



No season for risk

Autumn offers something for everyone. The coming and going of Labor Day means cooler weather, a return to regular schedules with kids back to school, and most of all, the start of football season (my favorite time of year!). Many Soldiers eagerly await the start of hunting season, while others are ready to start the countdown to time off around the holidays. What we can't look forward to, however, is a "slow" season for safety — just because the summer is over doesn't mean we can fall into complacency.

Soldiers at installations across the southern and western United States enjoy nice weather far longer than those in other parts of the country, and accidents are a good reflection of that. Between Labor Day and Dec. 1 last year, we lost 12 Soldiers on motorcycles; seven were NCOs. There's no doubt about it, many, many Soldiers will continue riding until the weather forces them off their bikes, and that may not be for several more months. As leaders, we can't let down our guard on the continuing issue of indiscipline on motorcycles. We must regularly check our Soldiers and ourselves to ensure every ride begins and ends safely.

Autumn and winter are the Army's high seasons for negligent discharges. Three Soldiers fatally shot themselves between September and December 2012, all under the influence of alcohol and at least two with guests in their homes. In many ways, young Soldiers are no different than college kids; they're going to congregate together off duty, and there's going to be alcohol involved more often than not. But Soldiers might feel a little more invincible than the average university student, given our profession and training with firearms. It's leaders who have to bring them back to earth and show them even superheroes aren't immune to bullets, especially when you're cutting up with friends.

Speaking of alcohol, it's undeniable that some Soldiers try to "enhance" all their off-duty activities with it. In fact, fixtures of autumn like football games and tailgate parties seem to invite alcohol use. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as our of-age Soldiers drink responsibly. Frank discussions about the risks of drinking and driving and even drinking and walking should be part of all our weekend safety briefs. And, leaders should be walking the talk by setting the standard and being the right example to follow. It's not about you anymore — what you do today influences your Soldiers' behavior more than you know.

'Tis the season for accidents, every day of the year. A turn of the calendar won't keep our Soldiers safe, but we can through engaged leadership and a focus on training, discipline and standards around the clock. The USACR/Safety Center is ready to help with the annual Army Safe Autumn Campaign, available at <https://safety.army.mil>. Check it out and let me know what you think and how we can better help you keep up the good fight. Most of all, enjoy this fantastic season while it lasts, but always play it safe!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

Rick Stidley
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