



Always on Guard

This month, the United States of America turns 235 years old. It's amazing to think how, during that short time, our nation has emerged from a fledgling democracy to the global leader it is today. The work you do every day ensures the sacrifices of past patriots will live on for generations to come. I am proud to be part of this great Army and have the opportunity to work alongside each of you. Thank you all for your service!

In Army safety, we spend a lot of time talking about off-duty accidents. This makes sense, because every year a vast majority of our accidental fatalities occur away from work. For example, as of June 1 this year, the off-duty share of all losses was a staggering 85 percent! That number illustrates two points: first, on-duty safety remains a great news story for the Leaders and Soldiers with their boots on the ground in locations at home station and in our overseas theaters; and second, off-duty accidents continue to be the most critical safety issue facing our Army today.

On duty, our biggest gains have been in reducing fatal Army motor vehicle accidents to unprecedented lows. In fact, as of June 6, AMV fatalities were down 80 percent from the previous year. That's an extraordinary accomplishment, especially considering the hundreds of thousands of miles driven every year in all models of AMVs, both in garrison and in theater. This statistic proves we've come a long way from the early days of our combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, when on-duty AMV losses soared to historic highs. Although safety upgrades and greater familiarity with equipment have had a lot to do with our recent successes, much of the credit is owed to superb leadership and hands-on engagement from Soldiers at all levels. Whether it's to remind another Soldier to buckle their restraint system or call out a driver who's exceeding the safe speed limit, those who do the right thing for safety show their commitment to the warrior ethos of never leaving a fallen comrade behind.

Given this amazing success on duty, it would be easy to assume we'd see a corresponding reduction in privately owned vehicle fatalities. Reality, however, is far different from this assumption. Although POV fatalities have been on a downward trend the past few years and currently remain below 2010 numbers, the grim fact is nearly 70 percent of the Soldiers lost during this fiscal year have been killed after hours on civilian roadways. How can a Soldier safely drive a multi-ton vehicle during the day but lose control of a small sedan or even smaller motorcycle at night or on the weekend? There are any number of contributing factors to fatal POV accidents, but the "big three" are almost always constant — speed, failure to wear seat belts or personal protective equipment and driving under the influence of alcohol.

The question we should all be asking is why our on-duty mindset isn't transferring to the off-duty realm. Our Soldiers know what to do and our Leaders do a fantastic job in enforcing standards on the job. But both Leaders and Soldiers must remember there is no time limit on responsibility, and their obligations to one another extend even after duty hours. Reminding a friend to buckle up or slow down is just as effective in a sedan as in a HMMWV. The key is engaging and never letting your Soldiers become complacent. Leaders should also tap into the Families within their units for support. Their access and influence make spouses and other close loved ones a great line of defense in keeping Soldiers safe.

Our mission here at the USACR/Safety Center is to help our Total Army Family —Leaders, Soldiers, Family members and Civilians — stay safe in all they do. POV safety is obviously a primary concern and we have many driving tools available on our website, <https://safety.army.mil>, but that's not all we have to offer. Be sure to check out our other products and let us know what else you need to make your safety program a success. You can start with our Safe Spring/Summer Campaign, which contains ready-made posters, videos and feature articles covering a wide range of topics related to warm weather activities.

Thank you all again for what you do every day. As you celebrate our nation's birthday, I ask that you take a moment to think about what more you can do to keep our Soldiers safe. Protecting our Band of Brothers and Sisters is the greatest birthday gift America could receive!

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