Narrative:

Whether Soldiers are handling a military or privately owned weapon, safety should always be a top concern. A leading cause of unintentional discharge mishaps in the Army is failure to properly clear a weapon. A Soldier being injured while attempting to clean a weapon or just showing it to friends are all-too-common scenarios. They fail to either clear the weapon properly or simply assume it is unloaded, not attempting to clear it at all.

Key Messages:

- The basic tenets of safe weapons handling apply to all weapons (assigned and privately owned), regardless of who owns them.

- Topping the list of small arms safety issues are improper handling and malfunctions due to improper headspace and timing or maintenance, which are often a result of complacency, indiscipline and inadequate training.

- Everyone needs to know, follow and enforce weapons safety standards. If you see someone mishandling a weapon, say something. You may just save a life.

- Properly store weapons – they should be stored unloaded and locked up so that children and others don’t have access to them.

- Bullets and booze are dangerous. Never handle a weapon when under the influence of alcohol or other substances that may affect perception and influence coordination.

Talking Points:

- Unintentional discharges most commonly occur when:
  
  - cleaning, clearing or performing a functions check
  - entering or exiting vehicles
  - retrieving, uploading, or emplacing weapons
  - following a change of mission, duty, or weapon's status
  - joking or playing around pointing a weapon at themselves or someone else
  - handling a foreign weapon they are unfamiliar with
  - becoming distracted and fiddling with a weapon and unmindfully pulling the trigger

- Do not assume you are an expert with all weapons because you carried an assigned weapon during deployment.
• When handling any weapon – privately owned or issued – make sure you know that weapon’s safety features and capabilities. Be sure to read the owner’s manual and sign up for a class.

• Remember to **THINK Weapons Safety**:
  o Treat every weapon as if it’s loaded.
  o Handle every weapon with care.
  o Identify the target before you fire.
  o Never point the muzzle at anything you don’t intend to shoot.
  o Keep the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire.

**Statistics:**

In fiscal year 2016, six Soldiers died in weapons-related mishaps. Three mishaps occurred on duty and the other three off duty. Alcohol was a known or suspected factor in all three of the off duty instances. In two of the cases, junior NCOs were involved.

Thus far in FY17, six Soldiers have perished in weapons-related accidents. Two accidents occurred on duty and the other four off duty.

**Resources:**

- [Range and Weapons Safety Toolbox](#)
- [Weapons and Explosives homepage](#)