



The Safety Corner

From the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned
October 6, 2006



Gators and ATVs

This issue of the Safety Corner highlights lessons and observations about All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and Gator/Polaris utility vehicles operations in the War on Terror.

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From the Director:

Recently at TQ, Iraq there was an ATV mishap aboard the base in which a young Marine fractured his leg. Additionally since FY03 the Marine Corps has experienced 7 Class A/B Mishaps relating to ATV and utility vehicles. Of the 7 mishaps reported, 5 resulted in fatalities and the remaining 2 Marines have permanent disabilities. The Army reported 9 Class A-C mishaps in FY06 and 17 mishaps in FY05. The 9 Army mishaps in FY06 resulted in 4 fatalities, and 4 soldiers died in FY05. To say the least there have been a lot of deaths and serious injuries due to ATV use, misuse, or abuse. Reducing the risk to the operators by awareness, close supervision, and education will ensue our war fighters are there to fight the war.

I know we are having the drivers and passengers wear helmets and flak jacket while operating ATVs - but remember, personal protection equipment is designed for stopping bullets, fragments, shrapnel, etc and not necessarily for preventing injuries when an ATV rolls over. Don't let your folks get complacency and feeling secure just because they have on a helmet and flak. Engaging their brain and not doing something stupid is probably the best protective measure they have available.

All Terrain Vehicles have proven to be useful to mission success in support of numerous operations. They need to be treated with respect as they can be dangerous if used improperly. Whether they are used in current operations or used for recreational use at home or on a farm, they have serious risks which need to be remembered every time you operate an ATV.

Leaders please take a look at the ATVs your unit is operating. Many of the ones I saw last month in Iraq had tires missing, no lights, or broken lights, and lacked reflective tape for night time recognition and avoidance. Please ensure you are doing your part keeping your warriors in the fight.

I look forward to your comments, observations, and concerns.

Semper Fidelis,

Col Monte Dunard, Director MCCLL

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Most ATV users, whether riding for work or pleasure, have little or no formal riding training and tend to think of ATVs as toys. On the contrary, ATVs are "rider active" vehicles, which means riders must master basic riding skills in order to ride them safely. When given the proper respect, ATVs can be a valuable work tool and provide considerable entertainment. Misuse however, can lead to serious injury or even death. Operations in OIF have seen the use of ATVs and other utility vehicles increase from operations use to an everyday or 'commuter' vehicle to get around bases.

An ATV is a powerful, motorized vehicle. It can weigh up to 600 lbs. and reach speeds of more than 60 mph. Even the best drivers can lose control of their ATV. A collision or a vehicle rollover can happen quickly. Before operating an ATV, think twice ... because you only live once.

"ATVs are not toys. Accidents are common and sometimes deadly. I know ... I've had to tell the parents."

Tim Burson, MD Neurosurgeon

The most common injuries associated with ATV crashes are to the head, face and spine, skull fractures, facial fractures, brain injuries, coma, paralysis, and spinal cord injuries. Most ATV deaths result from the vehicle overturning or colliding with objects. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated over 125,000 ATV related injuries and 407 Deaths in the U.S in 2005. Approximately one-third of the injuries and deaths are children under the age of 16.



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Al Asad Air Base Order Changes

From Miles Bowman, a Tactical Safety Specialist with 3D MAW FWD

Currently, there are approximately 200 ATVs and Quad runners on Al Asad Airbase of various styles and sizes. Some are owned by the military and some by contractors. When we took over the base roadways were sparse and the Gators and other tactical vehicles were all that were on station. They were perfect for getting around and there was very little competing traffic. Over the last couple of years many non-tactical vehicles have arrived and traffic has become a constant safety problem.

Gators and ATVs are now commonly used for non-tactical missions like going to chow or the PX. Most of them have headlights but no taillights. Some have a small reflector on the back corner about 4 inches by 2 inches, but most of those are covered up or missing. This makes them completely invisible from behind at night.

When this was brought to the attention of the Wing DOSS, Col McDade, he immediately instituted a temporary measure of attaching reflective safety belts to the rear of the vehicles (see right). After researching to see if taillight assemblies were available at a reasonable cost or if ultra-reflective highway tape would be acceptable, it was determined that the tape would be more than sufficient to illuminate the vehicles and make it visible at night. The tape is currently on order and KBR maintenance will issue the tape when the vehicles come in for their weekly maintenance.



A change has been submitted to base order 5560.1 (changes below) for the tape to be mandatory and we expect it to be instituted soon. PMO has been advised to stop vehicles without the reflective belts and instruct them to meet the requirements. Once the order is changed citations will be issued and offenders will be required to visit the Base Magistrate.

Several Changes have been proposed to Al Asad Air Base Order 5560.1 to include the use of Utility ATVs and Quad-runners. Enclosure 5 to the order adds these classifications:

- a. Tactical vehicles include armored vehicles, HMMWV, CUCV, tactical dozers, etc.
- b. Utility All-Terrain-Vehicles (ATVs) include all three (3), four (4) or six (6) wheeled All Terrain Vehicles (Gator, Polaris, etc.)
- c. Quad-runners are ATVs that are ridden like a motorcycle.
- d. Construction equipment includes dozers, forklifts, bobcats, etc.

These classifications were necessary to clear up any confusion on how to address safety requirements for operators. The order will require:

“... appropriate helmets, flak vests, and ballistic eye protection/goggles will be worn at all times by military personnel when riding in or on tactical vehicles, **Utility ATVs, Quad-runners** or heavy equipment. Civilians and contractors will also wear appropriate helmets when in or on tactical vehicles, ATVs, heavy equipment, and motorcycles or mopeds. Appropriate helmets are those helmets that are designed to be worn with the specific vehicle (e.g. DOT approved helmet for motorcycles, mopeds, quad runners or Kevlar for tactical vehicles and Utility ATVs).

Quad-runners require a reflective vest to be worn at all times. Utility ATVs such as Gators and Polaris type vehicles (non-Quad-runners) will be marked across the tailgate and along each cargo side with a strip of highly reflective tape in the absence of tail lights. A reflective type belt may be hung across the tail gate temporarily if reflective tape is not available to increase visibility at night.”



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Safety Tips

ATVs and utility vehicles have proven to be useful to support a variety of missions. Below are a few tips to keep in mind when operating ATVs and Gator/Polaris utility vehicles.

WEAR SAFETY GEAR - Wear a helmet, eye protection and other protective clothing suitable to the environment at all times. Without proper safety equipment you are putting yourself at unnecessary risk. A helmet, eye protection, gloves, over-the-ankle boots, long sleeve shirts and long pants are all important parts of your safety gear when riding.

NO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS - Do not use alcohol or other drugs when you ride. Operating an ATV while drinking or using drugs is not only unsafe, it is illegal.

OBEY THE LAW - Learn the ATV laws in your state and those in the areas you will be riding. Knowledge of the laws will not only help keep you safe but it may help you avoid an expensive ticket or worse.

OBEY THE RULES - Obey posted signs and stay on approved trails. Venturing from marked trails can result in a rider coming face to face with unexpected obstacles such as ditches, drop offs, cliffs, trees, etc.

WATCH YOUR SPEED - Always ride at a safe and responsible speed. Know your abilities and don't exceed those levels.

NO PASSENGERS - Do not carry passengers on your ATV. Most ATV's are designed for a single rider only.

GET TRAINED - Do not let young or inexperienced riders operate ATVs without training and supervision.

MAINTAIN A SAFE DISTANCE - Always maintain a safe distance from other vehicles. Tailgating can lead to collisions and injuries just as it does with automobiles on the road.

CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT - Make sure your equipment is in top working order. Do the brakes work? Are the tires properly inflated? Is there any damage to the unit? Check your equipment before you go. The worst time to find out something doesn't work is when you need it.

SECURE YOUR LOAD - If your vehicle is equipped to carry gear, ensure it is secured properly. Know the weight restrictions for the ATV. Any extra weight will affect how the ATV handles.



Recent Safety Corner Comments

The below comments were recently received in response to the Safety Corner Dated 18 September 2006 on Negligent Discharges. Our thanks to Major Guy Coursey, MSTP Exercise Design Officer.

"... I have known professionals with years of experience who could shoot any weapon you care to name, under any conditions, and come out on top. Almost all have had a ND in their lives because for a nano-second they became complacent and failed to follow at least one primary safety rule. Marines in a deployed environment are carrying long guns and myriad other weapons for long hours and under trying conditions. If they have not been well trained, don't have the right mindset, and/or their leadership is not on top of it, someone will eventually become a victim. It comes down to mindset. The cure to the problem is not making every weapon Condition 4, because making the Marines less able to defend themselves and unable to employ their weapons quickly out of fear they may have a ND is not the answer. Restricting it to only a few officers or SNCOs (who are often even more complacent than the troops), is not [the answer] either. The answer is following the four rules of firearms safety religiously, especially Rule 1 (Never let the muzzle cover anything you are not willing to destroy) and all associated TTPs (doing a visual and digital chamber check when initially handling any weapon, etc.)"

We look forward to your comments and observations at the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned. Let us know what you think. Send us feedback [HERE](#), or call us at (703) 432-1279.

The observations and recommendations contained in The Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) Safety Corner represent the considered judgment of Marines who have identified safety issues in their units. The purpose of this newsletter is to apprise other Marines of these safety recommendations and to encourage them to enter their own lessons into the Marine Corps Lessons Management System (LMS).