

Risk Management: an Airman's Obligation

By Lt Gen Darren W. McDew, Commander, 18th Air Force

Recently I was reminded of the fragility of life. During a mishap briefing I heard how a young Airman needlessly lost his life while engaging in risky behavior. One of the elements of the mishap that really stuck out for me was that so many others knew about the behavior, but had done little to intervene. It was a stark reminder that in the military risk management is both an individual and collective responsibility, and that mistakes on either side can have tragic consequences.

As the AMC commander's day-to-day commander of our nation's global air mobility enterprise, I understand firsthand the critical importance of operational risk

management to our mission. As a Mobility Airman, a husband, and a father I also understand the role it plays in our individual lives.

Risk Management (RM) is inextricably linked to the success of everything our Air Force does. In our individual lives we are best served by taking the time to think through the consequences of our actions beforehand. In the same way, successful and safe operations are a product of a systematic process which helps us evaluate courses of action, identify risks and benefits, and ultimately arrive at informed decisions.

As a commander I depend on RM to help me maximize our capabilities while minimizing the risk to our Airmen and assets. In my personal

life, I depend on that process to do essentially the same thing – to keep my loved ones and myself safe while we go about our daily lives. In both cases, my calculations evolve over time. There is wisdom in taking a conservative approach until you develop the skills, experience, and knowledge to take greater risks. As you gain experience, you'll realize that some risks are simply not worth taking.

The Critical Days of Summer are just one expression of the Air Force's recognition of the importance of responsible decision-making, whether in our personal or professional lives. We needlessly lose more Airmen to off-duty mishaps during the summer months than at any other time during the year. Each of those lives lost has a tremendous impact on family, friends, fellow Airmen, and importantly, our mission. However, RM is an expression of a broader obligation, not merely something to be thought about a few months out of the year.

We often say that we are here "to answer the call," whether our nation's, our friends', or the call of anyone in need. Our success in answering those calls requires the talent, innovation, commitment, and *sound risk management* of all Airmen. Simply put, RM is more than about safety and it is more than merely a personal issue. Supervisors, commanders, and leaders at all levels *must* have discussions about risk management with their Airmen. RM is a collective responsibility of all Airmen, a prerequisite to our continued success, and an obligation to our nation. As the new commander of the 18th Air Force, it is an obligation I take seriously, and one I charge all Mobility Airmen to honor as well. Thank you! 🇺🇸



Lt Gen Darren McDew speaks to students and guests at McConnell's Airman Leadership School.

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