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FROM THE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG



Making a difference with Engaged Leaders

Recently, Gen. Forrester and I, along with several counterparts, visited with Soldiers in Iraq on behalf of the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center to better understand safety-related issues affecting Soldier loss among our ranks. And while we understand progress is being made in regards to our mission, as I talked with Soldiers about accident prevention measures, some of the same problems from my first deployment remain.

For example, Soldiers are still opting not to wear their seat belts while driving in theater. Their reasoning behind this decision hinges on the fear of either being trapped in a vehicle after striking an IED and it catches fire, or not being able to exit if their vehicle becomes submerged in water. While these are valid concerns, please note you can't escape from a burning vehicle if you are unconscious.

Another recurring problem is negligent discharges. In October, a Soldier was killed because of a negligent discharge while on duty. In August, another negligent discharge claimed the life of an off-duty Soldier. While most incidents we investigate involving fatalities are accidental, it still does not make losing Soldiers among our ranks acceptable.

In 2007, we continued making great strides in accidental loss prevention. One reason for this was your efforts as engaged leaders. Engaged leaders exist at each level in our chain of command, no matter the rank. My definition of an engaged leader is someone who not only holds his/her Soldiers accountable, but are held accountable as well.

The November issue of *Knowledge* featured an article describing the sequence of events that led to a senior NCO's death in a motorcycle-related crash. The facts in this unfortunate accident revealed fatigue played a large role in the Soldier's death. Additional factors indicate he was in the company of several fellow senior NCOs leading up to the fatal event.

In this case, we are not only saddened by the loss of a Soldier, father, son and friend, but we also shake our heads in disbelief over the obvious. While no one in particular is to blame in an accident such as this, there are ways to prevent this from recurring.

Again, think about what I mentioned earlier about accountability as an engaged leader. The Army lives off of the three-to-six principle. This unspoken principle indicates every leader should be responsible for three to six Soldiers. In the enlisted ranks, the first sergeant is responsible for his platoon/section NCOs; they, in turn, are responsible for their squad leaders, who are responsible for their Soldiers.

The common bridge in this month's column—whether it is seat belt use, negligent discharges or driver error—is engaged leadership can and will make a difference in saving lives in our formations. On or off duty, ensure you are communicating composite risk management to your Soldiers, as well as holding them accountable.

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