"We ask everyone to take ownership of the risk-management process and to be your own best battle buddy. Whether you are taking a family vacation, road trip, riding your motorcycle or boating on the lake, be aware of potential hazards. Take responsibility for your own safety. Wear your seat belts, obey speed limits and wear your personal protective equipment as required. You owe it to your fellow Soldiers and your families to be safe."

Summer Safety Message, U.S. Army Leadership

in the heat of the summer

By Cindy Ramirez

MARCH 30: A 27-year-old specialist fell from a tree onto a fence and died. Alcohol is reported as a factor.

MAY 28: A 38-year-old sergeant first class riding an all-terrain vehicle drove off the gravel road and was thrown from the vehicle after crashing into a tree. He wasn't wearing a helmet and died at the scene.

MAY 29: A 23-year-old private first class who had been boating with other Soldiers disappeared under the surface of a lake after trying to retrieve an object floating in the water. He drowned.

These incidents, unfortunately, are true and make up only a few of the type of off-duty accidents that are taking the lives of Soldiers across the Army — particularly in summer when fatality rates inevitably increase, officials said.

"Many Soldiers understand where Composite Risk Management fits into mission planning, but seldom do they use that tool off duty. As a result, we keep seeing accidents taking Soldiers' lives," said Command Sgt. Major Michael Eyer, the senior noncommissioned officer for the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, Fort Rucker, Ala.

"Accidents happen year round, but the summer is often when Soldiers feel more free, more invincible and tend to get themselves into trouble."

Eyer said many accidents could be prevented if Soldiers incorporate CRM within their everyday activities. CRM is the Army's primary decision-making process to identify hazards, reduce risk and prevent accidental and tactical loss.

Statistics from the Safety Center show Soldier accidents and fatalities are on the rise this fiscal year. Although the majority continues to be from incidents involving privately owned vehicles and motorcycles, accidents such as falling from an elevation are also of concern.

As of June 24 in fiscal year 2010, the Army reported 10 off-duty fatalities — not including vehicle or motorcycle deaths. That compares to a total of 12 in fiscal year 2009 and 22 in 2008.

Play Safe in the Heat

The 2010 Safe Summer Campaign, "Play it Safe," reminds Army leaders, Soldiers, families and civilians the most critical days of summer are between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

The initiative provides articles, posters and videos to promote proactive prevention on everything from swimming to boating to heat-related illnesses.

The Safety Center reports that about 250 Soldiers have been treated for clinically severe heat-related injuries during the past two years, including heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

New in this year's campaign is an interactive activity which promotes water safety through messages intertwined within online games. An interactive activity on gun safety intended to reduce off-duty firearms accidents is now also online. Home and driving safety activities are coming soon.

"We are going to where the Soldier is," Eyer said, referring to the Internet. "Soldiers go online during their time off and spend a lot of time there. We are using that as an avenue to send our messages."

Eyer said the campaign materials allow installations to tailor their message to their needs.

As he visits installations across the nation to make presentations or review safety programs, Eyer said he's noticed safety offices becoming increasingly involved in the planning of recreational activities provided through programs such as the Army Family Morale, Welfare and Recreation and Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers.

"We need to continue to push for more involvement in the planning stages and throughout, and not consider safety offices separate entities that provide only mandatory training," Eyer said.

R. Keith Lane, director of installation safety at Fort Knox, Ky., said the Depart-

ment of Public Works, family readiness groups and the FMWR program play key roles in delivering safety messages.

"A host of other folks have gotten safety built into their programs," Lane said. "And that's very important. When you have multiple organizations thinking and talking about safety, it's like everybody is talking at once, so somebody is bound to get the message. Safety offices are here to help, to provide resources, but it can't all rest on us."

Water Safety

Fort Knox has had Soldiers drown the past few years, making water safety awareness especially important, Lane said.

An incident in May is still under investigation, but Lane said he believes the death hit the Fort Knox family hard. A few years ago, another Soldier died after he and his buddies went for a swim in a nearby river. The Soldier tried to rappel into the river and the rope broke.

"He went down at about 4 p.m. They didn't find him until 9 a.m. the next morning," Lane said. "I can only imagine how those other Soldiers must have felt. Nobody wants to feel that way; nobody should have to."

Richard Scott, a safety specialist at the Fort Rucker Safety Center, points to the "Too List" from the American Red Cross as a starting point for things Soldiers should consider when mitigating risks associated with water fun.

"The list reminds people to never get 'too tired, too cold, too far away from safety, too much sun or too much strenuous activity,'" Scott said.

"Sometimes, just being around a lot of people isn't enough when it comes to staying safe in the water," he added. "Being a buddy and actively watching for signs that someone is struggling can make the difference between a fun day in the water and a terrible tragedy."

Avoiding tragedies is at the heart of a train-the-trainer water and boating safety course offered at Fort Hood, Texas. Offered by the Army Corps of Engineers, the course has been offered at the installation for about five years.

The training trickles down to battalions and brigades, as well as families across the installation, said Ronald Deshotel, acting director for III Corps Safety at Fort Hood.

Driving, Riding, Walking

While boating and other swimming activities increase during the summer months, Deshotel said that as in installations Armywide, Fort Hood's biggest off-duty concern is privately owned vehicle and motorcycle accidents.

"Our motorcycle and POV safety courses go on all the time because we have motorcycle-riding weather year round," Deshotel said. "Unfortunately that continues to be our biggest problem in terms of accidents, but we're also seeing a lot more Soldiers come through our program."

Eyer said while more Soldiers are heeding the message of motorcycle safety, another troubling trend is forming: pedestrian fatalities.

"Those numbers are going up," said Eyer. "The Soldier decided not to drive, which was a good decision. But unfortunately, they've been drinking heavily in some cases, and decide to walk alone, sometimes along dangerous roads."

Eight pedestrian deaths were reported over 2008-09, while another eight have been reported so far in fiscal year 2010.

Guns and Alcohol

Also of note, Eyer said, are accidents involving privately owned weapons.

"Since we've spent the last eight years in conflict, our Soldiers are coming back feeling comfortable with weapons," Eyer said.

"We have had incidents of Soldiers wounded with personally owned weapons or injuring others with them, because they don't know how to operate them safely off duty, or they buy weapons on which they haven't been trained," he added.

A common factor in most accidents of all categories, Eyer said, is alcohol.

"Our best recourse is to ensure that Soldiers are counseled so they drink responsibly," he said. "And that we take precautions: Know your limit, have a designated driver, and always have a battle buddy to look out for you."

Eyer said having a support system is important, encouraging private party hosts and public establishments to serve non-alcoholic beverages and watch how much alcohol they serve. Soldiers should always have a designated driver or a designated walker, someone who can ensure they get home safely, he said.

'I Made It'

Fort Hood's Deshotel said it's especially important for NCOs to serve as mentors who Soldiers can trust and turn to for information and leadership.

"These messages are extremely important to the younger Soldier," said Deshotel, a retired chief warrant officer. "We [thought we] were invincible at that age, and these young Soldiers today are no different."

Like Eyer, Fort Knox's Lane said families and civilians also play a major role in keeping their Soldiers safe. As such, safety programs are increasingly reaching out to those audiences.

"We work to make sure that the Soldiers and the civilians who support them are able to do their job and still go home to their family at night and say, 'It was a rough day, but I made it.'"

Contact Cindy Ramirez at cindy.ramirez1@us.army.mil

HEAT INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

- **Dress for the heat:** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Wear hats, and use an umbrella.
- **Drink water:** Carry water or juice, and drink continuously even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- **Eat small:** Eat small meals, and eat more often. Avoid foods high in protein which increase metabolic heat.
- **Slow down.** Avoid strenuous activity, or do it between 4 and 7 a.m.
- **Stay indoors** when possible.
- **Take regular breaks** in a cool place when engaged in physical activity.

For safety information and interactive games, visit:

https://safety.army.mil/