



There's an old saying in the Army that goes something like this: "The Navy is about boats, the Air Force is about planes, but the Army is about people." That statement doesn't give our sister services credit for caring for their troops, which they absolutely do, but it illustrates a point. The essence of our Army is the American Soldier, and that's why we work so hard to protect our men and women from unnecessary risk, whatever it may be.

Recently, we took a day to stand down for suicide awareness and prevention. I've rarely been in training that generated such somber and sincere discussion, and that's especially important given this growing problem facing our Soldiers and their Families. But, I wonder, couldn't we make our safety stand downs just as somber and impactful? Let's not appear to take suicide more seriously than accidental fatalities — the end result of both is the loss of an irreplaceable Soldier.

I'm not downplaying the urgency of suicide in any way; it is without doubt one of the biggest problems facing our Army today. What I'm asking is that we all treat accidents and their losses with urgency as well, and acknowledge that stopping them requires the same attention and commitment that we've seen from our force in combating suicide. In many ways, suicides and accidents are linked, and we can confront these challenges at the same time.

Prevention of both tragedies is, I believe, fundamentally a function of engaged leadership and the battle buddy system. Think about the Soldiers who could be at risk within your formations. The one going through personal or financial problems might not be considering suicide yet, but may not think twice about taking out his aggression on the road in his POV or on his motorcycle. The new Soldier who feels isolated among her peers might drink to excess to fit in with the crowd, exposing herself to a whole new level of risk on the drive or walk home. There's no end to the possible combinations of factors that put our Soldiers at risk, but your engaged leadership and mentorship has and can continue to create an environment where leaders and led alike identify risky behavior before it reaches disastrous and tragic outcomes.

Involved and caring leaders are an important part of prevention, but battle buddies are our first line of defense. In stand downs and weekend safety briefings, we should be setting the expectation that Soldiers look out for one another as fiercely at home as they do in the fight. The Army is no different than any other organization; just like at school, there are always cliques of Soldiers who hang together on and off duty. Get to know these groups; the "unofficial" leader is usually pretty easy to figure out, so engage him or her first for battle buddy mentoring. Peers have amazing influence on one another, and we must tap into it.

The USACR/Safety Center has several tools that can assist you and your Soldiers in identifying those at risk. The Leader, Battle Buddy, and Individual Risk Assessment Cards, available at <https://safety.army.mil>, are similar to the ACE cards our Soldiers carry for suicide prevention. A series of questions, mitigation measures and professional resources provide users with the information they need to stay safe and get help, if needed. The cards are formatted on our site for easy reproduction — all you have to do is hit "print" and distribute among your individual units.

As we close this year and move into the next, I want to thank you for your commitment to safety, which resulted in fewer accidental losses during fiscal 2012 than previous years. I want us to stay sharp, look ahead and consider how we can continue moving in the right direction this coming year. We must remain ever vigilant against the mindset that accidents “just happen”; in reality, they are often preventable. If we were to all treat safety with the same urgency that we do and ought to give suicide, I have no doubt our accident rates will continue to decline. Our Soldiers are our Army, and we owe them our very best efforts!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy J. Edens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'E'.

TIMOTHY J. EDENS
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding