



## Getting riding right

With snow and freezing temperatures persisting throughout much of the United States well into April, it's safe to say this winter has been particularly long and hard. That's why, when the weather finally warms, Soldiers across our Army will be more eager than ever to bring their motorcycles out of storage. Hopefully you've already been talking to your riders about motorcycle safety, but May — as Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month — presents a perfect opportunity for you to either catch up on or reinforce the conversation.

Motorcycle accidents have been a persistent problem within the Army for some time. From fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2012, nearly 400 Soldiers were killed while operating a motorcycle. During that same time frame, approximately 500 Soldiers died in sedan accidents. That's a pretty slim margin when you consider the overwhelming number of sedan drivers versus motorcycle riders in the Army, and it highlights the fact that motorcycle fatalities have grown nearly every year as deaths in most other accident categories have fallen. We have to stop this now, for we can't afford another deadly summer on America's highways.

It's not my intention to pick on a particular group of riders, but accident data support the argument we should be aggressively targeting sport bike owners in our motorcycle safety programs. Last fiscal year, 59 percent of fatalities involved a sport bike; that figure has climbed to 67 percent to date this fiscal year. Age and rank are also a critical part of the equation: Of the 49 fatal motorcycle accidents reported during fiscal 2012, well over half involved a leader, and all but two of the nine Soldiers killed on motorcycles so far this year were older than 25.

One common theme spans a majority of motorcycle accident reports, regardless of age or pay grade — indiscipline. Whether it's speeding, riding without personal protective equipment or failing to complete required training, indiscipline is now a known entity we must confront. The fact we're seeing it in leaders is perhaps the most troubling aspect of all, that some of the individuals we've entrusted to care for Soldiers are failing them on a very grand scale. The loss of a leader to a preventable accident that ultimately was his or her own fault has to be a devastating experience for young Soldiers still finding their way as adults.

These are the trends from the past several years, and it has caused us to take a hard look at the way we approach safety. Like many of you, I came up through the Army believing 18- to 25-year-olds were our problem demographic, and they still are in sedan accidents. But leader and older Soldier involvement in motorcycle mishaps is still relatively new territory, although one we learn from every day. That's why May is such an opportune time to engage with not only your Soldiers, but also your leaders about motorcycle safety and indiscipline, to relay lessons learned early in the riding season with the goal of preventing future accidents.

Of course, the USACR/Safety Center is here to help with programs and tools. The Progressive Motorcycle Program, which promotes lifelong learning and was mandated by recent revision to Army Regulation 385-10, appears to be paying dividends in terms of fewer motorcycle fatalities thus far this year as compared to the same time frame in 2012. We're currently conducting a beta test at one Army installation to take the training one step further and incorporate a behavioral component into the Basic RiderCourse, thereby teaching Soldiers to make smart decisions on the road before they develop bad habits. I'll keep you informed of the progress on this initiative as it moves forward, but until then, ensure your Soldiers' training is up to date and point them to the numerous rider resources available at <https://safety.army.mil>.

Finally, we have to remember the risks our Soldiers will be facing this summer reach far beyond motorcycles. Sedan and other PMV fatalities are almost guaranteed to rise between now and October, along with deaths related to drowning. We'll need to be just as cognizant of these hazards and channel our efforts to mitigating them during these next few months.

Thank you all for the fantastic job you're doing for safety — we're here because of your hard work. I look forward to seeing even more improvements these last days of spring and throughout the summer. Use the tools we have, and please let me know how we can further help.

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