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Army sets new record low for mishap fatalities in 2016

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The Army achieved its seventh consecutive year of declines in mishap fatalities during the recently closed fiscal year, data from the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center show.

A total of 109 Soldiers died in on- and off-duty accidents during fiscal 2016, down from 110 the year before and the lowest figure in nearly 45 years of comprehensive recordkeeping. In fact, new historic lows have been set — and broken — every year since fiscal 2013.

“This accomplishment is a direct reflection of leaders and Soldiers working together to proactively manage risk,” said Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Farnsworth, director of Army Safety and commanding general, USACRC. “Their commitment to safety is evident, even as our Army continues to confront our enemies across the globe while training increasingly complex missions to address our readiness challenges.”

During the past five years, accidental deaths have fallen 32 percent across the active Army, with substantial reductions recorded for the Guard and Reserve components as well. This trend holds true across nearly all accident categories, with both total fatalities and fatality rates either dropping steadily or remaining stable with historic lows both on and off duty, according to a recent USACRC analysis.

One statistic that has failed to change over time, however, is the disproportionate number of fatal accidents occurring in motor vehicles. While off-duty sedan and pedestrian fatalities declined overall during fiscal 2016, motorcycle fatalities rose 32 percent. Similarly, on-duty vehicle fatalities were up 38 percent at year end, due in large part to a vehicle rollover at Fort Hood, Texas, in June that drowned nine Soldiers.

“Motorcycle fatalities accounted for over half our vehicle and pedestrian-related deaths this past year, which is something we rarely, if ever, see,” Farnsworth said. “Considering that only 16 percent of our Soldiers ride, this is alarming.”

Speeding, failure to wear personal protective equipment and alcohol use are the top three indiscipline factors seen in motorcycle fatality reports, USACRC data show, with enlisted leaders over age 25 comprising the majority of fatalities. Both Farnsworth and USACRC Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Burton agreed that leaders must confront indiscipline at the lowest levels.

“We have an obvious problem with some NCOs,” Burton said. “As leaders, we’re the first and best line of defense for loss prevention. It’s unacceptable that a few are setting a bad example for their Soldiers and peers, and even more tragic that they’re losing everything for a momentary bad decision. We all need to take a hard look at ourselves and correct the problems we see.”

Despite these challenges, both Farnsworth and Burton are optimistic for the future.

“We’re better now than we’ve ever been regarding safety, and we continue to improve every year,” Farnsworth said. “Command emphasis, engaged and accountable leaders, and battle buddies looking out for each other on and off duty will push our accidental losses even lower.”

For more information on the Army Safety and Occupational Health program, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.