



The realities of Army motorcycle accidents

I don't like to start these columns, or any of my correspondence to the field, with bad news. Truthfully, our Army is still doing very well overall with regard to safety; as of April 28, total accidental fatalities were down four percent from fiscal 2013. That's a great accomplishment, and I don't want to take away from it by focusing on the negative. But, I think it would be a disservice to you and our Soldiers to gloss over the fact that motorcycle fatalities are up sharply from this time last year, that indiscipline is still their leading cause, and that NCOs continue to make up a disproportionate share of the deaths.

Obviously, that kind of news begs immediate consideration. With May being National Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, let's take advantage and give this problem the attention it deserves. We have the entire month to make our Soldiers aware just as riding season gets into full swing for many of our installations. We can't let unseasonably cold temperatures lull us into complacency about our motorcycle riders; the longer they go without riding, the more eager they'll be to hit the road when the days finally stay warm.

The Army does a tremendous job in training Soldiers on motorcycle safety. Civilians in the general population don't have nearly the same training opportunities as our riders, especially progressive training courses that build upon basic skills. There's simply no excuse for Soldiers killing themselves via indiscipline on their bikes, and while it's true leaders can't be with their subordinates 24/7, they can set the example and follow the standards themselves. Honestly, that seems to be where we're falling most short, given that 10 of the 14 motorcycle fatalities reported this year have been leaders.

Command Sgt. Maj. Leeford Cain, USACR/Safety Center, last month published a note to the field addressing this issue (https://safety.army.mil/Portals/0/docs/CSM/CSM_motorcycle_message_js_22April2014.pdf), and I'd like to reiterate a couple of his points. First, what's the status of your unit's motorcycle mentorship program, and are the right people leading it? If you can't answer that question, perhaps it's time to revisit your training and mentor selection. Check out the new "Leader's Guide for Selecting a Motorcycle Mentor" at <https://safety.army.mil> for tips on forming the best team possible. Second, are your leaders disciplined? The leaders we've lost to indiscipline-based motorcycle accidents aren't the only ones out there, but their poor example can have an irreversible impact on our formations if left unchecked or written off as "we can't fix stupid."

Between training, mentorship and disciplined, engaged and accountable leadership, we have the tools we need to reduce motorcycle losses. Each works, and each saves lives. I encourage you to widely share a letter we recently received from a junior leader and motorcycle rider who had a close call with a reckless driver just after finishing required safety training. It's very powerful and speaks to the lifesaving effects of training, if the trainee takes what he or she learns seriously. The letter is available at <https://safety.army.mil/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=cG356XF6vdk%3d&tabid=2094>.

While not directly related to Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, we have important update coming soon: a major overhaul to the Travel Risk Planning System, or TRiPS. Beginning May 5, the system will offer users a wide variety of functionality and upgrades, including better travel planning options, improved user email compatibility, and freestanding applications for smartphones (coming soon). Please make leaders aware of these changes and encourage them to use the upgrades as a means to improved communication with their Soldiers. TRiPS attached to a DA31 will never make Soldiers safe, but it has proven effective when used by first-line leaders to force dialogue with their Soldiers and actually assess and mitigate the risk posed by their travel plans.

Thank you all for the hard work you do every day in safety that directly impacts readiness — I know your jobs aren't easy. It's not my intent to be negative here, but I know you want to face the harsh realities head on. Our Soldiers' lives are simply too important to sugar coat facts, especially when far too many are dying for no good reason. Please let me know what more I can do to help.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy J. Edens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

TIMOTHY J. EDENS
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding