



Staying Safe on the Road

Look anywhere in the United States, and one of the surest signs of spring and summer is the abundance of motorcycles on streets and highways. It's no different in our Army — as the temperature rises, so does the number of sport bikes, cruisers and everything in between on our installations. This time of year is a favorite for riding enthusiasts, and we want to kick it off safely by supporting the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's observation of Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month.

As an Army, we've made great strides in identifying motorcycle riders and providing them with training that has proven time and again to save lives. Riding shouldn't be an underground activity, and the increasing number of registered motorcycles on posts shows most Soldiers recognize the value of our current safety requirements and initiatives like Motorcycle Mentorship Programs. Yet, every year we lose far too many Soldiers to accidents involving indiscipline on motorcycles, whether it's a lack of proper training, excessive speeding, neglecting to wear even the most basic personal protective equipment or drinking while riding.

Historical analysis shows us that motorcycle riders are 10 times more likely to become involved in a Class A-C accident than sedan operators. Just as alarming is the ongoing trend of Leaders at the rank of sergeant and above being fatally injured on their bikes. As of mid-March, Leaders accounted for 10 of the 13 motorcycle deaths reported Army-wide for fiscal 2011. Leaders are responsible for both setting and enforcing the standard, and the challenge for our Army continues to be reaching these battle-hardened Soldiers on the importance of their personal accountability.

We place a great deal of emphasis on engagement in Soldier safety, but Leaders need engagement from their chain of command as well. Taking care of Soldiers is a tremendous job, and Leaders at all levels need support from their peers and superiors to do it effectively. However, we must remember rank does not exempt a Leader from wearing a helmet, following the speed limit or calling a cab when he or she has had too much to drink.

Neither does rank matter in engaging with high-risk Soldiers. Someone always knows when a Soldier, whether a subordinate or superior, is taking unnecessary risks on or off duty. Junior Soldiers should play a key role in keeping their Leaders safe, and we should allow them to freely express their concerns on potentially hazardous situations. Engagement is a two-way street and requires constant interaction between Soldiers and Leaders, with everyone looking out for and learning from one another.

Moving forward into the height of riding season, ensure all your Soldier riders — Leader and junior alike — are engaged and understand both the joys and hazards of motorcycle ownership. Training, education and PPE all go a long way toward keeping riders safe on the road, but there's no substitute for knowing your Leaders and Soldiers are counting on you to make it back safe.

While we'll see more motorcycles on the road during summer than any other season, privately owned vehicles still outnumber bikes by the thousands. Incidents involving POVs remain the top accidental killer of Soldiers every year, and the months between April and September are the peak season for fatal POV accidents. As with motorcycles, speeding, drinking and driving and failure to wear protective equipment — in this case, seat belts — are the causes most often cited in fatality reports. Remember to engage with your Soldiers on making safety a priority in all their summer travels, whether it's for fun in the local area, a beach a few hours away or visits to Family and friends many hundreds of miles from post.

Be sure to check out the tools available on the USACR/Safety Center website, <https://safety.army.mil>, for information and media products on riding, driving and summer safety. The annual Safe Spring/Summer Campaign was released live in April and includes posters, videos and articles designed to educate Soldiers on hazards associated with summer activities. We also recently consolidated all driving topics in one central location on our website, <https://safety.army.mil/povmotorcyclesafety>, with individual tabs for POV, motorcycle and recreational vehicle information and tools. Now users can easily retrieve guidance on specific topics and stay up-to-date on the latest safety news with just a couple of clicks. Let us know how the new tab works for you.

As always, thank you for the hard work you do every day to keep our Soldiers, Family members and Civilians safe. Play hard this summer, but remember to always play it safe!

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