



*Admiral's Corner*  
*From Commander, Naval Safety Center*

## Balancing the Risks



We all must work hard to balance the risks of our profession—during training periods, as well as in a combat environment. Consider, for example, a convoy of three HMMWVs that was approaching a gate to Baghdad International Airport, with five Sailors (first class petty officers) embarked. All were wearing modular integrated communications helmets, body armor, and night-vision goggles.

Because of local SOP for the high-threat environment, the vehicles were driving without headlights. In similar fashion, none of the Sailors were wearing seat belts because of tactical considerations of quickly exiting the vehicles in a high-threat environment.

As the HMMWVs approached the gate, a spotlight, which was part of the gate-force-protection plan, blinded the lead driver. He didn't see the unmarked concrete barrier that narrowed the route from three lanes to one. The lead vehicle hit the barrier head-on, and the second vehicle crashed into the rear of the first. The driver of the third vehicle made a rapid turn and braked but still hit the left side of the second vehicle.

The lead driver was hospitalized nine days with a cut on his right knee, and his front-seat passenger was hospitalized 17 days with spinal and orbital-floor fractures. The front-seat passenger in the second vehicle was hospitalized 17 days with a compound fracture to his left hand and a separated shoulder. Total damage to all three HMMWVs was estimated at \$395,000.

Many believe seat belts should be worn at all times, regardless of the circumstances. They would argue that the risk of dying during a HMMWV rollover caused by an improvised explosive device or by speeding is greater than the risk of not being

able to exit a vehicle under enemy fire. The normal response to coming under attack is to drive faster and use mobility, making the risk of rollover even greater. If you read "HMMWVs: They're Not Indestructible...Neither Are You" later in this issue, you'll find just how big a problem rollovers are for these vehicles. The trail of casualties is far too long.

Today, the challenge is to reduce mishaps 50 percent by FY05. Here's how things look at the moment:

- The combined Navy and Marine Corps PMV fatalities in FY02 (baseline for the 50-percent goal) numbered 140, dropped to 119 in FY03, and, through June this fiscal year, stood at 87.
- The combined Navy and Marine Corps recreational fatalities totaled 32 in both FY02 and FY03, and, through June 30 this fiscal year, stood at 26.

As these statistics show, our job isn't done. Meeting our mishap-reduction challenge is going to take a cultural change among our Sailors and Marines. Inspiring them to help accomplish this goal will require senior leaders to engage them with discussion, education, and mentorship. It also will take some old-fashioned leadership, out-of-the-box thinking, and application of the principles of ORM in everything we do. Make standards and discipline your control measures.

To quote my Army counterpart, BrigGen. Joe Smith, "We must do more than just teach safety—we must inspire it." The Naval Safety Center has some great tools, data, advice, and guidance to help you do that—check out our website at [www.safetycenter.navy.mil](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil).

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