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U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

FROM THE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG



NCOs: The Backbone of Standards

There's no doubt noncommissioned officers have one of the toughest jobs in today's Army, but the corps is still going strong after more than a decade at war. Even in the face of extreme challenges, NCOs at every level continue to prove they truly are the backbone of our force, doing great things for their Soldiers every day. I would be remiss as an NCO myself, however, if I didn't talk with you about our continuing issue with enlisted leaders and indiscipline, especially regarding privately owned motorcycles.

In general, I don't like to repeat the same things you've already heard many times, often from me. But this problem is too important to ignore, and it bears repeating that we simply have to get a handle on NCO indiscipline. It's not just their lives on the line — the example they're setting by willfully disregarding the standard also puts their Soldiers at risk.

The numbers from this fiscal year are sobering: Of all motorcycle fatalities recorded through June 1, more than half were NCOs. With the exception of a couple accidents where other drivers were at fault, nearly every incident involved some form of indiscipline, whether speeding, nonuse of personal protective equipment or improper passing of other vehicles. Although we can't watch our Soldiers every minute of every day, we do have control over our own behavior, and the bottom line is an NCO is a leader all the time.

We also have to remember these losses reflect only those NCOs whose risky behavior caught up with them. How many more among our ranks are taking potentially deadly risks every day? There's a difference between an undisciplined Soldier and an indisciplined one. Undisciplined Soldiers haven't been trained to know what right looks like but can be brought to standard in everything they do, including riding. An indisciplined Soldier, however, is one who knows the standard and is trained to it, but consciously chooses to do whatever he or she wants anyway. Even though the majority of NCOs involved in this year's fatal motorcycle accidents had the proper training and the right personal protective equipment, they simply chose not to follow the standard, and that's the textbook definition of indiscipline.

The trickle-down effect of this mentality is particularly dangerous. Our junior enlisted Soldiers are almost invariably young and impressionable. When they see their leaders making bad decisions with impunity, what's to stop them from doing the same? Not counting NCOs, every Soldier killed in a motorcycle accident — and all but three killed in privately owned vehicle accidents — thus far in fiscal 2012 has been a junior enlisted member. This doesn't mean these Soldiers had bad leadership, but it does indicate our NCOs need to step up and take the lead on

enforcing standards and modeling appropriate behavior. The Army is the first adult experience many Soldiers will have, and we can't set them up for failure by acting like children ourselves.

I don't mean to be harsh and I'm certainly not saying all, or even most, of our NCOs are undisciplined. But we have a tough problem with at least a few of our leaders, and it must be addressed immediately. From the squad leader to the command sergeant major, we should all be engaged with and looking out for one another's well being, ensuring the duties of leadership are fulfilled both on and off duty. It's not an issue of rank; it's about taking personal ownership of your responsibilities as an NCO, and leaders looking out for leaders as fellow Soldiers.

We're all in this fight together, and I'm here to help any way I can. Please don't hesitate to let me know how I or the USACR/Safety Center can augment your safety efforts. Also keep in mind that with summer in full swing, water-related incidents are sure to increase these next couple months. Please talk with your Soldiers about their plans and reinforce the dangers of alcohol and boating or swimming. Many drowning deaths are attributed to alcohol every year, and its effects can dull the reflexes and judgment of even experienced swimmers.

Thanks again for all your hard work every day — you are making a difference for our Soldiers and our Army. Enjoy your summer, and always play it safe!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard D. Stidley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Rick Stidley
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center