

Combat Edge

SUMMER 2026

Air Combat Command's Safety Magazine



Engine Down

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Aviation Safety Action Program



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Report a birdstrike ...
Or submit an identity-protected ASAP



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Combat Edge

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COVER PHOTO BY A1C SAMANTHA MELECIO

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Every morning on my drive to work, two things occur. First, I listen to a nationally broadcast sports talk show. In sports, the winning team is nearly always the one that executes their game plan with discipline, makes timely adjustments, stays out of foul or penalty trouble, and effectively uses the strengths of their full roster. When it comes to championship teams, they are the ones that consistently do this over the course of the entire season.

Second, I observe a disproportionately high number of minor traffic violations. These run the gambit from speeding, failing to stop at a stop sign, failing to use a turn signal when required, or using it when it is not required. While these infractions are not indicative of gross negligence, they do exhibit symptoms of self-serving behavior, lack of discipline, or ignorance of the rules. Unlike the sports teams discussed on the radio, these drivers don't really have anything on the line, and therefore their complacency during a routine commute is likely to amount to nothing of consequence.



Col Jesse Doyle
Director of Safety

Within our organization, how do we know when we need to apply the attributes of a championship team versus allowing ourselves to coast by with the complacency of a morning commute? Much like a professional sports team, the level of intensity in our line of work will ebb and flow. There will be moments like the off-season: lots of down-time and a little bit of freedom to let loose, or moments like an easy practice day where the goal is to walk through the game plan and rest up a bit. There also will be moments like the championship game, when everything is on the line, and even a minor mistake will be amplified.

Something I read several years ago that has been reinforced by my morning commute observations is that success is cumulative and progressive. A championship team doesn't just happen overnight. Years of effort and grind on the field, in the gym, and behind the scenes create the environment that leads to that success. More importantly, that success is repeatable only when the discipline and resilience that first led to it is maintained day in and day out, and the risk of complacency is mitigated.

The next time you find yourself on your own morning commute, let those minor traffic infractions serve as a reminder of what our organization cannot afford to be. Complacency is the enemy of readiness. We must choose the path of the championship team: embracing the grind, maintaining our discipline in the face of the mundane, and preparing relentlessly. Because in our profession, the championship game can arrive when it is least expected. When that day comes, our daily habits will dictate our success. Be safe and stay focused.

Psychological Safety

Mission's Hardest Requirement

By MSgt Karl K. Asuncion

In the Department of War, we are masters of the checklist. During a 17-year career in the Air Force, I have navigated many areas of the safety spectrum. I started on the flight line as a Jet Engine Mechanic, learning through the grit of hands-on experience and early mistakes. I then transitioned to Quality Assurance, where I learned to hunt for those same errors, before moving to Field Training Detachment instruction to pass those hard-won lessons to the next generation. Finally, retraining into Occupational Safety allowed me to see the full picture. I've been the one turning the wrench, the one inspecting the work, and the one writing the mishap reports.

Throughout that journey, I realized that the most sophisticated Personal Protective Equipment and the most rigorous technical orders (TOs) are only as effective as the culture of the shop using them. True operational readiness isn't just about physical compliance; it's built on psychological safety. In my transition to Occupational Safety, I learned that psychological safety isn't about "being soft." It is a mission-critical state in which Airmen feel they can take an interpersonal risk—such as admitting a mistake or pausing a job—without fear of retribution.

What Psychological Safety Is Not

Coming from a maintenance and safety background, I have to be clear about the boundaries:

- It is NOT a "Get Out of Jail Free" card. It doesn't mean there are no consequences for negligence. It means we focus on why a mistake happened (the system) rather than just whom to blame.
- It is NOT Safe Spaces. It's not about avoiding hard truths. In fact, it's about having the courageous markers to tell a supervisor that a plan is flawed before equipment fails or an Airman gets hurt.
- It is NOT a lowering of standards. As a former QA inspector and current Safety professional, I know that psychological safety actually raises standards because it brings hidden defects into the light where they can be fixed.

A1C Taliyah Lloyd and Airman Valerie Salazar Duran, 92nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chiefs, review technical orders at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington, Feb. 4, 2026. Aircraft maintainers are the unseen force behind mission success as they provide the safety checks and preflight requirements that keep the aircrew safe. Photo by A1C Gabriel Conley



A1C Lloyd attaches a gas tube to a gaseous oxygen breathing filler valve on a KC-135 Stratotanker. Photo by A1C Gabriel Conley

The Power of “Knock It Off”: From the Flight Line to the Office

In the propulsion world, we live by the “Knock-It-Off” or “Safety-Time-Out” culture; however, as I moved into supervisory roles over multiple sections, I realized this program only works if there is psychological safety behind it.

If a 3-level sees their leaders skipping crucial steps and chooses to remain silent because they fear being “put in their place,” the program has failed. Occupational Safety thrives when every member—from the commander to the newest trainee—knows that “Knock It Off” is a badge of professional responsibility, not a sign of weakness. We must treat the act of stopping an unsafe act with the same respect we give to a successful mission launch.



A1C Lloyd completes an inspection checklist. Photo by A1C Gabriel Conley

Soliciting Feedback: The Inspector versus The Partner

During my time performing inspections, I saw a common wall: the Inspector-versus-The-Shop mentality. When I shifted my lens to focus on psychological safety, I stopped just looking for infractions, and started soliciting feedback.

Instead of asking, “Are you following the TO?” I started asking, “What part of this TO is making your job difficult or tempting you to take a shortcut?” By creating an environment for Airmen to be honest about the friction in their daily lives, we identify the latent conditions that lead to mishaps. As a Supervisor, Section Chief, and Flight Chief, I found that when I admitted my own past mistakes as a young mechanic, it gave my team the courage to be honest about theirs. That honesty is the only way we truly achieve continuous improvement.

Autonomy with Direction: Trusting the Subject Matter Experts

As a Propulsion Systems Instructor, I taught the “how” and the “why.” But as a Safety professional and senior leader, I learned that the best results come from autonomy with direction. We provide the left and right limits—the safety regulations, the mission goal, and the timeline—and then we trust our NCOs and Airmen to navigate the middle. While staying within the boundaries of the black and white, sometimes grey with deliberate risk management is the best way forward. When we micromanage, we destroy psychological safety; we tell our people we don’t trust their training. When we provide autonomy, we foster ownership. An Airman who feels ownership of their engine, aircraft, program, or section is far more likely to innovate a safer way to get the job done than one who is just following orders under a microscope.



Author Karl Asuncion as a Staff Sergeant 100th Maintenance Group jets quality assurance inspector, searches the flightline for unscheduled maintenance in 2016, at RAF Mildenhall, England. Photo by SSgt Micaiah Anthony

The Bottom Line

Whether you are turning a wrench on a jet engine or sitting in a safety office reviewing mishap trends, the goal is the same: Mission Success and Airman Safety. After more than 17 years, I’ve realized the most dangerous component of any weapon system is a silent Airman. By building a culture in which feedback is a gift, “Knock It Off” is a standard, and autonomy is backed by trust, we ensure that the Department of War remains the most lethal—and safest—force on the planet. ✈️

The Hiss Below Deck

By Capt Patricia P. Burnworth

There I was...held up by an ominous sound preventing me from taking off, with no applicable checklist at my disposal, and the maintenance team stewing in frustration. I only had my experience, instinct, and fellow aircrew with me for guidance.

The summer heat in Nebraska only made our delay more aggravating, as all 21 of us aboard the jet troubleshooted various issues. The RC-135 RIVET JOINT (RJ) is arguably the leading Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance platform in the USAF fleet, providing vital intelligence for US Forces. Unfortunately, there are many mechanical issues plaguing this aging platform, as I, who pilots this magnificent aircraft, can attest. With the operational mission already delayed, maintenance personnel and my aircrew were anxious to takeoff. When I finally called for starting engines after all the minor issues were resolved, everyone was eager to get the jet into the air.

Upon the application of starting air from our pneumatic air cart ground equipment, the Tactical Coordinator (TC), the lead Electronic Warfare Officer who manages all aircrew behind the cockpit door, notified me that he heard an unusual "whooshing" sound. Suppressing a grin as I tried to imagine compressed air that didn't "whoosh," I queried him for further explanation. He explained that a significant bang and thud had occurred under the floor at his position just prior to the abnormal sound. This caught my attention. I knew the TC had extensive experience in this airframe, including observing thousands of engine starts. Realizing I shouldn't dismiss the problem, I groaned, knowing further investigation was necessary.

"I only had my experience, instinct, and fellow aircrew with me for guidance."

An RC-135 Rivet Joint assigned to Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, awaits maintenance on the flightline at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. The RC-135 is a reconnaissance aircraft with near real-time on-scene intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination capabilities.
Photo A1C Josey Blades

Normally, the four engines on an RJ are started individually via a pneumatic air cart connected to the aircraft bleed air plumbing, just forward of the left-wing leading edge. In the RC-135, this bleed air system allows extremely hot engine air to travel from each engine through the leading edge of each wing (just forward of multiple fuel tanks) to intersect within the fuselage and pressurize the aircraft. The intersection was directly beneath the TC's feet. I asked the crew chief to verify whether the sound might have originated from a cart malfunction. I also tasked an augmenting pilot to investigate under the TC's position, while the copilot searched for an applicable checklist within the

aircraft Technical Order (T.O.). Meanwhile, I scanned aircraft instrumentation and had the Navigator inspect the circuit breakers for any faults. My cohort returned shortly, confirming the abnormal sound was a legitimate concern. I noted no internal indications while informing maintenance and the aircrew of the situation. After the copilot found no relevant checklists, I discussed our concerns with the crew chief, and at that moment realized all the maintainers believed the sound to be normal. They had the same initial reaction that I had after hearing the description of the problem, and they were frustrated at our postponement of engine start.

As easy as it would be to simply refuse the aircraft (the authority I hold as the aircraft commander), the maintenance team would need to be convinced of the issue for further cooperation. If the issue was as insidious as I believed it to be, another aircrew might not recognize the malfunction, and take the aircraft airborne. Even if I wrote up the malfunction in the records, the aircraft could potentially be passed to another aircrew with the condition uncorrected if the maintainers could not replicate the issue. My greatest concern was that a bleed air leak within the fuselage could be catastrophic if it were near the forward fuel tank. Any bleed air leak is considered a major emergency

in flight, since air hot enough to melt metal is escaping to a place it is not meant to go.

First, the flight crew needed to show the air cart was not the origin of the sound we were hearing. To do this, the maintenance team joined the aircrew on the aircraft, and both engines on the right side of aircraft were started to provide pneumatic air in place of the start cart. Then the cart disconnected. Lo and behold, the sound persisted after the cart was turned off and removed, confirming my suspicions of this not being a cart problem.

Next, we determined the location of the rushing-air-noise by isolating the left and right sides of the aircraft's pneumatic

system by closing the pneumatic crossover valve. The sound disappeared completely when the valve was closed, indicating the suspected air leak was isolated to the left side of the pneumatic system.

Finally, to show the sound was truly abnormal and not merely the normal sound of rushing air in the pneumatic system, I opened the crossover valve and increased the thrust from engine number 3. The noise returned and became louder with increased engine thrust, verifying a true leak associated with bleed air from the engines. The normal sound from the pneumatic system would not change under engine acceleration.

Now convinced of a significant malfunction, we were able to

move forward. In the end, the maintenance team discovered the location of the leak, and were able to correct it that day. The aircrew took another aircraft and successfully completed the mission. Good communication, systems knowledge, and teamwork resolved this situation and prevented a potentially catastrophic incident. Had my TC not felt empowered to speak up, I would have been none the wiser, and would have taken off, putting the aircrew and the jet at risk. Never undervalue having extra eyes and ears to keep the crew safe.✈



U.S. Air Force Airmen assigned to the 82nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron maintenance flight prepare an RC-135V Rivet Joint during exercise RECCE-Edge 25 at Royal Australian Air Force Base Darwin, Australia, May 21, 2025. The RC-135V Rivet Joint is a highly specialized signals intelligence platform, equipped to collect, analyze, and deliver real-time electronic intelligence. Photo by 2 Lt James Strong

A Line in the Sand

By MSgt Matthugh B. Crosby



Photo by MSgt Matthugh B. Crosby

The operator was an artist. He was a skilled NCO with enough experience to be dangerous, using the excavator's bucket like a painter uses a brush—methodical, deliberate, and ruthlessly efficient. He was making quick work of a trenching project in the thick, ever-present dust of a deployed environment. But from my perspective as a Safety Professional, his art was creating a masterpiece of risk. To maintain a perfect line and save time, he was straddling the very trench he was digging.

Instinct vs. Reality

The trench itself was just under 20 inches deep. A casual observer might not have seen the threat, but my concern went beyond a simple cave-in. If that unstable edge gave way, the excavator could slide or fall into the trench. This could injure the operator, any workers nearby, or even the newly posted "safety observer" the commander had agreed to have on-site. Beyond the immediate human cost, the loss of that excavator and its specialized attachment would be detrimental to future operations—a loss of capability we couldn't afford. The potential for second- and third-order effects was immense.

The scene was a classic case of experience overriding training. This NCO knew the rules, but his skill gave him the confidence to bend them for the sake of the mission. Every instinct screamed at me to call "Knock-It-Off!" but I knew this situation was more complex than a simple rule violation.

The Conversation

I approached the commander, not the operator. "Sir," I started, "do you have a minute to talk about the full risk you're looking at on the trenching op?"

I laid out the "rule-book" from the AFIs and OSHA. I learned later this job had been on the books for over a day, yet safety was never brought into the deliberate planning phase. This was not the time to assign fault; it was the time to articulate the risks that had either been missed by multiple levels of leadership or were being completely disregarded. It was my responsibility and my duty to advocate for the safety of our Airmen and the preservation of our equipment—to ensure those factors were consciously weighed against the urgency of the task. It's an uncomfortable position, being the one to pump the brakes, but I was learning that as a safety professional, you must find comfort in those uncomfortable situations.

The commander listened, then asked the question that shows a leader is truly engaged: "What can we do?"

This shifted the dynamic to collaboration. I provided a few practical guidelines—ways to mitigate the risk without completely stopping the job. He accepted some of them. It was a risk-informed compromise.

The Takeaway: Real-World IRR

It didn't matter that this operation was downrange. My conversation with the commander was a real-world example of what the Air Force is now formalizing with the Chief of Staff's Integrating Risk & Readiness (IRR) campaign. This proactive program is designed to prepare all Airmen to make risk-informed decisions, recognizing that mission command necessitates risk management at the tactical edge.

IRR is not about avoiding risk—combat requires action. It's about reviving a mindset of operational discipline and using an assessment process to determine how to best mitigate risk in execution of the mission. It's about building enough trust with leadership that they ask, "What can we do?" instead of telling you to step aside.

The mission was completed successfully, not by luck, but because the commander made an informed decision that preserved combat power without sacrificing success. That is the core of IRR. Know the hazards, understand the consequences within your environment, and be the trusted advisor who helps leadership navigate the gray areas. That is how we will win. ✖



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Engine Down

By Maj Daehyuc D. “Duck” Yim

“My LEFT oil pressure is zero; My LEFT rpm is zero,” I stated to my A-10C wingman on our dedicated intra-flight frequency. “My LEFT throttle is coming to off!” I continued. About 60-90 seconds before making that statement on the night of 3 April 2025, I had completed the Safe Escape Maneuver following a practice dive bomb delivery which culminates in a 30-degree nose-high attitude. While pushing the nose over to attain level flight in the moonlit sky, I noticed the Master Caution light was illuminated. Subsequently, the Master Caution Panel indicated a left oil system problem. Looking at the left engine gauges, I noticed that not only did my left engine’s oil pressure display read “zero,” but the same engine’s rpm gauge also showed “zero.” In the A-10C, the simultaneous “zero” readings on the oil and rpm gauges indicate an oil pump driveshaft shear—a breakage of the rod that powers the oil system from the engine. Our technical orders direct that the engine be shut down quickly, as “engine failure can occur in 1 to 3 minutes.”

Recognizing the airplane was experiencing a catastrophic engine problem, I quickly made a “Knock it off” call on our range frequency, established altitude deconfliction between my wingman and myself, and skimmed our emergency checklist. I recalled stories of multi-engine pilots accidentally shutting down the working engine during emergencies, resulting in unrecoverable situations. I informed my wingman of my observations, with an emphasis on which engine the gauges were indicating. Although my wingman was a Formal Training Unit student and only on his second night flight in the A-10C, he was a former B-1 Weapons Systems Officer; recognizing the importance of being clear and specific, he said back to me, “Copy, LEFT engine.”

Following successful engine shut down, we more thoroughly referenced the checklist, then coordinated with an A-10C formation occupying the adjacent airspace for mutual support. Determining that home station was the nearest suitable base, we transited through their airspace for the most direct route home. On the way, we encountered a low-level rainstorm. Even though the A-10 was flying single engine, it handled the turbulence without issue, and I had complete confidence in the jet’s ability to make the journey successfully. We continued our return to base, coordinating with Air Traffic Control, finalizing the execution of our emergency checklists, and confirming our gameplan with the Supervisor of Flying. We landed without incident, and I came to a full stop on the runway to receive the support of our maintenance and firefighter teams. In the following days, our maintenance team downloaded the engine and discovered that indeed the direct shaft from the engine to the oil pump had sheared.

This incident highlights some of the features included in the original design of the A-10 that make it a survivable aircraft. In *The Fundamentals of Aircraft Combat Survivability Analysis and Design*, Second Edition, Dr. Robert Ball states that “aircraft that are more survivable can return to base more often because of their reduced vulnerability.” They subsequently can be repaired and returned to service. He further lists design and operational features that can enhance the survivability of an aircraft, including “more than one separated engine” and “redundant and separated hydraulics,” both qualities present in the A-10C.

The A-10C boasts 2 engines, separated from each other, and mounted outside the fuselage. This reduces the likelihood that both engines would be destroyed by a single air defense artillery round. It also would extend the time before an engine fire would affect the main fuselage. On the night of 3 April, the remaining right engine was more than enough to safely and confidently fly the 100 miles back to Davis-Monthan AFB. Our emergency procedure checklist includes single-engine flight profiles, should we have to divert to another airfield. That night, it reassured me that even with a quarter of the A-10C’s fuel capacity remaining, I could climb to 20,000 ft on a standard, no-wind day, fly 199 miles, and still arrive at “minimum fuel” for an approach and landing, all on one engine. Flying direct and maintaining the recommended altitude would have been enough to fly from the Barry M. Goldwater Range to Davis Monthan AFB in Tucson, Arizona, then divert to Luke AFB in Phoenix, if required.

The A-10C’s two redundant hydraulic systems also are worthy of mention, each of which is powered by an engine. Each system is fully capable of sufficiently powering every primary flight control surface. With my left engine shutdown, I had no concerns about the right hydraulic system’s ability to provide the control needed to maneuver around a low-level rainstorm and its associated turbulence.

Though its tactical use would depend on the situation, the A-10C’s design does allow for the infamous GAU-8 30mm Gatling gun to be operated off one hydraulic system at a reduced rate of fire. In the event my remaining hydraulic system malfunctioned, I would have yet another backup option by transitioning to “Manual Reversion,” which permits the pilot to control the aircraft’s flight controls through a system of cables and rods. Although flying the aircraft in this mode is much

more physically intensive, it permits adequate control for the pilot to fly to safe territory to eject or attempt a landing in ideal conditions.

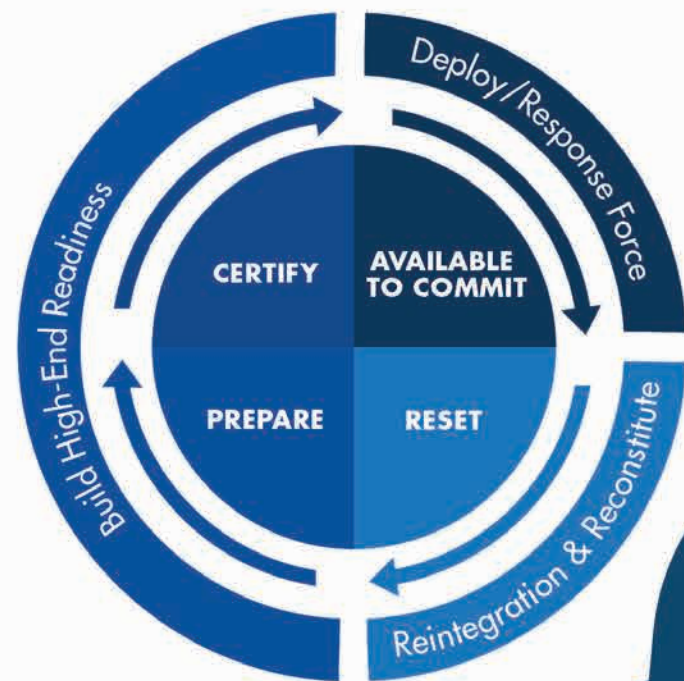
Ultimately, my sortie on highlighted two of the many design features incorporated into the A-10C for survivability: the two engines, and the redundant hydraulic systems, both of which increase the odds of the aircraft’s returning to base for repair and reintegration. In Desert Storm, these characteristics contributed to the fact that 20 significantly-damaged A-10s were able to fly home and all but one were returned to service. The aircraft’s performance that night proved once again that the A-10C’s survivability features are essential not only to returning pilots to base, but to ensuring the mission can continue. ✈️



More, Not Less

By MSgt Rachel A. Graf

Air Force Force Generation (AFFORGEN)



In an era of increasing threats and diminishing resources, the U.S. Air Force and Space Force are adapting to meet the challenges of tomorrow. As Safety Professionals, our role is more critical than ever: From advising on safety matters in daily operations to conducting mishap investigations and inspections, our role is integral to mission success. The nature of warfare is shifting; we can all see it. We also must shift to stay relevant in this competitive environment of near-peer adversaries, rapid technological advancement, and aging infrastructure.

The question arises: How is the Occupational Career field preparing for the future fight? What will that fight look like for the 1SOs? The answer lies in a proactive and integrated approach, embedding safety professionals in the AF Force Generation (AFFORGEN) deployment model.

Gone are the days of well-staffed safety offices in deployed locations. The reality of modern deployments is a single occupational safety professional shouldering the demands of an entire Wing. In some locations, that means wearing all the hats: Occupational, Aviation, and Weapons. This shift demands our 1SOs to think beyond the traditional model of the Safety Mishap Prevention Program and find a new and agile and forward-thinking approach to Safety in the deployed environment.

AFFORGEN establishes a 24-month cycle with four six-month phases: 1) Prepare, 2) Certify, 3) Available to commit, and 4) Reset. The model's purpose is to create more cohesive and predictable deployment cycles, moving away from the à la carte system of the past, in which individuals were

brought together from various units, and instead transitioning into filling a deployment from a single wing.

Despite this innovation, Safety still employs à-la-carte tasking that does not allow the deploying 1SO to prepare and certify with the deploying wing. What opportunities are being lost by not fully taking advantage of this deployment model? To be truly effective employing this deployment model, Safety Professionals must be involved in the Prepare and Certify phases of a wing's pre-deployment cycle. Missing these critical stages makes the job of a Safety Professional much harder. Arriving late to the game means a loss of rapport and a missed opportunity to influence the safety culture of a unit from the ground up.

How can this be facilitated? Backfilling home station safety offices with qualified personnel through manning assists, the Air Force can free up its deploying 1SOs to fully embed with their units through the Prepare, Certify, and Deploy phases of the AFFORGEN. This ensures that the home station's safety mission continues uninterrupted, while allowing the deploying member to build vital relationships and "street cred" before they even set foot in a deployed environment.

The one-deep deployment model presents a significant challenge: how to do the same amount of work with a fraction of the personnel? The uncomfortable truth is that something must give. Our Airman's Creed, with its powerful declaration, "I will not fail," creates a culture that is programmed against failure; however, in this new reality, a frank discussion about acceptable risk, prioritization

of tasks, and what to allow to fail is occurring. What can be allowed to fail? Dropping any task has the potential to create a hazard. Skipping on documenting programs is only creating a larger problem for the next rotation. Missed facility inspections mean more for the next person. Our Safety Professionals are just that—Safety Professionals. We want to do a professional job, advise on every issue, investigate every mishap, inspect facilities, revolve hazards, but most of all make our members safe so that the mission continues uninterrupted. How can one person inspect more than 900 buildings on an installation and still perform our other duties as a mishap investigator and safety advisor? What administrative duties fall by the wayside? In the face of aging infrastructure, each missed building inspection is a potential hazard. We need more,

not less. Something must give. Give more manning, or give more risk.

The AFFORGEN model's move towards cohesive deployments offers an opportunity to rethink the role of the deployed Safety Professional. By embedding 1SOs in every stage of the deployment cycle, from Preparation to Certify through Redeployment, the Air Force and Space Force can ensure that they are not just ready for the future fight, but that they are safe and effective. The future of warfare is here, and the Safety Professionals of the 1SO career field are on the front lines. Are we ready to meet the challenge?



Clear to Copy

How Communication Drives Safety Excellence in the Military

By Mr. Tristan J. Streetman

In military operations, communication is often discussed in terms of command and control, but its most powerful impact is on safety. From the flightline to the field, from maintenance bays to deployed operations, the way information is shared, questions are asked, and concerns are raised can mean the difference between a clean sortie and a catastrophic mishap.

Safety does not exist in a vacuum of regulations, checklists, and procedures. It lives and dies through human interaction. Clear expectations, open dialogue, and honest feedback create the conditions where hazards are identified early, risks are mitigated intelligently, and Airmen and Guardians feel empowered to protect both the mission and each other.

High-performing units don't just follow safety rules—they communicate safety into existence.

Three communication-driven pillars form the backbone of any strong military safety program: command messaging, operational communication, and feedback loops.



Illustration by www.vecteezy.com

I Command Messaging: Setting the Tone from the Top

Leader Intent & Buy-In

Every safety culture begins with leadership. Commanders, superintendents, and section leads don't just issue orders—they establish what truly matters. When leaders clearly and consistently communicate that safety is a mission enabler, not a mission obstacle, they reshape how people think about risk.

Airmen and Guardians watch what their leaders prioritize. When safety is framed as essential to readiness, lethality, and long-term mission success, it becomes something people protect, not something they work around. That messaging builds buy-in, which is far more powerful than compliance. A workforce that believes safety matters will act on it even when no one is watching.

Consistent Messaging

Trust is built through consistency. If leadership speaks about safety in town halls and commander's calls but then quietly rewards reckless shortcuts or production at any cost, the message collapses. Mixed signals breed cynicism, and cynicism kills safety.

Strong command messaging means safety expectations are aligned across every level, from group leadership down to flight chiefs and shift supervisors. When everyone echoes the same priorities, Airmen know what "right" looks like, even when under pressure.

Walk the Talk

Words mean little without visible action. Leaders who wear PPE, participate in risk assessments, and pause operations when something doesn't feel right send a powerful message without saying a word. They show that safety isn't just for junior Airmen; it applies to everyone.

When leaders actively listen to safety concerns and treat them seriously, they reinforce a two-way communication channel. That openness builds trust, and trust encourages people to speak before a hazard becomes a mishap.

Pennsylvania Air National Guard Airmen assigned to the 111th Attack Wing listen to a safety briefing before climbing up a communications tower to attach an antenna at Biddle Air National Guard Base, in Horsham, Pennsylvania, May 7, 2023. Photo by A1C Charles Casner



II Operational Communication: Talk Early, Talk Often

Pre-Task and Post-Task Briefs

Safety begins before the job starts. Pre-task briefings, whether they're flight briefs, tailgate talks, or line-up cards, give teams the opportunity to identify hazards, clarify roles, and ensure everyone shares the same mental picture of the task ahead.

Post-task debriefs close the loop. They allow teams to capture lessons learned, discuss what worked, and correct what didn't. These conversations turn experience into knowledge and mistakes into prevention.

Cross-Talk Between AFSCs

Modern military operations are interconnected. Pilots, maintainers, weather, logistics, medical, and safety all depend on each other's information to succeed. When communication breaks down between specialties, assumptions fill the gaps—and assumptions are dangerous.

Clear, jargon-free crosstalk builds shared situational awareness. It ensures everyone understands not just their part of the mission, but how their actions affect the whole system.

Assertive Communication & Speak-Up Culture

Rank should never silence safety. A strong unit creates an environment where an A1C feels just as empowered as a senior NCO to call out a hazard. That only happens when leaders actively reward respectful, assertive communication.

Psychological safety—the belief that speaking up won't lead to ridicule or punishment—is one of the strongest predictors of operational safety. When people know they can raise concerns without fear, hazards get addressed before they become tragedies.



U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) Airman with Detachment 2, 6th Combat Training Squadron, listen to safety briefing before small arms training at Joint Base San Antonio–Camp Bullis, Texas, April 8, 2026. Photo by Melissa Hydrick

III Feedback Loops: Communicating Lessons and Closing the Gap

Real-Time Hazard Reporting

Reporting systems only work when people believe their input matters. Programs like ASAP, MMPPs, and safety surveys give Airmen a voice, but leadership must complete the communication loop by sharing what was learned and what actions were taken.

When people see that reports lead to real change, participation increases, and safety intelligence improves across the organization.

After-Action Reviews (AARs)

A well-run AAR is one of the most powerful safety tools in the military. By bringing together all ranks and roles to openly discuss what happened, units turn experiences into institutional knowledge.

Honest communication — about both successes and failures — prevents repeat mishaps and strengthens risk management across future operations.

Recognition of Positive Safety Behavior

Safety isn't just about catching mistakes — it's about reinforcing excellence. Publicly recognizing Airmen who identify hazards, speak up, or mitigate risk sends a clear message: doing the right thing matters.

Celebrating proactive safety behavior builds morale, encourages engagement, and turns safe decision-making into a point of pride.

Final Word: Communication Is the Connector

The most advanced aircraft, detailed checklists, and state-of-the-art PPE mean little if communication is broken. A strong safety culture is built on leaders who clearly set expectations, teams that talk openly, and organizations that listen and learn.

In the end, safety isn't just everyone's responsibility; it's everyone's conversation. Safe operations don't happen by accident. They happen by communication.

Clear? Copy. ✎

1st Quarter FY26 Awards



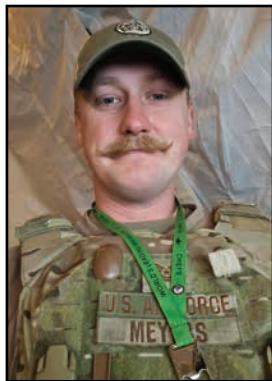
Safety Career Professional
SSgt Sonta S. Washington
23 WG/SEG, 15 AF
Moody AFB, GA



Pilot Safety
Maj Conor E. Dillon
75 EFS, 332 AEW, 9 AF
Moody AFB, GA



Unit Safety Representative
TSgt Mark A. Carter
99 LRS, 99 ABW, USAF WC
Nellis AFB, NV



AVIATION MAINTENANCE SAFETY
TSgt Riley R. Meyers
336 FGS, 4 FW, 15 AF
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC



Weapons Safety Professional
MSgt Cory J. Hinton
388 FW
Hill AFB, UT



Explosives Safety
SrA Colin J. Gauthier
77 FGS, 20 FW, 15 AF
Shaw AFB, SC



Flight Line Safety
CDDAR Team
20 EMS, 20 FW, 15 AF
Shaw AFB, SC



Aircrew Safety Award
Crew of KING 15
71 RQS, 23 WG, 15 AF
Moody AFB, GA



Unit Safety
380 Expeditionary Operations Flight
EOF, 380 AEW, 9 AF
APO/AE

Congratulations



FY26 Flight

Thru 31 Mar 2026

	Fatal	Aircraft Destroyed	Class A Aircraft Damage
15 AF	0		0
16 AF	0	0	0
USAFWC	0		0
ANG	0	0	0
AFRC	0	0	0
CONTRACT	0	0	0
COCOM	0	0	0

FY26 Occupational

Thru 31 Mar 2026

	Class A Fatal	Class A Non-Fatal	Class B
AFCENT	0	0	0
USAFWC	1	0	1
12 AF	0	0	0
15 AF	3	0	0
16 AF	1	0	0

FY26 Weapons

Thru 31 Mar 2026

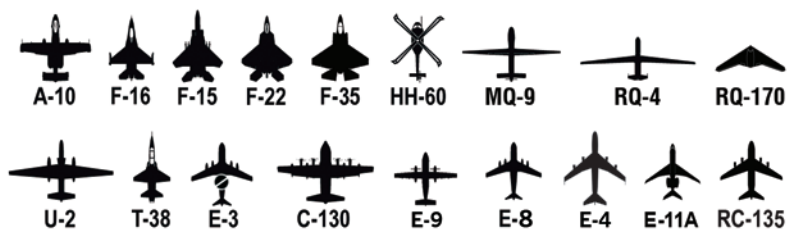
	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E
ACC	0	0	3	3	1

Legend

Class A - Fatality; permanent total disability; property damage \$2.5 million or more
Class B - Permanent partial disability; property damage between \$600,000 and \$2.5 million
Class C - Lost workday; property damage between \$60,000 and \$600,000
(Class description effective Oct. 1, 2019)

(RED) = On-duty (BLACK) = Off-duty

Symbols for Mishap Aircraft



Flight Notes

ACC experienced one Class A mishap in Q2 FY 2026: one F-35A (USAFWC; destroyed, but no fatalities). This mishap is currently under investigation, as a Safety Investigation Board (SIB) determines what happened and develops recommendations to prevent future aviation mishaps. Throughout all flight safety programs and initiatives, ACC Safety emphasizes sound decision-making and operational risk management.

Occupational Notes

During the second quarter of FY26, ACC experienced four Class A fatal mishaps, bringing our total to five for this FY. This is a significant increase in Class A mishaps compared to last FY, when at the end of the 2nd Quarter we had one Class A mishap. The four Class A mishaps for the second quarter of FY26 involved two 4WL PMVs, 1 2WL PMV and a Sports & Recreation (Soccer) fatality. All four are still under investigation at this time. As we enter the 101 Critical Days of Summer, now is the time to slow down and take a look around and make sure we are prepared for what we are about to do. Ask yourself a few questions: Do I have a plan? What if things don't go as expected? Then, what is the risk, and is it worth it?

We need everyone to make it home safely... including YOU!

Weapons Notes

Munitions-handling mishaps continued to be a concern during the second quarter, with one Class C and one Class D mishap involving missile handling, and one Class E incident with 30MM rounds. As we head into the warmer months, it is important to remember the inherent dangers of explosives and not allow complacency to creep into day-to-day operations. To ensure a safe summer, all personnel must adhere strictly to maintaining clear communication, conducting thorough safety briefings, and staying aware of your surroundings.

Summer Safety Tips



Keep these tips in mind as you and your family enjoy summer vacations, camping, family reunions, picnics and the Fourth of July.

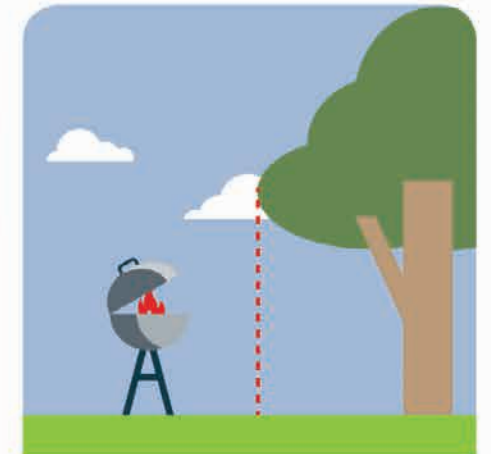
Fire safety



Build campfires at least 25 feet away from tents, shrubs and anything that can burn.



If you want to see fireworks, go to a public show put on by experts. Sparklers can reach 1,200 F and cause third-degree burns.



Use propane, charcoal and wood pellet barbecue grills outdoors only. Indoor use can cause a fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Place your grill well away from siding and deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches. Do not store or use a grill on a porch or balcony.



Pool-Cleaning Turned to Pain and Agony

By Mr. Derrick J. Brown

The Air Force has a way of encouraging Airmen to make the best decisions, both on and off duty; however, when Airmen choose not to adhere to making good decisions and risk management, the outcome can be unforgiving. It was the weekend of Memorial Day 2025, and I wanted to get the pool clean and ready to receive guests later in the day. It was about 0930, the sun was bright, and the temperature was 95 degrees. I gathered my large-brim straw hat, sunglasses, and pool cleaning supplies, and began this well-rehearsed routine. The pool design is an octagon with a slide waterfall. The walking surface around the pool is smooth stamped concrete.

Normally, when I clean the pool, I drink water throughout the process, but on this day during lunch at 1100, my wife had placed serval bottles of alcoholic beverages on ice in preparation for the guests. I decided to drink 3 wine coolers prior to putting away the pool-cleaning supplies. I never thought this would affect my ability to work safely. Wow, was I wrong. Feeling a bit buzzed, I went back to the pool and, while stowing the cleaning supplies, I tripped over a filtration pipe behind the waterfall and fell headfirst toward a section of a raised cinderblock wall. As I fell, I reflexively reached out, but still hit the wall face-first. Once back to the patio, opened the door, and went inside to assess my injuries. I sustained abrasions to the palms of both hands, a cut on my lower lip, and chipped front upper tooth.

The lesson I learned from this preventable mishap is that even a single drink can alter brain function, leading to lowered inhibitions, impaired judgment, slurred speech, and reduced coordination, which increases the risk of accidents, injuries, and risky behaviors. Short-term effects also include impulsiveness, and impaired decision-making. Making the rather poor decision to do chores under the influence of alcohol—and not practicing good risk management—came with consequences. Rather than being in the game and fully enjoying the Holiday festivities with family and friends, I spent the evening on the sidelines. A moment of better judgement can make a great deal of difference. Stay safe! ★

Photo by SoFArT/shutterstock.com

THE WORLD IS READING US

Each quarter, The Combat Edge is shipped to over 1,400 USAF addresses around the world. Its pages are filled with articles from Airmen who share their first-hand accounts of mishaps to over 63,000 readers. Copies of the magazine are found everywhere from back shops to front offices. Since 2022, articles from The Combat Edge have appeared in the following safety magazines of the following:

Hungarian Defense Forces
Air Operation Command and Control Center

UK Royal Air Force Safety Center
HQ Air Command

Royal New Zealand Air Force
Directorate of Air Force Safety and & Health

Canadian Armed Forces
Directorate of Flight Safety

That's right: The Air Forces of other nations contact our office for permission to reprint your excellent articles. Would you like your story to be appreciated at home and abroad?

It begins here.
Send it in.

Dr. Richard E. Cook
Chief Editor, The Combat Edge

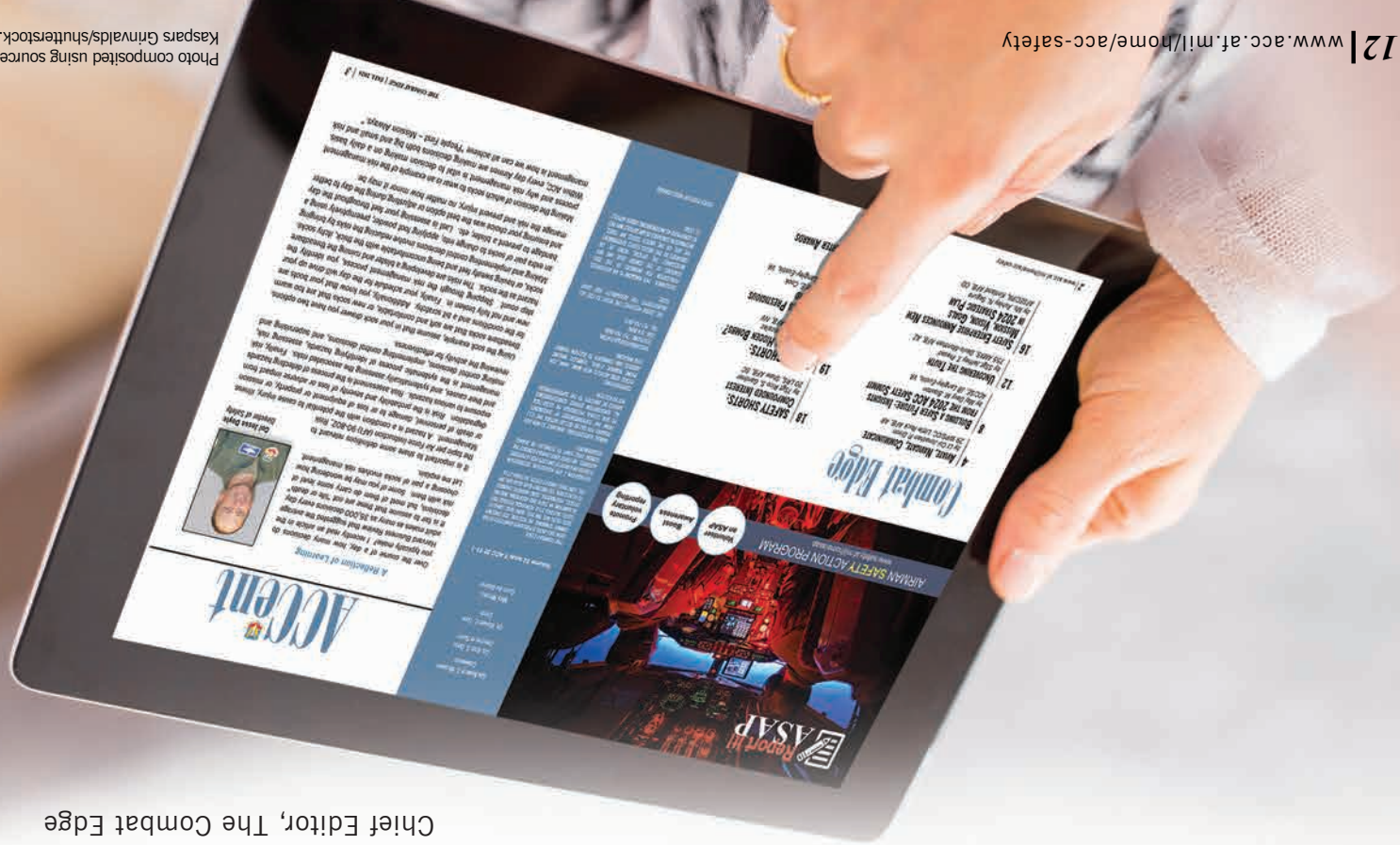


Photo composited using source photo by Kaspara Grinvalds/shutterstock.com



A Crash Course in Humility

By Msgr Brandon H. Griggs

had only been in the Air Force for five months when I got my first real taste of freedom. I was assigned to Luke Air force Base, Arizona after tech school, but took a pit stop back home in Sacramento, California. I was able to take three weeks' leave, and I was pumped. Nothing could beat being back with friends in my old stomping grounds, but with a little extra swag than last time. I had done something not many of my peers could do, and it felt great. It was time to celebrate and recharge.

My mom had scraped together what she could to get me my first car, a 2001 Saturn. It wasn't much to look at, all \$3500 of it, but it was mine. That little beater represented independence, pride, how hard my mom worked for me, and how hard I had worked over the last five months.

I wanted to make the most of my leave, so my best friends and I planned a trip out to Stinson Beach. It's a little over three hours from Sacramento, with winding roads and coastal views as you get closer. The energy was high. I was behind the wheel, music blasting, driving a little fast the whole way. My friends had already told me a couple of times to slow down, but I brushed it off, figuring I had it under control.

As we got closer to the beach, the roads started getting more treacherous, with steep hills, sharp

The next day after licking my wounds, we found out the car was totaled. My heart sank. That car meant a great deal to me—not because it was a nice ride, but because of what it represented. Then, my mom gave me the news: The insurance paid out double what it was worth. That poor car lasted a day, but we actually came out ahead! Not to mention, my buddies dropped by later that day to

forward to was over.

turns, and slick pavement from a light ocean mist. We came upon a sharp hairpin, and though I was only going about 10 miles an hour at that point, the wet road and downhill slope made it worse, and it was a 5 MPH zone for a reason. I tapped the brakes...and they locked up. We slid straight into a ditch. Airbags exploded in our faces. Everyone was okay, thank God, but the car was toast. Just like that, a day to which we all had been looking

The mood shifted fast: My friends were understandably upset. They had to wait hours to get picked up by my best friend's dad. I rode back in the AAA tow truck, staring out the window, disappointed in myself, already knowing what was coming.

check on me because they had given me a hard time the day before (as they should have). They said they couldn't care less, and it could have been worse. We ended up taking another trip the next weekend. For obvious reasons, I didn't drive.

Looking back now, I'm glad it happened. I know that sounds crazy, but it was a wake-up call. If I had been driving a faster car, or if we had been on a steeper hill or tighter turn, things could have gone very differently. I could have hurt myself or my friends. I could've lost my career before it had begun. I went on to excel early in the Air Force—something I'm proud of—but one mistake like that could have sent me down a totally different path. If I had been injured or had gotten into trouble, who knows if I'd be where I am now. As it is, I'm married, have three amazing kids, am on the verge

of promoting to Master Sergeant, and have just seven years left until retirement. That little Saturn, barely holding itself together, might have saved my life. It taught me something valuable early on: Prevention is everything. Don't speed. Pay attention to weather and road conditions. Respect the road. That one mistake helped shape how I've made it through 13 years in the military.

Be safe out there, folks. Sometimes, the biggest lessons come in the smallest, ugliest cars. 🚗



Photo by Wirestock Creators/shutterstock.com

On our last day together, the weather was windy, and red flags were up, warning swimmers of rough water conditions. Despite the warning, my father ventured out for one last look at the water. His motto is, “You can’t visit a beach and not get in the water; not doing so is bad luck.” An hour later, he returned to tell us he had nearly made the news. He had gone into the water despite the red flag, and got caught in a rip current that knocked him over and dragged him away from shore. Once he realized what was happening, he swam parallel to the shore to escape. When asked why he did not notice it earlier, his response was simple: he was caught up in the moment, and was not looking for it. We were fortunate that he recognized the danger in time and knew how to respond.

Rip currents are powerful and fast-moving, flowing from the shore to deeper water. They often are caused by waves breaking over sandbars or other underwater features. The surface may appear calm, while a powerful current rages underneath. These currents can pull swimmers far from shore, making it difficult to return. Rip currents can be hard to spot, but paying attention to warning flags is another important safety measure. It is essential to know the meaning of beach warning flags to identify potential hazards.

If you find yourself caught in a rip current, staying calm is key. Panic can cause you to take the most direct route and swim straight to shore, but doing so means swimming against the current, and you quickly can become exhausted. Instead, swim

parallel to the shore until you feel the grip of the current weaken. If you become too tired, float on your back and signal for help.

Rescuing someone from a rip current includes its own set of risks. Instinct may push us to rush in and save the person immediately, but it is important to assess the situation carefully.

First, determine if a lifeguard is present—trained lifeguards are equipped to handle such situations. If no lifeguard is available, assess your surroundings for potential flotation devices. Alert other beachgoers to call for backup. Before entering the water, take a moment to assess the current’s direction and determine the best approach. Attempting to swim directly into the rip current to reach the victim may cause the rescuer to become

trapped as well. Once you reach the victim, provide clear instructions, as they may be panicking. By understanding rip currents, maintaining awareness of warning signs, and knowing how to respond in case of emergency, swimmers and beachgoers can reduce the risks posed by these powerful and unpredictable currents. Taking note of any warning flags that are posted, and assess the water before entering. Beaches are beautiful, but can be dangerous. Be sure to take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones. 🌊

“Understanding the risks associated with rip currents is crucial to recognizing the danger and responding appropriately.”

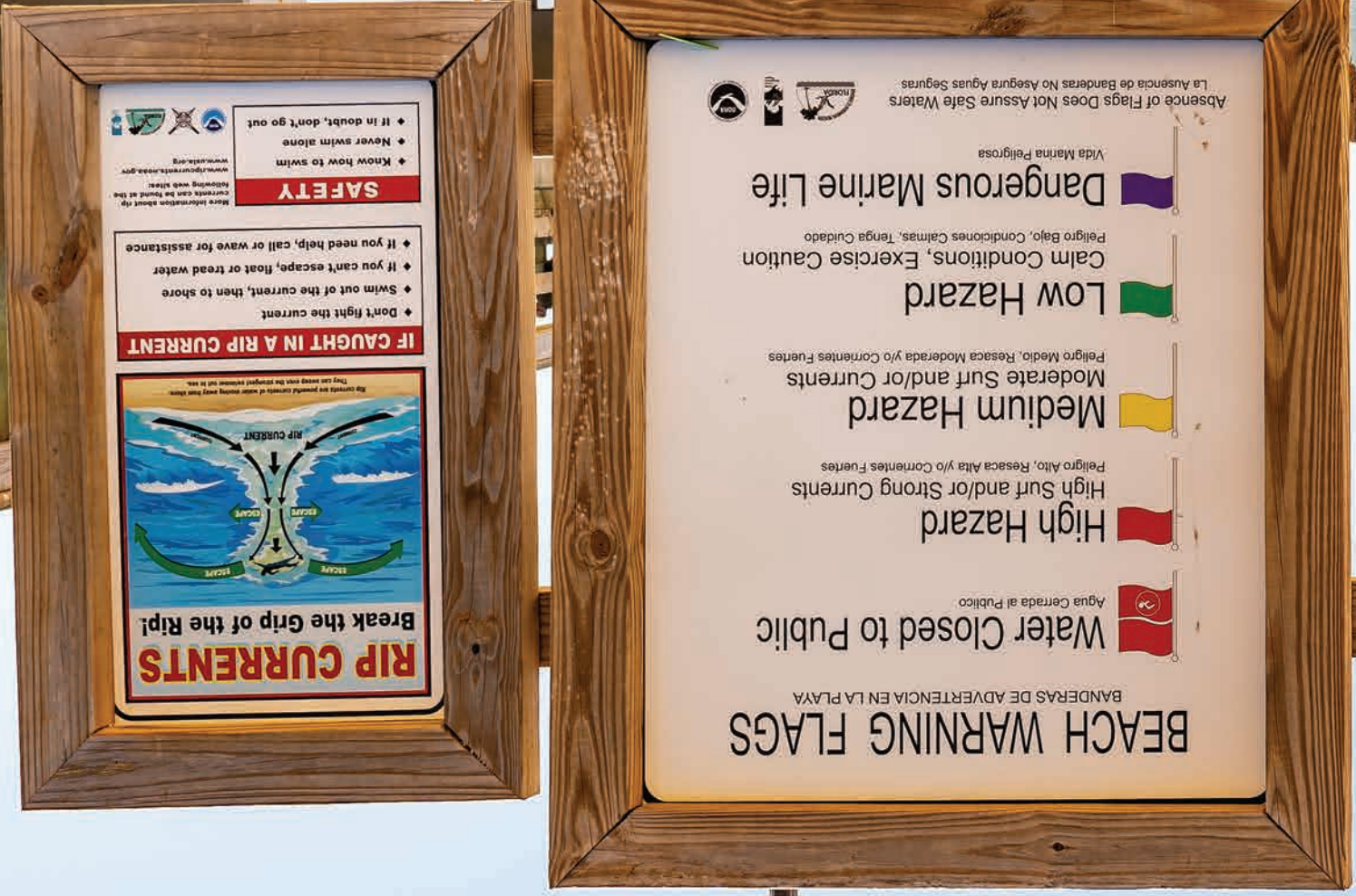


Rippin' Beaches

By Ms. Tanya M. Dwyer

Rip currents are among the most dangerous natural hazards along coastal areas. They can appear suddenly without warning, and pose a serious threat to swimmers, even the most experienced. Each year, news reports along the Gulf Coast highlight fatalities because of rip currents. Unfortunately, many of these tragic stories involve family members attempting to rescue a loved one, only to find themselves in danger. Understanding the risks associated with rip currents is crucial to recognizing the danger and responding appropriately.

Last summer (2025), my parents visited the Panama City Beach area of Florida, to experience the beauty of our white sandy beaches. They are from Oahu Island, Hawaii, and have spent a great deal of time at the beach. While they are experienced beachgoers, not all beaches are the same, and overconfidence can lead to complacency.



"If you are feeling "off," or have any of the symptoms of a heat-related injury, stop what you're doing and seek treatment."

Illustration by ALC Devyn Waits

LOOK OUT FOR HEAT STROKE

WHAT IS IT?

Heatstroke is a heat injury caused by your body overheating, usually as result of prolonged exposure to or exertion in high temperatures.



- High body temperature (103 degrees or higher)
- Altered behavior
- Nausea and vomiting
- Flushed skin
- Rapid breathing
- Racing heart rate
- Headache
- Dry or damp skin
- Loss of consciousness
- Dizziness

SYMPTOMS

- High body temperature (103 degrees or higher)
- Altered behavior
- Nausea and vomiting
- Flushed skin
- Rapid breathing
- Racing heart rate
- Headache
- Dry or damp skin
- Loss of consciousness
- Dizziness

HOW DO I PREVENT IT?

- WEAR LIGHT CLOTHING
- STAY HYDRATED
- TAKE IT EASY



FIRST AID:

- Call 911
- Grab a wingman
- Get to a cool, shady spot.
- Get in cool water

COMPLICATIONS:

- Vital organ failure
- Death
- Coma
- Brain damage



Stay Cool, Stay Alert, Stay in the Fight: Heat Injury Prevention

By Tsgt Cody W. Moss

It's not just the aircraft and vehicles that get too hot in the summer heat; it's our bodies too! As we head into the warmer months, the temperatures around the base will begin to climb, making heat-related injuries a real possibility. Whether you're at PT, out on the flightline, or enjoying some time out in the sun, your body is constantly working to regulate its internal temperature. When your body fails to keep up with the heat, the consequences can range from uncomfortable to life-threatening.

- First stage being heat cramps, which may seem minor but is an early warning sign of the body's need for water and electrolytes.

- The second stage is heat-exhaustion which includes nausea, fatigue, dizziness, and heavy sweating. Without intervention, it can escalate to the last stage, heat stroke.

- Third is heat stroke is a medical emergency. The body's cooling system has failed. Confusion or unconsciousness can occur, and, if left untreated, heat stroke can be fatal.

What can we do to protect ourselves and our fellow wingman? The first and most important

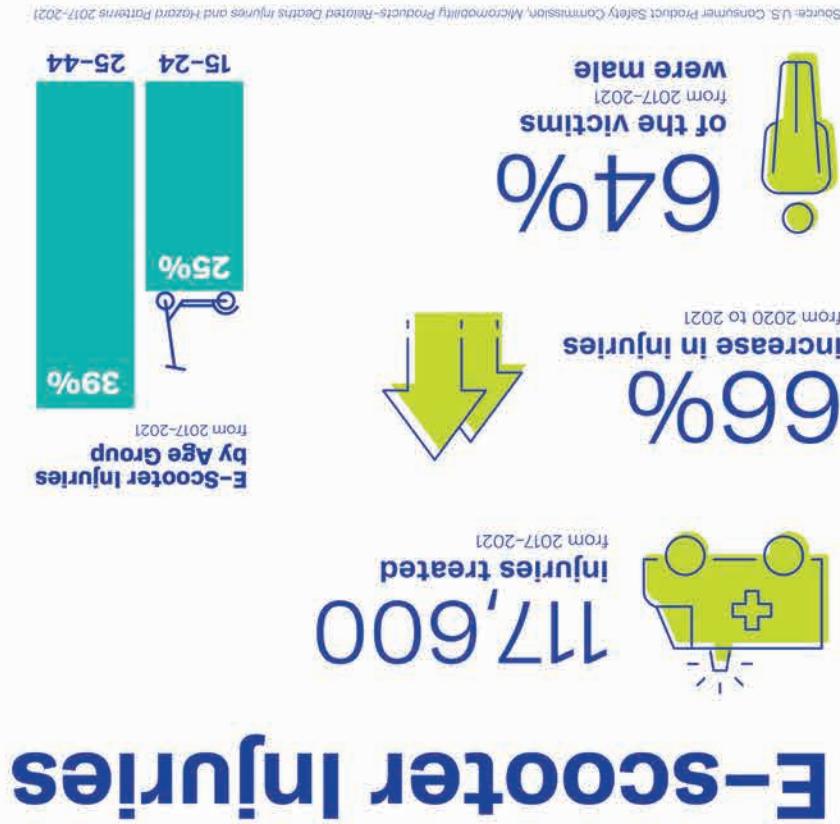
The bottom line is that heat safety isn't just about keeping ourselves safe outside, it's also about readiness. An Airman sidelined by a heat-related injury is one less asset available for the mission. Every one of us play a role in keeping ourselves and our wingmen safe in extreme conditions. Ensure you know the signs, follow the preventive steps, and don't wait until it's too late. ✨

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12	THE WORLD IS WATCHING US by Dr. Richard Cook ACC/SE, JB Langley-Eustis, VA
13	SAFETY SHORTS: POOL CLEANING TURNED TO PAIN AND AGONY by Mr. Derrick J. Brown 99 CES, Nellis AFB, NV

United States Consumer Product Safety Commission

Report E-scooter Injuries to SaferProducts.gov



What to know before you ride:

- Always wear a bicycle helmet.
- Before riding, make sure to check for any damage.
- See and be seen. Most deaths involve motor vehicles.
- Beware of obstacles.
- Follow all manufacturer directions.

101 Critical Days of Summer: Gear, Plan, and Skills

By Mr. Rodney (Robbie) F. Robinson

It seems like just yesterday I was planning my winter ski trip, and yet here we are—looking right at the 101 Critical Days of Summer (Memorial Day Weekend – Labor Day Weekend). With any change of season comes a shift in activities, along with a completely different set of associated risks. Summer is an incredible time to get out and see the world. Unfortunately, most people are thinking the same thing, which means popular destinations and activities are often overcrowded. To set yourself up for success, brace yourself for the crowds, and always have a backup plan.

- If you are hitting the road, expect highway congestion and the inevitable seasonal construction delays. One strategy to minimize the impact on your travel plans is to drive during off-peak hours—just ensure you are fully rested before getting behind the wheel. If your plans involve air travel, anticipate longer delays and crowded security lines. While delays are frustrating, I always remind myself of one simple truth: I would much rather have an issue with the plane on the ground than in the air. Keeping that perspective is a great way to stay calm when travel logistics get messy.
 - Beyond travel, the summer months bring a wealth of outdoor activities: hitting the beach, boating, swimming, camping, hiking, and biking, just to name a few. Every single one of these comes with its own inherent risks. Last year in Air Combat Command (ACC), we lost three lives in preventable mishaps. In many of those cases, taking just a few moments to do a quick risk assessment before stepping into the activity could have made a significant difference—and very likely saved a life.
 - This year, the Air Force and ACC are heavily focused on Integrating Risk and Readiness into everything we do, both on and off duty.
- Remember that we all count on you to make the right choice. Our team needs you more than you think. Make good decisions, look out for your wingmen, and we will see you soon! ★



Photo by Mr. Robbie F. Robinson

OVER the Edge

MAGAZINE

Rippin' Beaches

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