



Illustration by DM1(AW) Eulogio Devera, USS *Nimitz*

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Sailors often take their working, living, or liberty environments for granted and don't think about potential consequences of their actions (or inactions!). For instance, the last time you ventured down a pier to get to your ship and saw a crane operating, did you wear a hard hat? Cranes are critical support equipment found on just about any pier where Navy ships are moored: They might be civilian or Navy cranes, a shipboard crane, pedestal or traveling cranes—you name it.

Many are guilty: We see the crane and meander around it. By chance but certainly not from habit, we might look up and notice the crane has a load dangling from its hook; we then go around the load by what we determine to be an acceptable berth, and carry on. Unfortunately, the manner in which we carry on isn't always smart, and it's sometimes dangerous!

A Hard Head Is Not an Authorized Substitute for a Hard Hat

We should all know—common sense dictates it—hard hats with chin straps are required in the vicinity of all crane operations. Why do we ignore the requirement? Have we fallen victim to the it-won't-happen-to-me syndrome? When we see a crane, do we say to ourselves, “I'm only going to be there for a second,” or “I'm just passing through, so I don't need a hard hat”?

Reality check: Gravity's downward force is about 32.15 feet per second/squared. That fact means a falling pallet of sodas or a box of paintbrushes will move much faster than you can and ultimately will ring your chimes.

One common thought is, “Why bother wearing a hard hat if the load weight is so great it will kill me anyway?” Answer: The hard hat will direct your head away from a falling load's force so you have a better chance of surviving. Your chance of surviving without a hard hat is almost zero.

Sailors have many excuses for not wearing hard hats: They reek of sweat, they mess up one's hair, and they make the forehead break out in acne, to name a few. You name an excuse, and we've probably heard it. Unfortunately, excuses in the Navy are not like hard hats: We rely on excuses to “save” us in embarrassing situations; we're not so quick to use a hard hat, even though it might save us from serious injury or even death.

We need to rethink our invincibility and admit that, yes—it can happen to me, and no—you really can't move that fast. Gravity doesn't care who you are or how fast you think you can move. Gravity keeps the planets in orbit around the sun and literally can bring your world crashing down upon your tender cranium.

Remember, a hard head is not an authorized substitute for a hard hat. ☹

The author was stationed aboard USS Frank Cable, homeported in Guam, when he wrote this article.