



Editorial:

Finding Ways to Reduce Mishaps



That was the thrust of our discussions at the first Navy and Marine Corps Safety Council meeting, which I co-chaired (along with my USMC counterpart, COL Buck Dewey, HQ Safety Division) on March 17, 2004, in Washington, D.C. The importance of this gathering—and of service programs aimed at preventing mishaps—was underlined by the presence of the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Gordon England; the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Safety, Ms. Connie DeWitte; and about 30 flag and general officers.

To quote Secretary England, "Safety is very, very high on my personal agenda." Not only is attention to safety "a great visible sign of your commitment to our men and women, but safety programs produce a very large, direct benefit to the total force."

Ms. Connie DeWitte kicked off the meeting by noting that her agenda was to use this opportunity to move safety forward. "I believe we can make the [*Secretary of Defense's*] 50-percent goal and also create some deep roots for future programs," she said. The attendance of so many senior officers discussing safety was unprecedented and provides the momentum to move safety efforts forward.

Four committees, made up of representatives from the aviation, afloat, ashore, and ground-tactical communities, are carrying out the council's work. During the first meeting, discussions focused on short- and long-term initiatives and resource issues. Significant topics included operational

risk management, safety culture, and traffic mishaps. The 50-percent mishap-reduction campaign also was a major topic, but, as Secretary England pointed out, "The goal isn't really fifty percent. We'll settle for fifty percent, but we don't want anyone injured or killed."

Readers of this magazine are familiar with the emphasis on traffic mishaps, long the leading killer of military personnel. On this subject, Commander Naval Submarine Forces, VADM Kirk Donald, said, "When we lose a Sailor, I ask the commanding officer to write me a letter, explaining what happened and why. So often, there are one or two people who knew there were indicators—speeding tickets, driving without a license. This problem calls for intrusive leadership. We're doing a lot, but there is still a lot more to do."

What does it take to stop the loss of life, the missed opportunities, the wasted potential, and the broken families? It requires the leadership and dedicated efforts of everyone. It also requires some changes in the way we do things, what we expect of each other, and what we accept as operations normal. Finally, it requires every Sailor, Marine and civilian to take a turn on looking out for each other—the same way you look out for your family members.

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