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U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

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IMPROVISING

One dictionary defines the word improvise to mean "unprepared"; "to make, provide, or do with the tools and materials at hand, usually to fill an unforeseen and immediate need."

Many old sea stories have been written on how seamen had improvised in emergency situations, such as a ship coming into port with a "jury mast" or "jury rudder."

When proper precautions are not followed, a lot of things can happen, oftentimes they are bad. For example, the deck force was chipping and painting booms and had rigged two pieces of 1" dunnage from a winch to the top of deck cargo, a span of about 6 feet. They used this improvised walkway most of the morning until knocking off for lunch when one of the boards gave way and a seaman fell to the deck several feet. He was seriously injured.

Occasionally, seamen are observed improvising on the job by using a screwdriver in place of a chisel, a wrench instead of a hammer, a box or drum to stand on in lieu of a well secured ladder. This kind of improvising is dangerous and unnecessary. When we start to work with insufficient or incorrect tools or equipment, we are only asking for trouble. Instead of leaving the job to get the proper tools, we attempt to pick up what is handy, and the next thing we have is an accident. Incorrect and unsafe tools are equally bad.

When we recognize the dangers of improvising, then we must put this knowledge to work. Don't take chances, whether it be yourself or a shipmate, as soon as we see improvising on the job it is our duty to stop it at once.

Any form of improvising has no place on a ship where safety and good seamanship are the watchword. Planning ahead will prevent improvising, and remember that no job is so urgent that it can't be performed safely.

Let's leave the "jury rig" for emergencies where a seaman's know-how to improvise may be necessary.

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