



2014: What's your objective?

We just turned the page on another fiscal year, and preliminary numbers suggest it will be among our Army's best ever for safety. But no matter how fiscal 2013 shakes out, we must allow ourselves to go nowhere but forward into the new year, building upon our successes and paying heed to lessons learned along the way. The Army's annual safety and occupational health objectives, signed in early September by the secretary of the Army and Army chief of staff, provide a sound framework for you to do just that within your formations.

Fiscal 2014's objectives are straightforward: incorporating three specific goals into the unit's strategic plan, and working toward an Army-wide target of a minimum 10 percent reduction in all losses between now and the end of next September. While that figure is less daunting than accident reduction goals set in the past, it won't be easy to achieve. An active and participatory safety culture, however, will go a long way toward helping you and your Soldiers reach and even surpass all of this year's objectives. Here's how culture can help, broken down by each individual objective.

Objective 1a: Identify your organization's top three accident loss areas and provide tools and programs specifically targeted to mitigate the risks that led to those losses. Every unit has its own distinct safety culture, whether good or bad. As a leader, you should know not only what kind of culture you have, but also what risks your Soldiers face most often. Your leadership style helps set the culture, and a leader who is committed and actively leading risk management will garner more buy-in from his or her Soldiers on the unit's safety programs. Willing participation from all stakeholders is a key ingredient in recognizing your formation's top hazards and targeting them with appropriate and effective tools.

Objective 1b: Engaged leaders are the key to reducing our most prevalent cause of Army mishaps — human error. Incorporate proactive measures in your plans to establish a positive safety climate in your organization. Positive safety cultures are, by their very nature, proactive. Engaged leaders deal with the "ifs" and "thens" before a mishap happens instead of after, actually preventing accidents in the process. They also actively seek buy-in from not only their Soldiers, but leaders at every level across the chain of command. This "peer leadership" ensures there are no weak links in the fabric of the unit's safety culture, where even a seemingly minor disruption could put many Soldiers at risk. Conversely, negative safety cultures are almost always reactive, with leaders taking causal factors at their face value and enforcing safety as an inconvenient, but required, mandate. The check-the-block mindset that dominated safety for many years is representative of this, and we've worked hard as an Army to move away from that model. Stay proactive and you'll stay ahead.

Objective 1c: Specify the metrics you will use to track, analyze and evaluate your progress in reducing accidental loss in your unit. Safety is part art, part science. Establishing a positive and proactive safety culture is most definitely art, but backing up your programs with verifiable data is where science enters the picture. The Army Readiness Assessment Program is a great tool to help you identify which metrics matter most in your formation. Thousands of assessments have verified time and again that units with proactive safety cultures operate in high-risk environments at significantly reduced accidental loss rates than those that simply react to accidents. I encourage leaders to continue leveraging this institutionalized program. The metrics will show where you're reducing injuries and saving lives.

Objective 2: For each of those top three loss areas identified, establish a quantitative goal to achieve a minimum 10 percent loss reduction and develop a unique system for defining goals and success. When approached correctly, this objective should be a culmination of the previous three; each goal is part of the cycle that leads to accident prevention and loss reduction. By quantifying progress (or lack thereof), you can make an informed decision on what is and isn't working for your Soldiers. This analysis should be a continual process throughout the fiscal year, with benchmarks you set for your unit's particular circumstances.

Fiscal 2014's objectives are designed to validate what many units and organizations are already doing exceptionally well. With an aggressive and proactive approach to risk management, leaders can take them from goal to reality. As always, my team and I stand ready to help — let us know how we can make safety pay for you!

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