



First Impressions

Coming into any new job is an adventure, and in our Army, you'd better be prepared to hit the ground running. In my short time as the new director of Army Safety and commanding general of the USACR/Safety Center, I've been sprinting! I never imagined how busy and rewarding these first couple of months would be, and I want to commend you all for the incredible work you've done to keep accidental fatalities at historic lows these past few years. I couldn't have asked for better teachers than the leaders, Soldiers, Family members and Civilians doing the hard work for safety every day — thank you for being a wonderful example for me to follow.

I didn't come into this position with a grand vision for how things should be; we're obviously on the right track with fatalities on a sustained downward trajectory. But there are a few issues that caught my attention immediately, and I'd like to share my thoughts on those now. Some are recurring problems, while others are just beginning to emerge as a verifiable trend. The one commonality among them, though, is that they all require our urgent attention.

Loss of leaders in privately owned motorcycle accidents. This subject has been a priority for Army leadership for quite some time, but the fact remains that just as our most recent third quarter was ending, well over half of this year's motorcycle fatalities were NCOs. In the July 2012 Knowledge, CSM Rick Stidley wrote that bad decisions at the top tend to trickle down to the lowest level, even in formations as small as a squad. I completely agree with his position — no one is immune to indiscipline, especially young Soldiers who look to their leaders for guidance and wisdom. There's no excuse and no room in our Army for leaders who don't live what right looks like.

A disproportionate share of specialists involved in privately owned vehicle and POM accidents. I saw lots of data my first few days on the job, and this was among the most startling: Up to the end of the third quarter of fiscal 2012, specialists accounted for more than half of all POV fatalities and about a third of all POM losses. Even more alarming, indiscipline, primarily excessive speeding, was cited in many of these accident reports. Something is wrong when Soldiers who've been in the Army long enough to know the standards and are getting ready to assume leadership roles outnumber privates two-to-one in fatal accidents. Whether it's due to the toxic effects of indisciplined leadership or simply a matter of individual failure to uphold the standards, we have to break the cycle and reach these Soldiers now to not only save lives, but also prevent them from entering the NCO ranks with an unmitigated, high-risk attitude.

Keeping safety professionals in the field. The current professionalization and training of our Army's safety professionals, both uniformed and Civilian, is unprecedented. At no prior time have commanders had the breadth and depth of safety expertise in their formations as now, but I have concerns some of that knowledge may remain untapped. We can't pay lip service to safety — commanders must make it a priority, and the best place to start is with the safety professional. These men and women have been trained to be your advocate, advisor and counselor on all things safety, and not tapping into that potential does both them and your Soldiers a disservice. I promise that, if given the chance, they will become an indispensable part of your go-to staff!

Applying risk management in the schoolhouse. We've gotten much better as an Army on teaching the "cradle to grave" model of risk management in initial-entry training and leader development courses. Now that the complete operational drawdown of combat forces is near, we have a fantastic opportunity to take those efforts even further. Safety is a value our Soldiers should learn from the very beginning, and there's no better time to reach them than when they're eager to discover what the Army is all about.

You might be missing the "how" to fix these issues, and quite honestly, I don't have an answer yet. No one solution will work for every Soldier or unit; that's why the broad concepts of engagement, training, discipline and standards have worked so well for us — leaders can mold them to their Soldiers' unique needs and circumstances. I welcome your feedback on what we've done and where we need to go in the future. No one is in this fight alone!

Finally, remember that with the dwindling days of summer here, many of your Soldiers will be taking last-minute vacations. Please caution them to be extra careful on the road and in the water, the two places they're most likely to get into trouble. Our first and most important mission is to make sure everyone makes it home, every time.

It's an honor to be here, and I look forward to serving with you in the exciting days ahead. Thank you again for all your hard work and support!



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Commanding