

# Unsafe Safe

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It sounds contradictory, but an unsafe safe is exactly what my squadron had during a recent underway detachment. It began months ago during deck certification. Our avionics shop realized it needed a larger, ready-room safe to store some equipment, since their shop safe wasn't authorized to stow cryptographic items.

The ship was notified, and we were told the smaller, avionics-shop safe could be removed and swapped with the larger safe in the ready-room. The job of swapping safes appeared easier than anyone thought it would be.

We came back aboard for a Tailored Ship's Training Availability, and the safes had not yet been moved as planned. Right now, each time the ATs needed something from their larger safe, they had to retrieve it from the ready-room: It became a big hassle.

We notified the ship and were again told the safes would be swapped. We even got a work order number. Though still hesitant to celebrate, we nonetheless were confident the work soon would be done.

Alas! When we returned aboard for another exercise, the safes still had not been moved! When asking why and mentioning the work order number, we were told the job was cancelled. We now were irate and called everyone we could think of to expedite moving the safes. We even called the CMS custodian, who said he didn't own the safe and that we should call the division whose name was on it. The battle lasted for the entire exercise.

We then came aboard for a joint task-force exercise, and the safes still were not swapped! By now we had had enough and—yes—we ripped the small safe out of the avionics shop (it wasn't hard because it was mounted to the deck with only a few small bolts). The safe in the ready room was a different story—it weighed almost 400 pounds,



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas

and the shop where we were taking it was down a ladder, through a long passageway, then up another ladder. We called the ship's 1st Division to ask for help to move the safe, so he sent two people with a dolly.

While encouraging, it wasn't good enough. We had no idea how to move this thing with the available equipment. We called everyone in the ship's directory who could possibly advise us on swapping these safes. We were willing to do it ourselves but just wanted to know how. Phone calls again proved futile, and with everyone becoming impatient, we finally decided to use some line and just get the job done.

We moved the big safe out of the ready room and up to the flight deck to avoid all the knee-knockers. But we still had to go up one ladder and down another to get the big safe to the avionics shop. Unfortunately, within five minutes after the moving party left with the safe, one of the Sailors returned to the ready room to tell the staff duty officer he was going to medical. Apparently, the plan was to lift the safe with a couple of guys and some line, but the line slipped, and the 400-pound safe fell on the man's fingers. Luckily, no fingers were broken, but one was badly lacerated and required heavy bandaging.

Had we used more ORM and less emotion, we would have recognized our impatience and ambition as a dangerous combination. In the end, the safe ended up in the avionics shop—as planned—but we unnecessarily injured one of our Sailors. Considering the weight and bulk of what we were moving, we were just plain lucky his injury wasn't worse. ☹️

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