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Measuring up

One of the perennial questions in safety is, “How do we measure what we’re doing?” Too often, the only metric we have available is how many Soldiers died in accidents during any particular period. We’ve gotten into the habit of looking at those numbers and attributing our safety programs’ success or failure to them. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing; we obviously want the arrow pointing downward on accidental deaths. But, I don’t believe it’s enough to quantify what we do every day with only a single figure — safety is much bigger and more complex than that.

In my mind, metrics should be about accountability, not simply numbers. Getting your unit to 100 percent on training requirements or mandated inspections is a noble goal, but it never falls to a single person or event to do it. We must hold our leaders to task in meeting stated metrics, not just the safety officer and not merely against the number of fatalities to accidents. The same is true for developing metrics; every leader should be involved in the process, and honestly, Soldiers should be too. Talking to your troops will give you a good idea of reasonable goals, and then, based on your experience and judgment, you can dial up the “hard” in the process. Simply making a command decision to reduce accidents by whatever percentage won’t make a workable goal or create an environment where your Soldiers buy in to safety through their own participation in risk management. Properly developed, safety metrics can be part of your unit’s safety culture, provide incentive and inspire achievement.

Our Army has been in flux for nearly 12 years, but now is the time to buckle down and make safety a lifestyle so we’re prepared for the next war. These long years of combat have taught us just how important safety is for our Soldiers and mission success, and we don’t need to go back to the days of inaction followed by reaction. We’re much better as a force at pragmatic, proactive approaches to safety, and while metrics have been part of that success, it’s the people behind them who have really made the difference. Leaders looking out for Soldiers and Soldiers looking out for each other have turned the tide against accidental fatalities, and they should be the authority on grading your safety performance. Talk, ask questions, listen and put their ideas into action — the best metric you can meet is having a fully engaged unit.

Spring is on our doorstep, so make sure your Soldiers are ready for the risk. Motorcycle and driver’s training, water safety and responsible drinking are all hot topics for the upcoming season. Schedule a safety stand-down or other dedicated time to discuss hazards and risk management with your Soldiers before the fun begins, and get their ideas on metrics for a successful seasonal safety campaign. Whether it’s starting a Motorcycle Mentorship Program to train new riders or reviving a unit designated driver program, there are many positive ways to influence and measure your formation’s safety culture. Soldier participation in these initiatives is a great indicator of success!

I welcome your ideas on safety metrics and how we can better help you and your Soldiers meet your goals. Also, remember to look for the Army Safe Spring Campaign, to be released later this month at <https://safety.army.mil>. The first step in helping your Soldiers operationalize safety, both on and off duty, is arming them with the information they need to make smart decisions. Check out the campaign, and please let me know your suggestions for future topics.

Thank you for all you do every day, and remember to always play it safe!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

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Commanding