



By Cindy Ramirez

**W**arm summer days beckon the risk-taker inside us all: Spending long days at the lake or in the pool, pushing adrenaline-pumping speeds behind the wheel or taking on endurance-testing extreme sports tease our sense of adventure.

*But for many Soldiers who have risked their lives on the battlefield, summer's beckoning while on the homefront can be especially dangerous.*

"The Soldiers we often see in accident and fatality reports, especially those involving privately owned vehicles, are young adults taking risks that most young adults take," said Command Sgt. Major Michael Eyer of the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, Fort Rucker, Ala. "But these Soldiers — many who have been to one, two or more deployments where they've had to manage risks every day, every hour — feel a sense of invincibility when they come home, and they forget basic precautions."

The Army typically experiences an increase in off-duty accidents and accidental fatalities over the summer, most notably, involving privately owned vehicles and motorcycles. In fact, about 60 percent of accidental fatalities within the Army so far this fiscal year — 68 as of March 12 — involve privately owned vehicles, according to statistics gathered by the Safety Center.

To help Soldiers, leaders and families avoid accidents over the next several months, the Safety Center has launched its 2010 Safe Summer Campaign, "Play it Safe." The public service cam-

paign focuses on more than 20 summer safety topics and features articles, posters and tools to help bolster existing safety programs.

Among those topics are boating and swimming, camping, hiking and extreme sports, sun safety, and everything vehicular — driving under the influence, avoiding fatigue, securing seat belts and restraints, and safely driving cars, trucks, SUVs, bicycles, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes.

In fiscal year 2009, 106 fatalities were reported involving privately owned vehicles while Soldiers were off-duty. That compares to 173 accidental aviation and ground fatalities involving Army aircraft or vehicles. Though both figures are the lowest in the past three years, officials said there's much more that can be done to reduce those statistics even further.

"Our Soldiers are going to engage in high-risk activities when they're not at work," Eyer said. "We know this, and we must embrace the fact and move forward — not with the intent to stop them, but rather to help them understand how they can participate in these activities safely."

Eyer said that's where Composite Risk Management comes into play.

### Calculating risk

The Army's primary decision-making process to identify hazards, reduce risk and prevent loss, Composite Risk Management focuses on protecting Soldiers from injury or death, as well as avoiding damage to equipment.

The Safety Center has developed several tools to help Soldiers and their leaders mitigate risk, chief among them is the Travel Risk Planning System, or TRiPS. The online program allows Soldiers to input information about an upcoming road trip, including the type of vehicle they'll be driving, their destination and the time and route of their travels. TRiPS reports must be approved by supervisors before Soldiers can embark on their trip.

The Army also mandates motorcycle riders take a safety course, and numerous other training and safety programs that teach Soldiers how to avoid accidents.

Most of the time, Eyer said, it comes down to basics — buckle up when driving, don't swim alone, drink plenty of water when hiking, wear a helmet when riding all-terrain vehicles and don't consume alcohol when you're not supposed to.

Awareness campaigns remind Soldiers, leaders and families about these dangers, but it's also necessary to empower them with the confidence to speak up when they see the potential for accidents.

"Peers, friends, wives, families, NCOs all have the responsibility to look out for their Soldiers, for each other," Eyer said.

The same dangers that Composite Risk Management aims to avoid while on the job aren't often measured or considered by Soldiers during their off time, he said.

"Those same considerations are just as important at any given time," Eyer said. "But Soldiers often fail to follow basic safety procedures or consider the risks, and their NCOs do not always engage themselves enough so that their Soldiers feel comfortable to turn to them when they do find themselves in trouble."

## The aftermath

Sgt. 1st Class Gabriel Boyd, a ground accident investigator at the Safety Center, is among those tasked with trying to answer the "why" question following an accident or accidental fatality.

"We have task forces that deploy worldwide to investigate accidents of all kinds, including ground and aviation incidents, to try to answer what happened and why," Boyd said. "It's never pretty."



Photo by Cindy Ramirez

Ground accident investigator Sgt. 1st Class Gabriel Boyd stands next to a poster of *Knowledge*, the official Army safety magazine, and says investigation teams are working to prevent future accidents and fatalities.

The accident investigation teams consider several factors — human, environmental and material — and sometimes interview witnesses, family members and Soldiers' peers to determine whether any psychological issues may have contributed to the incident. Their findings are used to track trends and recommend changes in equipment or policies, as well as to develop awareness campaigns to avoid future incidents.

"Even though we deal in the aftermath of an accident, we're an accident prevention team," Boyd said. "If we can prevent one fatality, one injury, then that is the most satisfying part of my job. We're making a difference."

## Seeking adventure

To help battle-weary Soldiers transition into their home units without losing their adrenaline-driven zeal for excitement, the Warrior Adventure Quest program allows them to experience high-risk activities in a safe and controlled environment.

Warrior Adventure Quest, being implemented in installations across the Army, offers Soldiers activities such as paintball, mountain biking, scuba diving, sky diving, white-water rafting, snowboarding and rock climbing.

"It's definitely working to help Soldiers focus their energy in positive and safe ways," said Sgt. Maj. Robert M. Carmel of the Morale, Welfare and Recreation program at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., where the program is swinging into full-throttle with the expected return over the next eight months of about 17,000 Soldiers who are currently deployed.

"You come out of combat, and you have all this hype and energy after being in these high-stress situations," Carmel said. "The feedback has been nothing but positive."

But it doesn't always have to be so "high-risk," Eyer said.

In 2007, Fort Riley, Kan., designated a 250-acre plot for all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes that is open to Soldiers, their families and Department of the Army civilians.

Organizing sports competitions and hosting recreational activities can also help Soldiers de-stress, get fit and stay safe.

"As dwell time between combat tours increases, leaders need to find creative ways to incorporate similar programs and educational and team-building initiatives into their training schedules," Eyer said. "This builds stronger and safer Soldiers by channeling their creative energies toward hobbies that fulfill twin goals of physical fitness and safety awareness." 

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## U.S. Army Accident Report

	FY 2010*	FY 2009	FY 2008	FY 2007
Class A** Accidents	73	218	247	265
Accidental Fatalities	70	173	207	249
Off-duty privately owned vehicle fatalities	39	106	129	114

\* From Oct. 1, 2009, to March 17, 2010

\*\*Denotes fatality or permanent total disability and/or damage costs of \$1 million or more and/or destruction of Army aircraft, missile or spacecraft



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