



Assessing Army Safety

As the new director of Army Safety and commanding general of the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, I look forward to working with Army leaders and safety professionals at all levels to preserve our Army's readiness through the prevention of accidental loss of our Soldiers, civilians, Family members and vital resources. First, however, I'd like to recognize some of those whose efforts have been so instrumental in turning the accidental loss arrow downward over the past few years.

Firstly, I want to thank my predecessor, Brig. Gen. Tim Edens. His commitment and efforts to Army safety will positively impact our force for years to come. Secondly, I want to thank our corps of Army senior safety directors. You are the institutional backbone of Army safety and have achieved this status based on your perseverance and commitment to our Army. Your experience is invaluable. Lastly, I want to thank our safety officers and NCOs in our brigades, battalions and companies. You serve on point every day, and your dedication to the Army safety mission is clearly recognizable.

Over the next few weeks, I will assess the state of Army safety and report my findings back to the Army Chief of Staff. My initial sense is that our policies and programs are effective. However, I need a bit more time to validate that assessment.

In the past, we've used 10-year accidental fatality data to measure success. While the 10-year Soldier fatality trend continues to move downward (264 fatalities in fiscal 2004 compared to 135 in fiscal 2013) and we're on a good path to close fiscal 2014, this data alone cannot serve as the overall indicator of success. For instance, the mere fact that off-duty fatalities outnumber on-duty fatalities by nearly 3-to-1 should be troubling to every Army leader. What is just as troubling is that motorcycle and sedan/truck accidents account for more than half of those off-duty fatalities.

We all know historical data and statistics give us a snapshot of what is claiming the lives of our Soldiers, but we must dig deeper to find the root causes. Doing so will allow us to predict the next situation that could lead to an accident and prevent it from occurring.

In July 2010, then-Brig. Gen. Anthony Crutchfield wrote in an article for Knowledge magazine in which he identified the five most common words he found in accident reports at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California — untrained, unsupervised, undisciplined, overconfident and complacent. He encouraged leaders to understand the risk management process and ensure safety awareness is ingrained in everything their Soldiers do.

"As commanders and supervisors," General Crutchfield wrote, "we are responsible for establishing and enforcing effective safety programs."

I couldn't agree more. Our Army is drawing down from more than 13 years of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must all be cognizant that although we may not be battling individuals or groups of armed adversaries, the adversaries we will face are no less deadly. Being untrained, unsupervised, undisciplined, overconfident or complacent, whether on or off duty, can be just as threatening as the enemy and will take a life indiscriminately and without hesitation.

The one common denominator in the equation for success is leader engagement. Organizations led by informed and aware leaders who engage their subordinates and teammates will succeed. Engaged leaders also make safety imperative in their formations, and it serves as the foundation on which the organization's safety culture is built.

At the end of the day, with a collaborative approach inclusive of all safety professionals across the force, effective and proactive leader engagement and the harnessing of current technology, I believe we can build a common operating picture of our safety environment and identify individuals in our formations that are most at risk. Having that information will allow us to push knowledge and resources to prevent accidents.

I look forward to working with all of you in the future and greatly welcome your feedback. I pledge to you my support and commitment to Army safety as we work together to sustain the positive momentum we've achieved over the past few years.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff A. Farnsworth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JEFFREY A. FARNSWORTH
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Commanding