

5 buttons that should never have been pressed

400 words

David Shariatmadari, guardian.co.uk, Friday 26 April 2013 14.32 BST

Have you ever pressed a button and regretted it? A French MP recently voted to legalise gay marriage by mistake.

As the world gets increasingly controlled by gadgets, the possibilities for error have become terrifying. Stories of inadvertent email forwards and accidental private photo shares have become common. Sometimes the damage is repairable, but sometimes it isn't.

But pressing the wrong button is not just a hazard for office workers. Here are some of the ways a slip of the finger has sometimes resulted in embarrassment or potentially worse .

A French MP and opponent of gay marriage who so fears the union of same-sex couples he even wrote a book about it managed to vote in favour of it. "There were three buttons flashing, and I pressed the wrong button," he said. Unfortunately he was able to reverse his vote by talking to administrators later.

Last year, a state legislator in North Carolina and anti-fracking campaigner inadvertently made the practice legal by pressing the wrong button while voting at the end of an exhausting day. She wasn't able to rectify the mistake. Oops!

More terrifying was the mistake made by an airline co-pilot on board an All Nippon Airways flight. The captain left the cabin, leaving his colleague in charge. On his return, the co-pilot accidentally flicked the wrong switch. Instead of opening the cockpit door, the plane dived 1900 metres in 30 seconds, but thankfully, no one was seriously injured.

Among the most famous mistakes is that made by a US legislator. He mistakenly tweeted a "sexually suggestive photograph of a man from the waist down, in nothing but underwear". It was assumed to be himself, and was intended as a private communication with a woman friend from Seattle. In spite of this scandal, he is now a candidate for mayor of New York.

Probably the biggest potential button mistake has been with us for much longer. The possibility of unintended nuclear war entered the public consciousness once the US and the Soviet Union decided to put their nuclear missiles on "hair-trigger" launch systems. As yet, no one has accidentally pressed any of those buttons. But fears of accidental war have again surfaced because of growing tensions between North Korea and its immediate neighbours. And if you think this is all a bit exaggerated, just remember that a Soviet satellite malfunction in 1983 nearly turned the Cold War hot.