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U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

FROM THE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG



Just the Facts

One of the things I look forward to most in my job is traveling to talk with Leaders and Soldiers across our Army. It's great to see firsthand the tremendous job our Soldiers are doing every day, while also helping Leaders at all levels address the safety challenges within their formations. But there's one thing about these conversations that sticks with me after every trip: Almost without fail, they focus on the issue of indiscipline and seat belt use in privately owned vehicles.

During all my years as an NCO, I've heard every excuse imaginable from Soldiers who willingly choose not to wear their seat belts. Here are a few of them, followed by some facts on why buckling up is so important.

"Sergeant Major, I have an air bag, so I don't need to wear my seat belt." FACT: Air bags only supplement the protective effects of seat belts — they do not replace them. Driver and passenger air bags, as well as new iterations of curtain and side impact bags, are not designed to be used alone. In fact, unbelted vehicle occupants can be seriously injured or killed by the force of activated air bags, which deploy at speeds greater than 100 mph.

"Well, Sergeant Major, I drive a truck, so I'm safe. It sits so high no car can hurt me." FACT: This excuse is apparently pretty popular, since National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics show seat belt use by pickup truck drivers lags significantly behind those in other vehicles, including passenger cars, SUVs and minivans (75 percent versus 86 and 88 percent, respectively). But in reality, pickups are three times more likely to roll during crashes than other vehicles, and rollovers are the single-greatest cause of injuries and fatalities on American roadways each year.

"But Sergeant Major, I only need my seat belt when I'm driving long distances. I'm just going a few miles around post now." FACT: According to the state of Florida's Click It or Ticket campaign, most fatal vehicle accidents occur within 25 miles of home and at speeds below 40 mph. Whatever speed you're traveling is the speed at which your body, led by your head, will hit the windshield or dash should you be involved in an accident unbelted. For every 10 mph in a traffic accident, crash forces are roughly equivalent to the fall from a one-story building — and your head won't know the difference between glass, plastic or asphalt.

"You know, Sergeant Major, I'm a safe driver, so I don't need a seat belt." FACT: Not everyone takes pride in their driving. Bad drivers are everywhere, and bad things happen to good drivers. You also can't control the weather, mechanical malfunctions or

events like tire blowouts, either on your vehicle or someone else's. You don't want to be remembered as that "safe" driver who died because you failed to buckle up.

And last but not least ...

"Uh, Sergeant Major, I just forgot to put my seat belt on." FACT: It takes about three seconds to buckle a seat belt, states the U.S. Department of Transportation. If you can remember to grab your cellphone or music player before hitting the road, you have both the time and the memory to reach back for your belt and snap it into place. Make it a priority, and you'll be surprised how quickly buckling up becomes an automatic habit.

Still not convinced? Here are two more cold, hard facts for you. First, Soldiers are required by regulation to wear seat belts at all times in POVs, whether as a driver or passenger. It's not a choice, and it doesn't matter whether the state in which they live has a seat belt law. Second, enforcing standards saves lives and engaged leadership works. Driving is a privilege, not a right, and as Leaders, we have the power of both corrective action and corrective training through programs like Roadrageous to steer high-risk Soldiers back to a safe path. Use that power wisely and every time it's needed. We can't risk losing even one of our Soldiers because we didn't take the time to make an on-the-spot correction or have a conversation on indiscipline behind the wheel.

We also have to realize indiscipline doesn't discriminate based on rank. There are Leaders among us who willfully disregard the standard every day in their vehicles or on their motorcycles. Don't be afraid to correct your peers or even those above you in the chain of command and talk to your seniors when a fellow Leader is in trouble. At the end of the day, we're all Soldiers, and we're all accountable for each other's safety.

We've heard the excuses and we know what the problem is — now it's time for solutions. Enforce the standard, implement a zero-tolerance indiscipline policy and engage with your Soldiers on the seat belt issue. There's nothing more important to our Soldiers, Family members and Civilians than safety, and that begins with you.

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard D. Stidley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Rick Stidley
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center