

NEWS RELEASE

Alcohol: The party killer

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With the beginning of the holiday season, “don’t drink and drive” becomes a common refrain in everything from public service campaigns to family members saying goodbye to loved ones headed to a party or other social gathering.

Unfortunately, it’s not just drinking and driving that can kill you or others — it’s drinking and pretty much anything else.

“It’s important to recognize that alcohol impairs judgment and slows reaction time,” said Command Sgt. Maj. William L. Gardner II, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center. “Drinking can place you at higher risk of having a mishap during any activity.”

During the past five fiscal years, at least 25 percent of all off-duty fatal mishaps recorded Army-wide between Thanksgiving and the week after New Year’s Day involved alcohol, USACRC data show. That number could be even higher due to disconnects between civilian law enforcement agencies, which most often investigate off-duty, off-installation mishaps, and Army units that report them to the USACRC.

“Toxicology reports can take time to come back, and the unit won’t receive that information until well after the initial report, if at all,” explained Tracey Russell, USACRC safety manager. “So while alcohol was verified in at least a quarter of off-duty holiday fatality reports from 2016 to now, we suspect it’s probably more.”

While Soldiers have been killed in alcohol-related falls and pedestrian-vehicle collisions, among other mishaps, privately owned weapons and drinking are a particularly deadly mix.

“Alcohol was a factor in all the fatal POW mishaps reported across the Army over the past five holiday seasons and a very common factor in these mishaps year-round,” Russell said. “This is not negotiable. If you’re consuming alcohol, don’t handle a weapon; if you’re handling a weapon, don’t consume alcohol.”

Drinking is an ongoing hazard for Soldiers regardless of season, but the danger during the holidays is distinct from other times of year.

“It’s not necessarily riskier to drink during the holidays than during the rest of the year,” Russell said. “The issue is that during the holiday season, some individuals might have a tendency to drink more often and in larger quantities.”

According to Gardner, holiday safety is about accountability, not restriction.

“We’re not telling Soldiers not to drink,” he said. “As long as they’re of legal drinking age and manage their consumption and associated activities responsibly, the decision to drink is a personal one that’s up to the individual.”

First-line leaders counseling Soldiers before block holiday leave should encourage them to control their drinking, but also remain realistic that some will surpass their limits.

“It’s imperative to discuss planning ahead and what to do if you find yourself in a situation you didn’t plan for, such as calling a friend or even your leader for a ride home or getting a cab or ride-sharing service,” Gardner said. “And if firearms are present while you or others are consuming alcohol, have the presence of mind to make sure the weapons are put away safely.”

The USACRC recently released a communications campaign targeted to managing risk during the exodus period. The complete campaign, including feature articles, posters and public service announcements, is available at <https://safety.army.mil>.