



# Admiral's CORNER

FROM COMMANDER, NAVAL SAFETY CENTER



## It's Time To Turn the Tide

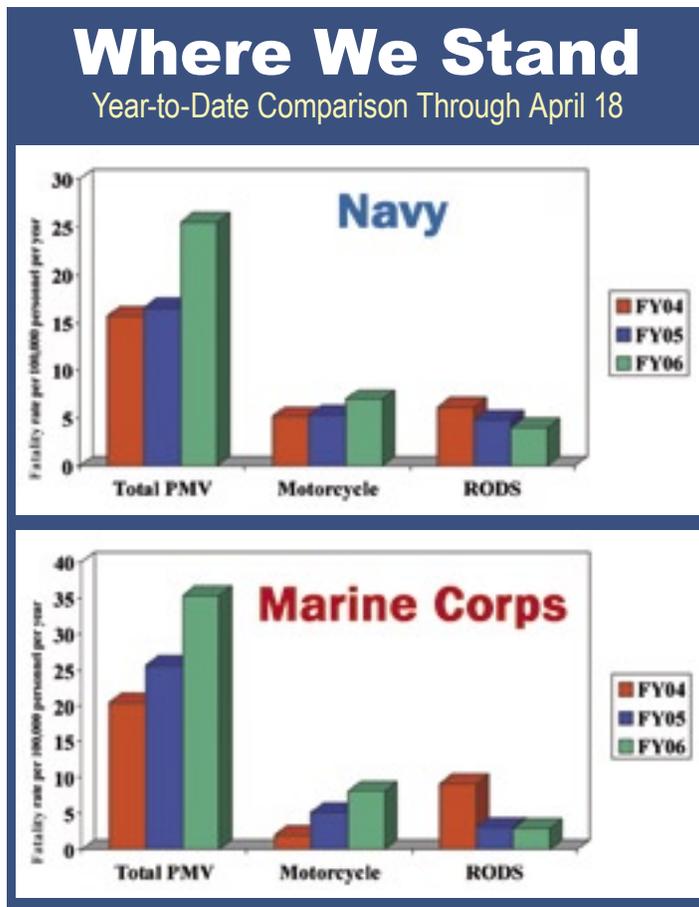
As I look at the spiraling number of deaths this fiscal year [see accompanying charts] among our young Sailors and Marines as the result of PMV mishaps, I can't help wondering what it's going to take to stop all this carnage. Here's what I'm talking about:

- A 24-year-old and a 20-year-old go out in the former's 2002 Ford Mustang and visit several drinking establishments over a two-day period. Then, while returning from their toot, they're traveling a state highway, approaching a railroad crossing, where a train happens to be passing. Warning signals are sounding and flashing everywhere. Neither really is paying attention, though. Why? Because they're both busy jackin' their jaws on cellphones. Then, to add a little more distraction, a bowling ball rolls off the rear seat and hits the front-center console, causing both to turn back and reach for the ball. By now, it's the 11th hour, and the 24-year-old driver suddenly realizes he has to do something to avoid hitting the train. He swerves sharply, but, alas, the train takes out the whole right side of the Mustang—killing the

20-year-old passenger. The unscathed driver blows a 0.123 BAC on the scene, has to complete a 28-day drug-and-alcohol-rehabilitation program, and, at last report, was waiting for the state to file charges against him for intoxicated manslaughter. It seems reasonable to me that his already traumatized condition is likely to get a lot worse before it gets any better. Wouldn't you agree?

- Then, there's this tale about a 23-year-old and his roommate who have been at a friend's house, relaxing and drinking. When the 23-year-old decides it's time to leave, his roommate and other friends try to stop him. He rebuffs them, though, and rides away on his 2001 Honda CBR600. About 2330, he's headed toward home when he tries—but fails, "thanks" in part to a 0.24 BAC—to make a sharp right turn. Instead, he hits a concrete drainage ditch and is killed instantly, with five days passing before anyone finds his body—a sad commentary to someone considered to be "a strong performer with a bright future in the Navy."

While you're feeling sorry for these victims, don't forget all the other



people involved, starting with families and friends. And how about the firemen, paramedics, law-enforcement personnel, tow-truck drivers, and emergency-room staffs? They're affected, too. As one former firefighter/EMT turned naval aviator described to me, the memories of drinking-and-driving tragedies don't disappear very quickly. "My nightmares lasted for several years," he said.

Given these facts, I simply find it difficult to understand why our young Sailors and Marines keep making the wrong choices. Why drink and drive when such no-brainer alternatives exist (e.g., using a designated driver or taking a taxi)? If you see others preparing to drive—or ride—after drinking too much, do every-

thing you can to stop them. If you can't stop them, immediately call the police. You'll be doing them and everyone else on the roads a favor; and, if that call costs a friendship, you'll still have the satisfaction of knowing you did the right thing.

I also urge you to take a look at some of the best practices for traffic and preventing alcohol-related incidents and DUIs that are available on our website. Go to <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/bestpractices/ashore/default.htm>.



RADM George Mayer

## Editorial

# Legal Drinking Age— The War Rages On

By Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center

**M**ilitary officials have waged a long, hard, uphill battle to stem the problem of underage drinking. Their efforts to keep the minimum age for active-duty members at 21 are hampered by those who advocate an "old enough to bear arms, old enough to drink" philosophy. Here's what some current and former service members have to say:

- *I believe anyone who is packing a rifle for his/her country should have ALL the rights and privileges the country offers. Teenage girls can get abortions without parental consent. Teenage boys and girls can get married, but they can't have a legal bottle of beer. Where are our priorities?*

- *Either the drinking age should come down, or the enlistment age should go up.*

- *Beer is part of who we are as a nation. Let these kids indulge if they so choose. However, make them aware that if they screw up, they will pay the price. [Unfortunately, the families also pay a price, and theirs don't end at a loved one's burial site.]*

- *Mature enough to make the decision to enlist, mature enough to make the decision to drink. It's absurd to expect our personnel to sacrifice without entrusting them with responsibility.*

- *I feel that anyone who signs up to put his life on the line for this country should do so with all the privileges and rights—that includes getting sloshed.*

Then, there are these comments:

*When I first joined the service at 18, I felt the drinking age was unfair. Over the years, though, I've seen too many young service people get in trouble with alcohol, and I believe that lowering the age limit only would make it easier for them to get in more trouble. Drinking alcohol takes a certain amount of maturity that you just don't get from being trained by the military and being old enough to put your life on the line. Going out drinking is not a military function and isn't done in a controlled environment. I wouldn't have a problem with a command serving alcohol at a unit party, where someone is accountable for how much is served and who can or can't drive. Maybe*