



Prevention and Control of Disease: Duties of Commanding Officers and the Senior Officer Present

Introduction

Since 1842, the Chief of the US Navy's [Bureau of Medicine and Surgery](#) (BUMED) has been the administrative head of the Navy's [Medical Department](#) with a duty to define the core duties of its members. Toward that end, the Chief of BUMED has established that the senior Navy Medical Corps officer has a fundamental regulatory duty to advise their commanding officer with respect to conditions affecting the health of their command. When the senior Navy Medical Department Representative (MDR) aboard a Navy ship is a hospital corpsman (HM) assigned to independent duty, this HM also has a fundamental duty to advise their COs similarly. These Navy Medical Department Members can perform their duties best when they understand the duties (i.e. information needs) of their supported COs and other officers to prevent and control disease and to preserve the combat power of their units.

Click [here](#) for information about the **SECNAV-level administrative authority granted to the Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.**

Commanding Officers (CO)

The fundamental duties and responsibilities of all Navy COs related to the prevention and control of disease has been established by the Secretary of the Navy. They are defined in US Navy Regulations, general orders, customs and tradition. All Navy Commanding Officers shall:

- maintain a satisfactory state of health and physical fitness of the personnel under his or her command. See article [0820 of Navy regulations](#) for details. All Navy COs are absolutely responsible for the safety, well-being and efficiency of their entire command, and they may not delegate this responsibility. Their authority is commensurate with their responsibility. See article [0802 of Navy Regulations](#) for more details.
- not allow intercourse with a port, other ships or aircraft, or other areas of operation when doubt exist about the health conditions or sanitary regulations of them until consulting with the local health authorities. See article [0859 of Navy Regulations](#) for details.



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- not conceal any circumstances that may subject a ship of the Navy to quarantine. See article [0859 of Navy Regulations](#) for details.
- foster the high morale of personnel under his command. See [article 0820 of Navy Regulations](#). A crew free of disease and injury is more likely to have high morale.
- periodically inspect the material condition of the command to determine its cleanliness. And, COs shall also periodically inspect the personnel of the command and ensure that they maintain a neat and clean appearance. See [article 0808 of Navy Regulations](#).
- acquaint themselves with, obey and, so far as their authority extends, enforce laws, regulations, and legal orders that are applicable to their duties and to the duties of those they supervise. [See articles 1130 and 1132 of US Navy Regulations](#).
- discharge their duties in conformance with existing laws, orders and regulations. In the absence of specific instructions, they shall act in conformance with service policies and customs. [See article 1130 of US Navy Regulations](#). For example, the CO of the Navy and Marine Corps Public health center has a duty to exercise command and control of his subordinate units. See [BUMEDINST 5450.157B](#) for the requirement.

Commanding officers are authorized to depart from lawful orders or instructions upon their or own judgment and responsibility. See article 0802 of US Navy Regulations for details by clicking [here](#).

Duties of the Senior Officer Present

Whether the senior officer present is the unit's CO or not, these officers have force health protection related duties commensurate with their authority. The senior line officer present in a Navy unit shall obtain information about the medical facilities and capabilities that are available to his or her crew in the unit's area of operations. These officers also shall adopt such measures as are required by the situation to preserve the health of the persons under his or her authority. See [article 0923 of Navy Regulations](#) for the mandate.