medical, but, if I’d known I had to fill out all this paperwork, I never would have gone.”

I heard that complaint recently. It’s just one of many I’ve listened to since reporting aboard as the ship’s industrial hygiene officer. My response is always the same: “We investigate every injury, no matter how small, to look for contributing factors we can correct to prevent a recurrence.”

Of course, I realize that statement probably doesn’t mean much to the guys on the deckplates who are just trying to do their jobs. They don’t see the statistics that cross my desk. One month, for example, every injury treated by one of our corpsmen translated into about 10 days of reduced operational ability. Why? Because the victim was assigned to limited or light duty. To the guys on the deckplates, in divisions that already are undermanned, this problem means an increased workload.

Most mishaps could have been prevented—including the one described in the opening paragraph. In that example, it appeared the problem was just a matter of the guy’s feet going faster than the rest of his body, but our investigation revealed otherwise. We found the ladder’s handrail loose. When the victim grabbed it to wheel around and get down the next ladder, the handrail shifted. He lost his balance and footing and jammed his finger as he



Injuries like this can be prevented if we learn everything we can from them.

caught himself on the back of the ladder.

I investigated another mishap where Halon had discharged into the faces of two shipmates while they were checking the handline on a P-16 firefighting vehicle. The short-term answer was to point the nozzle away from their faces and down wind. However, further investigation showed there is no way to tell if the handline has residual pressure without actually opening the nozzle.

Even small mishaps can be prevented if we spend a little time to learn everything we can from the past. *The author’s e-mail address is seal@enterprise.navy.mil.*