

Senior Leaders,

The first half of fiscal 2011 is behind us, and I'm pleased to report our numbers are generally well below those of previous years. Accidental fatalities are currently 17 percent below totals for the same timeframe a year ago, a figure that represents 13 Soldiers still alive and in their formations to fight another day. This tremendous reduction shows our Leaders, Soldiers, Family members and Civilians are staying engaged and assuming responsibility for both their personal safety and the well being of our Army team.

While this positive news is certainly welcome, we cannot forget the 63 Soldiers who were lost to accidents during the first six months of this fiscal year. Neither can we risk complacency in the weeks and months ahead, when fatal off-duty accidents typically peak. Our Leaders have the right focus and are engaged in the right direction, and I remain confident we can and will continue on this downward trend throughout the hazardous days of spring and summer.

OFF DUTY

As with previous quarters, the majority of our off-duty fatalities in the second quarter were attributed to privately owned vehicle accidents: 21 Soldiers killed in POVs, of which 4 were on motorcycles. Overall, motorcycle fatalities are 75 percent above fiscal 2010 numbers, and indiscipline—primarily excessive speeding leading to loss of control—remained the greatest single contributing factor in these accidents. This and other forms of indiscipline, including failure to wear personal protective equipment, alcohol use and disregard for proper licensing and training, are nothing new for our Army, and we have to get at the root of why Soldiers continue to take catastrophic risks on their motorcycles.

While there is no easy solution to these problems, Leader, peer and Family engagement remain critical in keeping our Soldiers safe on the road. Commitment to Family, country and one another is among the finest virtues of Army service, and messages that show Soldiers how their risky behavior affects others seem to have a greater impact on future actions. Continuous engagement and mentorship are essential to keeping safety foremost in the minds of our Soldiers. I ask that you take a look at our website, <https://safety.army.mil>, for helpful programs and videos that can assist you and your junior Leaders as you talk with Soldiers and your formations.

Although off-duty negligent discharge fatalities dropped remarkably during fiscal 2010, they have been on the rise this fiscal year. We lost two Soldiers in the first quarter (not including a third Soldier who suffered a permanent total disability) and one during the second quarter to privately owned weapons accidents, all occurring in the late evening or early morning and in the presence of alcohol. In all four incidents, the Soldiers pointed and fired at their face or head, reportedly to prove the weapons weren't loaded. Our Soldiers work with weapons every day and know better than to take such risks, but Leader involvement and engagement, coupled with training and awareness, is the first and most important line of defense in weapons safety. Several tools and videos specific to this subject are available on our website, including the Firearms Safety Techniques challenge. This interactive site allows users to simulate weapons firing in a variety of scenarios, one being under the influence of alcohol. The FST challenge and our other tools have received good feedback from across the force, so please encourage your Soldiers to take a look. I also encourage Leaders to leverage local gun shops and on-post ranges to ensure Soldiers with personal weapons are properly trained for each type of weapon they own.

ON DUTY: GROUND

Two fatal on-duty ground accidents were reported during the second quarter—a negligent discharge incident where a Soldier was killed when another Soldier fired an improperly cleared M9 pistol, and an MATV rollover that fatally injured the vehicle's gunner. Overall, we are doing remarkably well on the ground, especially considering what we ask of our Soldiers deployed downrange and at home station. As with off-duty weapons accidents, training and awareness are key to preventing these type accidents in the future. However, our primary challenge remains MRAP rollovers, which historically have been attributed to indiscipline and disregard for known standards. When Leaders allow their Soldiers to drive or ride without restraint systems and operate these vehicles at excessive speeds, the results are often tragic. Driver training, Leader engagement and enforcement of standards are critical to ensuring the safety of our vehicle crews, and I encourage you to explore the possibility of intensive MRAP training during the early stages of preparation for deployment. Although the availability of these vehicles is extremely limited in CONUS, our training centers are expanding their fleets to accommodate rotational formations, and further expansion plans include an ultimate goal of more than 5,000 vehicles in home station training fleets across the force. Likewise, be sure to use Training Circular 7-31, MRAP Family of Vehicle Driver Training, for your vehicle crews. This publication is an essential part of driver training kits and establishes the standard for safe MRAP operations.

ON DUTY: AIR

No fatal aviation accidents were reported during the second quarter. However, this good news followed two tragic accidents that claimed seven lives (four military and three civilian) in the first quarter. There is no margin for error in air operations, and tough, realistic training and rigid enforcement of standards are our best defense in ensuring the safety of our aviation crews. An initiative that continues to show huge dividends for our aviation formations is High Altitude Mission Environmental Training, launched by the USAACE a few years back and being used very successfully by our aviation task forces as they prepare for deployment. This one-of-a-kind training opportunity allows aviation task force commanders to collectively train the challenging skill sets required of their formations downrange.

USACR/SAFETY CENTER INITIATIVES

Safety is both our mission and our passion, and the USACR/Safety Center stands ready to help you in the fight against preventable accidents. We recently launched our annual Safe Spring/Summer Campaign, complete with informative feature articles, posters and videos on seasonal topics. We will also support the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's annual Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month in May, so be sure to check our website for information and media tools geared toward this challenging area. In addition, we are in the process of updating our Family Engagement Kit, an indispensable resource for Family members of Soldiers returning from deployment. Informed and engaged Family members are essential in off-duty Soldier safety, so please ensure your FRG, FRSA and ACS personnel are aware of the kit and make it available to their families.

Another exciting new tool available on our homepage is the TRADOC-produced "Off-Duty, On Guard," an interactive site that allows users to assume the roles of characters placed in a variety of scenarios and learn the possible consequences of their decisions. As discussed earlier, Soldiers are affected most when they see how their actions could affect others, and this tool is a great way for Leaders to engage.

Finally, we recently launched a “Civilian’s Corner” page on our website to engage with our Civilian workforce and provide a one-stop resource for Leaders developing Civilian safety programs. Current topics include worker’s compensation, the Voluntary Protection Program, the Pipeline return-to-work program and Protecting our Workers and Ensuring Re-employment initiative. Also featured is the “Leader’s Guide to Civilian Safety,” developed to assist Leaders and supervisors in preventing Civilian employee accidents and injuries. Our Army’s Civilian workforce is a vital part of our Army Family, so please check out the new page and let us know what else is needed to ensure the safety of these important personnel.

Thank you for what you do every day for our Soldiers, Families and Civilians, and please let me know how the USACRC/Safety Center can help keep your teams safe. V/R, Bill

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG!

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