



Safety: A Top Priority Today, Tomorrow

These late days of spring are a wonderful time of year: Temperatures are hinting at the lazy days of summer just ahead, and Soldiers, Families and Civilians across the force are heading outdoors to soak up the sun. This could be considered the most wonderful season of all for many reasons, and by now we're all hearing the sirens' song of perfect weather beckoning us to hit the highway for beaches, parks and other leisurely destinations. And while our Army will observe two national safety campaigns this month, I ask you all to remember risk doesn't keep a calendar — safety should be a priority every minute of every day.

May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, and I'm pleased to report that halfway through fiscal 2012, Army motorcycle fatalities were down from the same timeframe last year. That's great news on the surface, especially considering the mild winter that offered nearly year-round riding conditions for many Soldiers in the United States. Engagement, whether among Leaders and Soldiers or Soldiers and their peers, is working, and most riders are doing the right things to stay safe on the road. However, a closer look at our 10-year motorcycle trend shows this relative calm could be highly deceptive.


Since fiscal 2002, motorcycle fatalities have predictably risen every two to three years, followed by a dramatic decline and then an equally dramatic increase. Now, our most pressing question is how to keep fiscal 2012 from being just another lull in the storm. Sustaining our current progress through the end of September and into the next few fiscal years won't be easy, especially when more and more Soldiers will be bringing their bikes out of winter hibernation or purchasing new rides altogether. Training is obviously a very important part of the solution, and the Army has addressed the need for expanded, sequential motorcycle training through the Progressive Motorcycle Program. Yet, as in all aspects of safety, training by itself isn't enough. Engagement and standards enforcement specifically targeted to indiscipline are the most crucial elements of preventing future tragedies not only on motorcycles, but in all types of vehicles.

This issue of Knowledge contains several excellent articles on motorcycle safety, including "Indiscipline — Beyond Risk Acceptance," written by Lt. Col. Scott Wile of the Driving Directorate here at the USACR/Safety Center. I encourage you to carefully read this story and take Lt. Col. Wile's conclusions to heart. Risky behavior exists everywhere, but most alarmingly, it often exists just beneath the surface of day-to-day operations. Knowing which Soldiers are at risk, even those you'd never expect to be disciplined off duty, is the first step in preventing future fatalities. Talk to your Soldiers, then talk to them some more so you'll be "in the know" regarding who's at risk within your formations.

While much of our attention and efforts should be focused on motorcycle safety, we can't do so at the expense of other issues. Although numbers have stabilized recently, sedans and other POVs were on the rise most of the first half of 2012. Since summer is historically the deadliest time of year for Soldiers in POVs, it's extremely important that you redouble your engagement efforts as we enter this season of long weekends and leisurely travel. Drowning also remains a top concern; we've already lost two Soldiers this fiscal year in water-related accidents. The annual Army Safe Spring/Summer campaign is currently underway, so I encourage you to check out our website at <https://safety.army.mil> for media tools specifically designed to target these and other critical seasonal hazards.

Finally, May was recently recognized as Electrical Safety Awareness Month by the Department of Defense. Electrical hazards are often unseen, and this program aims to educate Soldiers, Family members, Civilians and contractors on the hazards of electricity and the mitigation strategies that have proven effective in preventing injury and death. Visit our website often during the month for updates on this exciting new initiative.

Thank you all for everything you do for our Soldiers, Family members and Civilians. Play hard this summer, but remember to always play it safe!

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