



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



COs: You Can Prevent That “Knock on the Door”

After countless portrayals on TV and in the movies, the scene is too well-known: A military vehicle stops in front of a home. One or two uniformed officers get out, walk somberly to the door, then knock or ring the doorbell. A mother, father, husband, wife, or other family member is about to learn the tragic news they have lost their beloved service member. Any loss is devastating but especially so when it’s from a preventable mishap.

Meanwhile, writing a letter to the family of that service member who died in a non-hostile mishap is one of the most difficult aspects of command. No commanding officer who has to write such a letter can avoid the silent frustration that comes with knowing, in most cases, the mishap could have and should have been prevented.

Today, commanding officers have access to many tools critical in greatly reducing, and one day eliminating, personnel losses from avoidable mishaps. Used with and incorporated into the routine operations of any afloat, aviation or ashore unit, actions like the following will help COs avoid having to write such letters and will spare families from that dreaded knock on the door.

1. Regularly visit the Naval Safety Center website and use the tools it offers at: www.safetycenter.navy.mil.

2. Schedule a baseline on-site safety survey, culture workshop, and/or online Command Safety Climate Assessment Survey (CSCAS). The CSCAS includes the Maintenance Climate Assessment Survey (MCAS) and the Command Safety Assessment (CSA), as appropriate for the command. A culture workshop helps unit COs better understand their command culture and provides outside risk-assessment data. The Command Safety Assessment Survey looks at an organization’s operational practices from a safety perspective. For afloat units, the Afloat Safety Climate Assessment Survey (ASCAS) is a new tool that helps assess the shipboard safety climate. Shore commands can use the ESCS or Employee Safety Climate Survey to assess the command’s overall safety climate and determine areas needing command attention.

3. Ensure the command has solid welcome-aboard, sponsorship, and mentorship programs, addressing both on- and off-duty safety issues. The programs must be updated regularly, and their successes must be measured by feedback from those members whom they are intended to serve. As you update your command mentorship program, ensure that embedded within the program are procedures to identify and track the

command’s potential and known high-risk personnel. Some members who might fall into this category include those who drive motorcycles, command members with a history of speeding tickets or other vehicular moving violations (known “thrill-seekers”), and those with a disciplinary record. Train all hands about the cold, hard consequences of misbehavior, not following the rules, and not adhering to safety best practices. Make appropriate page 13 entries, documenting training.

4. Leadership must maintain high visibility within the command and regularly demonstrate the chain of command’s commitment to safety. Take all mishaps seriously, and treat them the same.

5. Ensure all hands understand that each command member is held individually accountable for his or her actions and must follow regulations and established procedures.

6. Make risk management (RM) work in the command; stress using it in all daily activities, both on and off the job. RM is a proven decision-making tool and focuses on anticipating and identifying potential hazards and mitigating them. Doing so reduces potential injuries or equipment losses. RM uses five steps for managing risk and is applied at one of three levels, depending on the situation. More RM information is on the Naval Safety Center website at: www.safetycenter.navy.mil/orm/default.

7. In all communities, review how your team accomplishes crew resource management (CRM). CRM focuses mishap-prevention efforts on people. Key CRM elements are situational awareness, assertiveness, decision-making, communication, leadership, adaptability and flexibility, and mission analysis.

All of these actions require proactive leadership and a safety cultural mindset that results in best practices 24/7. This safety mindset also must include family members. Safety education for dependents can be passed through familygrams, commanding officer “town hall” meetings, and command ombudsmen.

We can all take the steps necessary to prevent one of our families from having to face that dreaded “knock on the door.” The tools and leadership already exist; we just have to put the two together.

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