



# Managing risk involves more than just assessment

U.S. Army photo

*Managing risk begins long before the unit deploys on its assigned mission. Determining the level of risk involved in convoy movements like the one above is crucial to a safe and successful mission.*

By Sgt. Jimmy Norris

Whether a unit is planning a four-day weekend or a deployment into a far away desert, there is risk in almost everything, and that risk needs to be assessed. The unit leadership must identify the hazards threatening both the Soldiers and the mission, and ways to mitigate those hazards need to be found. Unfortunately, said Chief Warrant Officer Anthony Kurtz, team chief of the U.S. Army Safety Center's Mobile Training Team, the mistake many units make is stopping their risk management process after they complete the risk assessment.

"Conducting a risk assessment only covers the first two steps of the risk management process," he said. "This is where units get in trouble. They stop there because they think they've accomplished risk management."

The risk management process, he said, is a five-step continuous process.

The first step is to identify the hazards of a mission. Hazards, Kurtz said, are any real or potential conditions that can cause injury, illness, mission degradation, damage to or loss of equipment or property.

Kurtz said there are a number of ways to identify hazards. One is through experience. If a leader has been involved in a similar mission, he should have a pretty good idea of which hazards to expect.

Using their experience to help identify hazards is one of the ways NCOs can play a big role in the risk management process, said Master Sgt. Terry Costlow, an instructor from the U.S. Army Safety Center's Mobile Training Team.

"NCOs have been out in the field. They've probably done the missions hundreds of times and probably have 10 times the experience their commander does," he said. "They can help by informing him of past hazards and recommending controls they've seen used effectively."

Another way to identify potential hazards is through historical data. At the end of every mission or exercise, Kurtz said, there should be an after action review (AAR). The AAR provides a record of hazards that occurred the last time the unit conducted a similar mission. Another way to identify hazards is through intuitive analysis, what Kurtz described as a "gut feeling."

The best way, he said, is to use the hazard identification tools that can be found on the U.S. Army Safety Center Web site located at <http://safety.army.mil>.

Once the hazards have been identified, the second step in the Risk Management Process is to assess the hazards – to determine the possible impact of each hazard based on the hazard's probability and potential severity.

The U.S. Army Safety Center's Web site provides a risk assessment matrix that helps categorize hazards according to severity and probability. (See graphic on page 18.)

To illustrate how these categories might fit into an assessment, Kurtz used a ruck march on desert terrain as an example. The probability of a heat injury in this situation is likely, but since most injuries result only in a Soldier needing an intravenous rehydration treatment, the severity of the hazard is negligible, Kurtz explained. On the Risk Assessment Matrix, a probability of likely and a severity of negligible combine to form a low-risk situation.

But each mission is different, Kurtz said. For example, Soldiers who have had previous heat injuries have an increased probability of a new heat injury.

“You have to ask ‘How will this affect the Soldiers?’ because if it affects the Soldiers, chances are, it will affect the mission,” Kurtz said.

“I would rather rate a hazard higher and have more controls in place than risk having a Soldier injured,” added Costlow.

The third step in the risk management process is to develop controls that reduce either the probability or the severity of a hazard.

Going back to his example of a ruck march in the desert, Kurtz said, an example of a control measure might be to schedule the march for the early morning when temperatures are cooler than they would be later in the day. By moving the activity to a cooler part of the day, the likelihood of a heat injury is reduced.

At the NCO-level, Kurtz said, it’s important to be aggressive in making the chain of command aware of potential risks, Soldiers’ prior heat injuries, for example, so they can make informed decisions when putting controls in place.

		PROBABILITY				
		FREQUENT	LIKELY	OCCASIONAL	SELDOM	UNLIKELY
SEVERITY	CATASTROPHIC	E	E	H	H	M
	CRITICAL	E	H	H	M	L
	MARGINAL	H	M	M	L	L
	NEGLECTIBLE	M	L	L	L	L

**Probability**  
*Unlikely – Will probably not occur*  
*Seldom – Unlikely, but could occur at some time*  
*Occasional – Occurs sporadically*  
*Likely – Occurs several times*  
*Frequent – Occurs often*

**Severity**  
*Negligible – Requiring first aid or causing minor system impairment*  
*Marginal – Causing minor injury or property damage*  
*Critical – Causing permanent partial disability or major property damage*  
*Catastrophic – Resulting in death, permanent total disability, system loss or major property damage*



Photo by Spc. Sean Kimmons, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, PAO

**Marshalling vehicles to the ready line involves little risk, but if the potential risks are not considered, even this operation can have a negative outcome. According to the Army Safety Center, for every reported accident there are approximately 600 nonreported near misses.**

The fourth step in the risk management process is to implement controls.

“NCOs and the Army as a whole are real good at identifying and assessing hazards and coming up with controls,” said Costlow. “Implementing is where we start falling off. We talk about controls, but we don’t put them in place.”

Implementing controls is done through regulations, policy letters, standard operating procedures, orders, briefings, back-briefs, training and rehearsals.

Kurtz said NCOs play a key role in this step by training and briefing their Soldiers after the chain of command has put a policy in place.

“NCOs shouldn’t think they don’t have a role in this process because they do,” Kurtz said. “They’re the first-line supervisors. They’re the ones with their boots in the mud.”

The fifth step in the process is to supervise and evaluate. Supervising and evaluating means enforcing implemented controls, while evaluating, adjusting and updating when necessary. According to Costlow, this is another part of the risk management process in which NCOs play a key role.

“NCOs are the enforcers of the standard. The squad leaders, platoon sergeants and team leaders are the ones out working with the Soldiers,” he said. “The commander can’t always be there and the Soldiers are more apt to talk to their NCOs than to their commanders about any new hazards that might come up or which controls aren’t working.”

Supervising and evaluating, Kurtz said, is one of the most often neglected steps in the process.

“This is the step people forget the most,” he said. “Supervising and evaluating is a continuous process because as soon as the mission starts the situation has changed. New hazards arise, the weather changes or the controls you implemented don’t work.”

When the mission is over, Kurtz said, units should always conduct an AAR. This will provide the historical data for future missions and help reduce risks.

“The bottom line is you want to use this process to protect the assets and protect the mission,” Kurtz said.

For more information on the risk management process, go to the Army Safety Center Web site at <http://safety.army.mil>.



U.S. Army photo

*Underestimating the risks involved in a rappelling exercise can be deadly.*