



Mitigating Risk with Awareness

It's hard to believe another winter has come and gone, yet spring is on our doorstep and Soldiers and Families across our Army are getting outdoors for some much needed fresh air. Whether it's getting the motorcycle ready for riding season, taking the cover off the boat or planning a vacation far from home, spring and summer offer abundant opportunities for rest and relaxation. That fun can come with a price, however, and Leaders and Soldiers should stay especially aware of the risks inherent to the change of seasons.

During the past three fiscal years, the spring and summer months have continued to be our Army's high-water mark for off-duty fatalities. In fact, closeout numbers from the last six months of fiscal 2011 were nearly 20 percent higher than those from fiscal 2009, a disturbing trend that Leaders and Soldiers at all levels should make every attempt to counter. But mitigating the risk requires awareness, so I'd like to talk about the issues we saw most frequently last year.

Not surprisingly, the majority of our Army's accidental fatalities were due to privately owned vehicle accidents, with a nearly even split between sedans/other POVs and motorcycles — 32 versus 29, respectively. Taken together, approximately 80 percent of all accidental fatalities from the beginning of April to the end of September occurred on the road, and a great many of that number involved indiscipline. Speeding and failure to wear seat belts or personal protective equipment were the top indiscipline-related factors, and several accidents reportedly involved speeds of 90 mph or greater.

These losses were not simply tragic; they were also pointless. No Soldier ever has a good excuse to not wear a seat belt or travel at speeds approaching triple digits. Likewise, no Leader has a valid reason for not knowing his or her Soldiers are behaving in such a reckless manner. Someone always knows when a Soldier is taking unnecessary risks; Leaders must get to know their Soldiers and establish a relationship where they feel comfortable talking about their high-risk peers. Safety issues don't belong underground — they should be out in the open and up for discussion, with input on both problems and solutions welcomed from Soldiers at all levels.

The next question is what do you do with high-risk Soldiers once they're identified? Remaining engaged with both the Soldier and his or her peers is the single-most important thing any Leader can do. Behavior change takes time and patience, and Leaders should involve peers in the process to show the at-risk Soldier he or she is an important and valued member of the team. From there, Leaders should take advantage of remedial driver training programs like Roadrageous, now an official part of the Army Traffic Safety Training Program.

Independent studies have shown this training to be effective in reducing collisions by as much as 74 percent, so it's a valuable opportunity for both high-risk Soldiers and anyone wanting to learn defensive driving techniques. Leaders interested in scheduling Roadrageous training should contact their garrison safety office.

We should also remember last spring and summer's fatalities weren't limited to POVs and motorcycles; eight Soldiers drowned between April and September. Activities on the water can be just as risky as driving or riding, and are made even more so when combined with alcohol use or when Soldiers can't swim or don't know how to properly use a watercraft. Engage with your Soldiers, ask them about their plans and ensure they have the proper training before embarking on any water-related activity. Family, Morale and Recreation facilities offer many fantastic programs geared toward water safety, so ensure your Soldiers take advantage of these close and readily available training opportunities. And like driving sober, ensure your Soldiers understand the risks of mixing alcohol and water activities.

By working together and staying engaged, we can keep accidental fatalities from rising with the temperature these next few months. Stay aware and stay engaged, and most of all, ensure your Soldiers play it safe this spring and summer!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William T. Wolf', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

William T. Wolf
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding