

Editorial:

Applying OJT and ORM Off-Duty

by RAdm. David Architzel,
Commander, Naval Safety Center

During the past five fiscal years, 331 Sailors and 271 Marines were killed on highways. These deaths represented nearly 81 percent of all off-duty deaths during the period, and were more than twice the number killed in all operational mishaps. Think about that for a moment. During those five years, twice as many people died on the road as perished in all the airplane crashes, ship collisions, groundings, fires and explosions in the entire Navy and Marine Corps.

Part of the reason for the difference in the numbers of off-duty and on-duty mishaps is operational risk management (ORM). We know the work we do on the job is dangerous, and we're acutely aware that a moment's inattention can lead to disaster. As a result, we're careful at work—we use ORM to ferret out and avoid unnecessary risks. However, too few of us carry these proven principles out the gate with us at the end of the day. We let down our guard, especially on the road, thinking the danger is behind us, and tragedy strikes—twice as often as it does on the job.

Marine Corps leadership decided that the off-duty mishap rates were unacceptable. As a result, the Corps reduced off-duty death rates by 46 percent. When top leadership tackles a serious issue and demands the full attention and support of their subordinates, things happen. The word has yet to reach everyone in the Corps, but the number who have heard and responded positively (as the numbers show) is growing daily.

This isn't to say that the Navy and Marine Corps can be satisfied with our operational mishap rate. In less than a month, we've lost two training aircraft and four aviators. In a recent shipboard mishap, a diver died after he became fouled in the ship's anchor chain. Ashore, we lost a Sailor when he suffered a heart attack during a command PRT run. In one week, seven Marines lost their lives, and four others were seriously injured in operational mishaps in the air and ashore.

Ours is a dangerous business. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee recently noted that military



deaths in peacetime “remind us of the risks that men and women in our armed services take every day on our behalf, so we're grateful to them.” The Marine Corps Commandant, Gen. J. L. Jones, shared those words in a message to Marines everywhere. He also issued this challenge to commanders: “It's our responsibility to maximize training while minimizing risk. We cannot be satisfied until we have driven our mishap rates as close to zero as is humanly possible... Our young warriors count upon our leadership and judgment to keep them safe. This is our greatest responsibility as leaders.”

I strongly agree. We must never let the death of a shipmate become just another statistic. Remember the human side of the equation, and don't accept mishaps as the cost of doing business. Help establish a culture where people pay attention to what they're doing, think about what can go wrong, and decide what can be done to prevent it. Empower them to act on their knowledge and experience, and reward them for the lives they save. Leaders need to be involved in establishing these habits and attitudes both on and off the job. The time to raise the benchmark is now. ☺