



Safe and sober celebrating

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The fall and winter seasons are full of opportunities for celebrating. Football games, holidays and extended vacations from work all offer ample time for fun, food and fellowship. And for many people, tailgates and parties wouldn't be the same without a splash or two of their favorite alcoholic beverages.

While social gatherings offer a perfect opportunity to let loose, Soldiers, Family members and Civilians must be extra vigilant and have a plan if they choose to drink, regardless of the time of year. But when you factor in other variables unique to winter, including adverse weather conditions like ice and snow, prior planning becomes even more important.

"Driving in inclement weather regardless of the time of year is a challenge," said Ben Bailey, a safety specialist with the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Driving Task Force. "Adding alcohol only further impairs your ability to think, react and recover."

Accident reports show drinking and driving are a lethal combination for Soldiers year round. Between the start of fiscal 2008 and close of fiscal 2009, 71 Soldiers died in alcohol-related vehicle crashes. At least 14 Soldiers were killed in drinking and driving incidents in fiscal 2010, with additional reports pending at the end of the year. And during those three years, another 149 Soldiers were injured in privately owned vehicle crashes where alcohol was reported as a contributing factor.

Statistics also prove the dangers of alcohol impairment do not stop at driving—walking while drunk can be just as deadly. On average, the Army loses approximately two Soldiers every year to alcohol-related pedestrian accidents.

"Walking versus driving sounds like a good plan, but an intoxicated pedestrian is at tremendous risk," Bailey said. "A plan is only as good as the planner. If your thoughts are clouded by the effects of alcohol, you might not have planned for every challenge."

According to Bailey, both party hosts and their guests have special responsibilities for ensuring everyone makes it home safely.

For hosts:

- Collect car keys from guests as they arrive and return them to only those guests who are not impaired.
- Offer alcohol-free beverages and plenty of food so guests have alternatives to alcohol.
- Ensure guests leave sober or with a sober designated driver, and call a cab for guests without a ride.
- Keep alcoholic beverages off limits to all guests under the age of 21.

For guests:

- Make a plan. Designate a nondrinking buddy and give him or her the keys, prearrange a taxi service or have the numbers for local cab companies programmed in your cell phone.
- Use the buddy system. Rotate designated driver responsibilities and, if no one else volunteers, speak up and offer to stay sober.
- Be honest with yourself and remember that even a slight “buzz” can significantly weaken your perceptions and abilities. If you are out on your own and know you are impaired, stay with the host until you are sober or call a friend or taxi for a ride.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when celebrating these next few months is that no matter the situation, drinking and driving is never the right answer. Engagement on all fronts—leaders, Soldiers, Family members and Civilians—is critical to ensuring everyone in the Army Family understands the dangers of impaired driving.

“Risk taking often ends in needless fatalities,” Bailey said. “Our Army needs each and every one of our Soldiers. We must continue teaching our Soldiers to think about their decisions and the consequences of risky behavior.”

More information on impaired driving, POV safety and many other fall and winter safety topics is available online at <https://safety.army.mil> under the Fall/Winter Safety Campaign tab.