



Taming the dog days

The fact that the fiscal year coincides with the end of summer can be a cruel coincidence for those of us in safety. There's no buffer zone that allows us to bounce back from a bad fourth quarter, which traditionally is our Army's worst time of year for accidents. Slow and steady gains made throughout the year can be diminished quickly by just one or two bad months, and that could kill motivation to keep working toward safety goals. But thus far in fiscal 2013, it looks like we won't have that problem: With about two months left to go, accidental fatalities are still 20 percent lower than this time last year. That decline has held steady for several months now, but to keep it going, we'll have to stay on top of our game through August and September.

Here are some areas to highlight with your Soldiers during safety briefings and end-of-summer stand-downs.

PMV. This year's substantial drop in private motor vehicle fatalities is one of the Army's best news stories in years. As of July 23, fatal accidents in sedans were down 33 percent and pedestrian deaths by half. Motorcycle fatalities had dropped 30 percent from the same time frame last year. These successes run counter to the fears many of us had during the early days of the drawdown in Iraq and the continuing de-escalation of operations in Afghanistan, which together have contributed to more Soldiers at home station than any time in the previous decade-plus. They truly are reflective of the commitment our leaders have to safety and our Soldiers to looking out for themselves and one another. Quite simply, our people made this happen!

There's never a good time to let down our guard, though, especially as Soldiers are eager to enjoy the limited time left before summer vacations are over and kids head back to school. "Get-there-itis" can be just as deadly an affliction as any terminal disease, and it's claimed far too many Soldiers on leave or pass through the years. The two or three minutes gained by excessive speeding are not worth the risk Soldiers and their Families face in a vehicle crash. The destination will always be there, but they may not be if they let the hurry take over. Proper planning and the right frame of mind are key to ensuring road trips begin and end safely and happily.

Drowning. Unfortunately, we haven't seen a similar decline in fatal water accidents; using July 23 data as a baseline, drownings have doubled from fiscal 2012. This summer has been marked by unusually erratic weather, and recreational water spots have been affected. Rip currents along the coasts and lakes and rivers that are either above or below normal stage all pose hazards to boaters and swimmers. Soldiers should be aware of and respect present conditions, regardless of their plans. The water isn't going anywhere, but one impulsive decision can mean you aren't there to enjoy it.

ATV. There's always one accident category that catches us off guard every year, and this time it's PMV-other fatalities tied to all-terrain vehicles. Numbers are small — four deaths overall — but still worrying, considering last year's total was zero. Themes common to motorcycle accidents, including indiscipline and lack of personal protective equipment, have emerged in these accident investigations. While it's too early to call this a trend, it's definitely important to start talking to our Soldiers now about ATV safety, especially with autumn and hunting season approaching. We can go far by using the same approaches that have worked for motorcycles, but we have to open the conversation to make that happen.

You know best what's happening in your formations, but the above points should give you a good start for reaching your Soldiers during these critical next weeks. We're close to another record year for safety, perhaps the best we've ever had. But it's not about the number's you'll brief at the end of the year; everything we do is to keep the Soldiers standing in your formations today there for tomorrow and beyond.

Please use the resources at <https://safety.army.mil> and let me know what else you need to keep your Soldiers safe. We'll be rolling an updated website out during late fall to early winter, and I hope you'll find it more user-

friendly than the existing site. I'm eager to hear your suggestions, so please send me your feedback and let us work for you. Also remember the deadline for training your Soldiers and civilian employees on new elements of the Globally Harmonized System is Dec. 1; don't let that target get lost as the summer rush turns into the holiday frenzy.

Thank you all for what you do every day — you make safety happen and save lives in ways you'll never know!

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