



## Set The Right Example

This month marks the midway point in fiscal 2011, and our Army is poised to continue our ongoing downward trend in fatal accidents for yet another year. We opened the second quarter 15 percent below last year's total fatality numbers for the same timeframe, and statistics in our key privately owned vehicle category were even better, down 26 percent for the year. This great news story reflects the commitment and dedication of all our Leaders, Soldiers, Families and Civilians to the safety of our force and to each other. Thank you for all your hard work!

This trend is certainly welcome, and it appears we're headed in the right direction in countering the No. 1 accidental killer of our Soldiers. However, we can't become complacent and think our problems with POVs are at a point of solution. The improved numbers we're seeing are actually masking a devastating issue with Soldiers not using seat belts, and a majority of our POV fatalities to date have been attributed at least in part to a neglect to buckle up.

The circumstances behind most of these fatalities is remarkably similar: a loss of control, the vehicle striking another vehicle or stationary object and sometimes rolling over, with the Soldier driver and/or passengers ejected during the accident sequence. At least two of these fatal accidents occurred on post, and a third occurred during the Soldier's drive to work for his regular duty day. Five of the six fatalities were 24 years old or younger, meaning they grew up in an age of mandatory seat belt laws well before they assumed the military obligation of always buckling up. Willful disregard for standards is a Leader, Soldier and Family issue, and it will take a concerted effort by all three groups to curb this growing and disturbing trend.

For Leaders, off-duty standards enforcement has always been among the most difficult of all responsibilities. First-line supervisors can't be with their Soldiers all the time, but they can engage with them during the duty day about the risks of driving and other off-duty activities. Since the drive to and from work will be the most dangerous part of the day for many of our Soldiers, it's only logical that Leaders spend the time and effort required to ensure their subordinates are informed and empowered to make smart decisions after the duty day ends. It's also important for Leaders to get to know their Soldiers personally so they can learn what interventions work for a given individual. Safety isn't a "one-size-fits-all" pursuit, and an approach that works with one Soldier won't necessarily work for another.

As the weather begins to gradually warm up, many Soldiers will want to bring their motorcycles out of cold weather storage and prepare them for the approaching spring and summer riding season. This is a great time to take the opportunity to have the bike serviced, check the serviceability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and get motorcycle refresher training completed. Some of the basic riding skills are quickly perishable over the fall/winter months, and now is the time to get some much needed refresher training before taking those long rides later in the season.

Our Army continues to lose Soldiers due to acts of indiscipline. The acts of excessive speed, reckless riding, a lack of properly approved motorcycle training and failure to wear proper PPE continue to show up in accident findings. Leaders, the ruthless enforcement of standards for our motorcycle riders is the only way to stop these senseless losses. Leaders can and should conduct on-the-spot checks for licensing and approved motorcycle riding training for their riders, as well as inspecting their Soldiers' motorcycles periodically. Tools and checklists for the inspection of motorcycles and PPE can be found on the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center website under the POV/Motorcycle Safety tab.

Another great source of information that also promotes safe riding through experienced rider mentorship is the Motorcycle Mentorship Program (MMP). This installation-based program promotes an environment that can create positive conduct and behavior while riding and serves as a force multiplier that supports a commander's motorcycle accident prevention program.

Because every Soldier has his or her own unique needs, Soldier-to-Soldier and Family engagement is critical in this fight. Friends and Family members generally know their Soldiers better than anyone else and have more access to them during their off-duty time. And, because of their close relationships, peers, spouses, parents and siblings can often make an impact even when others have tried unsuccessfully. Never allow the Soldiers in your life to operate a vehicle unbelted, and let them know your concerns about their unsafe driving habits. You might be met with resistance at first, but, when it comes to a Soldier's life, it's an argument worth having.

Ultimately, the decision to wear a seat belt is a personal choice, but it's one that can be affected through positive interaction with others. If you're in a leadership position, set the right example by doing the right thing all the time. The same standard applies for Soldier peers and Family members. Make the smart decisions and watch how your behavior affects your friends and loved ones. The simple click of a seat belt is one of the sweetest sounds any driver or passenger will hear before an accident, and there's no better way to save lives on the road than by buckling up.

Each of you is doing a great job every day for our Army and our nation. Thank you for what you do, and let's get the last half of fiscal 2011 off to a great start today by staying engaged in Soldier safety. There's no better reward than watching your Soldiers thrive in both their on- and off-duty lives, so do your part by giving them the tools for success!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**William T. Wolf**  
Brigadier General, USA  
Commanding