

When Does Drinking Become— or Create—a Problem?



By LCdr. Tom Binner,
Naval Safety Center

As with all mishaps, a chain of events leads to the result. In December 2000, a Sailor stationed in a DD found out the hard way when drinking became hazardous to his health.

He departs the ship on a sunny Saturday morning on what was to be a day of normal liberty. During the course of the day, he goes shopping at the Navy Exchange, eats lunch, talks with shipmates on base, and the like. Evening approaches and he goes to one of the BEQs to visit a friend. While at his friend's room, he has a few drinks. Evening turned to night and the sailor and friend decide to go to the EM club to "socialize." After socializing and two to three drinks later, the Sailor and friend are in the mood to go out in town.

Night turns to early morning. The Sailor and a group of friends socialize some more at the local establishments. About 0200, our Sailor decides he has had enough liberty for one night and walks back to the ship. It's a warm night for December, in the mid-to upper 50s, clear skies, and an almost full moon. After requesting permission to come aboard and presenting his ID card, our shipmate proceeds aft on the port main deck and enters the ship through a

QAWTD. Instead of going below to his berthing, he goes to the flight deck. Little does the Sailor realize, however, that two flight-deck safety nets have been removed at the after end of the flight deck.

During the day, the two flight-deck safety nets had been removed to allow maintenance on the torpedo strike-down device. The maintenance person had become distracted over other daily events and had forgotten to reinstall the flight-deck safety nets. Around 0230 our shipmate walks across the dark flight deck, doesn't see the missing flight-deck safety nets, and falls from the flight deck to the missile deck. The topside rover finds the mishap victim unconscious, calls for assistance, and our shipmate is transported to a naval hospital, then on to a civilian neurological hospital. Our shipmate was in a coma until January 2001, and although he came out of it, he is permanently disabled and has been medically retired.

The Sailor did not show outward signs of having had too much to drink. He did not stagger or slur his speech when he crossed the quarterdeck; however he had a blood alcohol level of .19 three hours after his fall.

This tragic mishap has affected the lives of all on board his ship. He was a good Sailor and a friend to many.

How many more shipmates will we lose this year during "social events"? Why should we care? "Drinking alcohol is legal," you say.

Here are a few reasons why we should care. Heavy drinking can cause weight gain, high blood pressure, cancer, liver disease, heart and respiratory failures. It can cause family and money problems. It affects individual pride, along with job performance and reliability.

The bottom line is this: You could lose your job, your family, *and* your life. ☹

The author's e-mail address is
tbinner@safetycenter.navy.mil.



For More Info...

For further guidance refer to *OpNavInst. 5350.4C* of June 29, 1999 (with change 1), Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Control.