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U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

FROM THE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG



Breaking the Cycle

I just passed my one-year anniversary here at the USACR/Safety Center, and while I thought I knew a little about safety before, I feel I can finally speak with some authority on the subject! It's been a busy 12 months, and one of the things that's become obvious to me during my various travels is just how many Soldiers we have in home station now. With combat operations in Iraq over and the drawdown continuing in Afghanistan, our installations have come alive with the sounds of early morning cadences and Families enjoying time together. It's great to have our Soldiers home, but we should also be aware that they now face more off-duty risk than perhaps ever before.

Anyone who's been around the Army any length of time knows the cyclic nature of our business, and accidents are no exception. Looking back at more than 30 years of data, accidental fatalities have declined, held steady, jumped unexpectedly, fallen again, stabilized and then increased before repeating the cycle time after time. This proves to me that safety, just like doctrine or tactics, is one of those things you never consider "done." Risk is constantly changing, and we have to evolve along with it.

So here we are in September, prepared to wrap up fiscal 2012 with one of the lowest accidental fatality rates in recent memory. This is an ongoing trend that started in fiscal 2008 and, for the first time ever in our Army's history, we've actually reduced accidental fatalities during sustained combat operations. Great news, no doubt — but what can we do to ensure the cycle of accidental loss doesn't surprise us again, especially now that most of our force is transitioning back to the training environment?

I believe the answer to that question lies in the very foundation of our Army: training, discipline and standards, on the part of both leaders and Soldiers. There is absolutely no distinction between a leader and his or her subordinates regarding these three critical issues; we're all accountable to the Army 24/7, a fact that must be enforced to the lowest levels in our formations. To do so, however, both senior and junior leaders must show more than a passing concern for their Soldiers off duty.

That means leaders have to know their Soldiers, their likes and dislikes, their Family backgrounds, the things that make that Soldier uniquely them. No one expects our leaders to play the part of a psychologist, but the signs of high-risk behavior can become fairly obvious when you get to know a person. It's reasonable to assume a Soldier who likes to push the speed limit in a tactical vehicle might take the same chances in their own vehicle off duty, or the one who thinks personal protective equipment is optional on the job feels the same way on their

motorcycle. Leading Soldiers is never simple, but we don't have to outsmart or manipulate them into showing us their high-risk behavior. It's often right in front of us all along.

This premise is the focus of the USACR/Safety Center's newest campaign, "Know the Signs." Beginning Sept. 4 and running through fiscal 2014, multimedia materials, including posters, videos, fact sheets and feature articles, will be released at least quarterly at <https://safety.army.mil>. Each product is designed to heighten awareness of potential risk factors and help leaders and Soldiers at all levels address the risk before tragedy strikes. This great initiative is sure to resonate with your teams, so please check our website often and let us know how you're using the tools, along with your suggestions for future iterations.

The sight of a thriving installation should fill us all with pride, knowing where these Soldiers have been and all they've been through to make it home. Now we have to make them understand the game isn't over; indiscipline and high-risk behavior are formidable and stealthy, but not unbeatable, opponents. Know the signs, know what right looks like and do what's right — those are words we all can live by!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard D. Stidley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Richard D. Stidley
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center