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Learning the Ropes

A detailed guide to getting the job done as the ASO

By LTJG Patrick Grumley

Your XO tells you you've become the afloat safety officer (ASO). You'll likely get an abysmal turnover as most safety programs afloat are under-scrutinized and lack proper oversight. In fact, odds are it was previously managed by the operations officer (OPS) — who had little time to send off Web-Enabled Safety System (WESS) reports with minimal bandwidth all the while scheduling UNREPs and pier services — or a first-tour division officer (DIVO) on the last month of their tour. I'm sure they care about fixing safety walkthroughs more than their impending move to Hawaii. Stereotypes aside, you are now the officer in charge of safety and you have been tasked with fixing the program.

So, where to start? First off, the *Navy Safety and Occupational Health Program Manual* (OPNAVINST 5100.19E) is your bible. If you open to the portion detailing the responsibilities of the safety officer you will likely discover a number of things you haven't heard during your tenure at sea. Compile a "List of Things I'm Curious About" at the very beginning of your time as ASO. Nobody will blame you if you bring up a non-functional program or record your first week on the job (six months in is another story). Once you have your list in hand, visit the Naval Safety Center (NSC) web site. Spend a couple of hours perusing what the site has to

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offer. Nine times out of 10, you can find an answer to any questions — their entire job is safety.

Now that your list is complete, bring it to the XO or the safety officer and state four things:

1. The program/requirement,
2. The issue with the program/requirement,
3. What the program should look like, and
4. How you intend to fix it.

The cornerstone of any effective program in the Navy remains knowing the requirement, the status of your system, and being able to articulate the path to fixing it. Now that you have a reasonable grasp on what you have to do, here are some tips to getting there.

Accountability

If you aren't a fan of administration, safety will not be any fun for you — sorry. The 5100.19 requires you to keep a number of documents on-hand for often two or three years. If you weren't at least turned over these binders, ask the XO to sign a memorandum for the record detailing what items you no longer have on file. It will likely still be a discrepancy on an inspection, but at least it will prove that you knew you were required to have a given record before the inspector is shaking his head at you.

Safety walkthroughs are paramount to knowing the safety status of the ship. Each surface ship division must have a safety petty officer (SPO) and an alternate or at least a second petty officer standing by in the hopper or prospective gains list. When they do their walkthroughs each week, compile them in an electronic document that includes any discrepancies that weren't immediately resolved. The discrepancies should be entered in the organizational and maintenance management system-next generation (OMMS-NG) and be noted as a safety issue in the job sequence number. This will help you identify trends — more on that later.

Pick a random division each week and conduct a silent spot check (don't tell them about it). If you can't find anything glaringly obvious, division members at least did the diligence of walking their spaces. If you do find discrepancies, talk with that SPO and make sure he or she knows how to conduct walkthroughs and what to look for. Ideally, you gave them some initial training when they joined

your SPO force. If a walkthrough is unsatisfactory a second time, get their chain of command involved. We all know how much chiefs love hearing from DIVOs from another department or division.

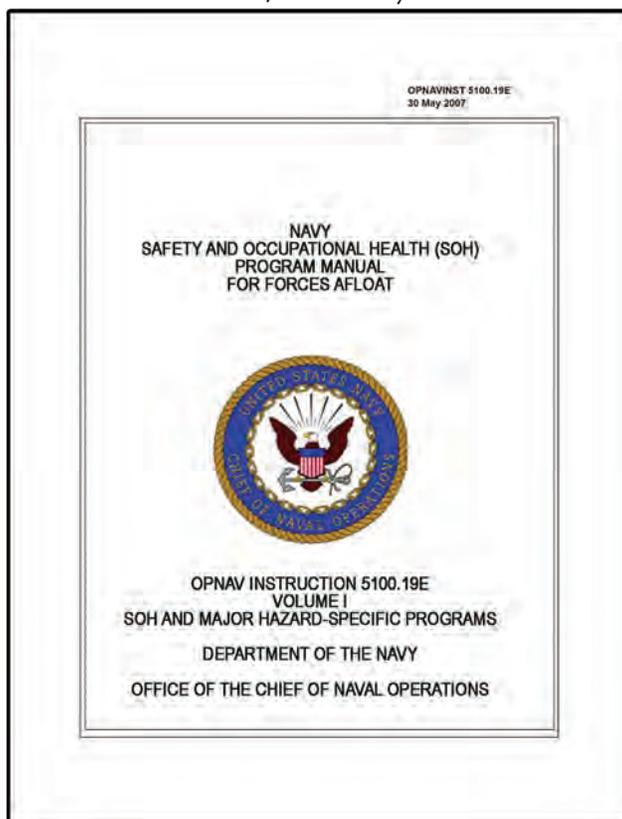
If walkthroughs just aren't happening, here is the system that worked well for me. Walkthroughs were due on Tuesday. If they weren't turned in by taps, the senior SPO (“First Class Petty Officer Squared Away”) would alert the LPOs of that division to have them turned in by dinner on Wednesday. If I still didn't have them by dinner, I would email their DIVOs stating their division was delinquent in safety for the week in a single email. The basic fact that other DIVOs know about a discrepancy in their division is usually motivation enough to get the walkthrough turned in. Soon you'll be at 100 percent accountability.

Training

Your governing instructions make it very clear about the importance of training — it's a top priority. Navy training is too often a display of a confused petty officer reading a training guide they've never seen before in front of a group of people that couldn't care less about what he or she has to say. If you aren't careful, this could be your safety training. Make it a point to get experts involved in creating the lesson guides or PowerPoint. The representatives from each division are great resources for diverse topics. If you have outdated training, have one of your SPO experts update the lesson guide. Let them be as creative as possible and use examples from other ships. Let's face it: safety can be a bit dry.

Speaking of other ships, hold continual additional training on other ships' mishaps which are relevant to divisions on your ship. Training is always more interesting to Sailors if it is relatable to their day-to-day operations. This training will help you accomplish the trend analysis component mentioned earlier. By training your Sailors on mishaps, the Navy is learning from its mistakes.

Lastly, put out your training topic schedule a year in advance, if possible, and standardize your schedule (example: OPS Department has training the third Thursday of every month at 0900). Also, put your



departmental and divisional topic in the Plan of the Day so nobody is surprised by their topic for the week.

Standdowns

If you can't make a safety standdown at least moderately interesting, nobody will listen. Nobody really cares that there were however many Christmas tree fires last year. Showing the video of how fast a dry Christmas tree starts a house on fire, however, is captivating and memorable. The NSC website has a surfeit of pictures and diagrams for your use. Also, *YouTube* is never short on "safety don'ts" videos.

Moreover, you don't have to do the standdown yourself. It is better to set up small group stations with different topics than hold a giant standdown on the flight deck. The Sailors will be more engaged, and you can get your experts to hold the training.

Sailors might not realize it, but they can probably quote just about any poster you find in the p-ways. To create a culture of safety, take advantage of the posters you'll receive as safety officer and hand out any pamphlets. If you don't have any, once again, visit the NSC web site.

Mishaps

One of the last aspects of an effective safety program is mishap reporting. When I was receiving turnover

from the last ASO, I was told that I needed a WESS account and OPS would tell me if I needed to fill out a report. The following week OPS asked me if a certain situation required a report – I told him I'd find out. I scoured more than 200 pages of the mishap reporting instruction to verify the answer was no. I was two months into managing my program when I discovered the "Is it Reportable?" PowerPoint on the NSC web site. It should clear up any questions you have on whether or not to do a WESS or AMHRS (Afloat Mishap Hazard Reporting System) report. When in doubt, report it. Make sure you know all the types of mishaps and the affiliated report that is required.

If a mishap has occurred, get as much information as possible. If a Sailor was injured, talk to your independent duty corpsman as soon as possible and get a copy of the injury report. Just the same as when you were the investigating officer on a preliminary inquiry, interview any personnel surrounding the recent incident. It is unlikely you will provide too much information. Of course, be sensitive when discussing tragic or difficult events.

I hope my experience as ASO will help you get your safety program started on the right foot. **SC**

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LTJG Grumley is the assistant safety officer aboard USS Shoup (DDG 86).

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U.S. Navy photo by PH2 William R. Heimbuch

ONLINE RESOURCES

Naval Safety Center

<http://www.public.navy.mil/comnavsafecen/pages/index.aspx>

WESS Online Reporting

<http://www.public.navy.mil/comnavsafecen/pages/wess/WESS.aspx>