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Watch Your Step!

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A number of Soldiers have been killed or seriously injured in pedestrian-related accidents during recent years, and one goal of this year's Army Safe Spring/Summer campaign is to heighten awareness of unsafe behaviors and the hazards of distracted walking.

While distracted walking may sound innocuous, Soldiers are losing their lives while participating in high-risk pedestrian activities like running with headphones or crossing multilane highways under the influence of alcohol. Even Soldiers doing the right thing have been hit by inattentive drivers at crosswalks.

"Over the course of the past five fiscal years (2007 – 2011), 37 Soldiers have died in off-duty pedestrian accidents," said Dr. Joseph MacFadden, USACR/Safety Center Human Factors Directorate. "National statistics have shown many pedestrian accidents were a result of inattention blindness. All too often, pedestrians tend to be engaged in texting, talking on their cell phones, having a conversation with someone they are walking alongside or just not paying attention to their surroundings."

Experts say situational awareness is a key component of pedestrian safety. Drivers may fail to yield the right of way, so pedestrians cannot assume a car will always stop to let them pass.

"Pedestrians need to walk defensively and be prepared for the unexpected," said David Johnson, safety director at Joint Multinational Training Command. "They can prevent accidents by walking on sidewalks, crossing streets at intersections whenever possible and avoiding dangerous moves such as stepping into traffic from between parked cars."

Johnson said drivers and pedestrians must work together.

"Drivers should keep their minds on driving and the traffic around them, including pedestrian traffic," he said. "And pedestrians must make eye contact with drivers to ensure they are seen."

The Army has lost many Soldiers because of senseless acts, MacFadden said, but pedestrian-related mishaps are easily preventable.

Currently, the Human Factors Directorate is working on a campaign that specifically targets pedestrian safety. The new initiative will launch in the coming months as Soldiers spend more time outdoors.

“We want Soldiers and their Family members to always be alert when outdoors,” MacFadden said. “The ‘Watch Out Walking!’ campaign is aimed at keeping our Soldiers, Families and Civilians safe.”

For additional information on pedestrian safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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