Spring 2026

Combat Edge

Air Combat Command's Safety Mag

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MOUNTAINS AHEAD

Combat Edge

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COVER PHOTO BY CAPT MATTHEW BECKUM

ACCent

Col Jesse Doyle
Director of Safety

The space shuttle Challenger and its seven astronauts were tragically lost on January 28, 1986. Since its inception, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has pushed boundaries to advance scientific research and space exploration. This endeavor has been, and will continue to be, a challenge surrounded by risk. NASA often has successfully navigated that risk to advance its mission, as proven by its many successes; however, to honor the loss of the Challenger crew, as well as the men and women of Apollo 1 and Columbia, it is prudent to recognize that operating in a risk-filled environment requires an unwavering commitment to continuous reflection and improvement.

The Challenger was ultimately lost due to the physical failure of an O-ring on a solid rocket booster; however, the catastrophe itself was the culmination of multiple organizational factors. The result was that NASA, in retrospect, was not purposefully disregarding a known hazard, but rather collectively establishing a culture and an organizational structure that was unable to communicate the hazard and mitigate or manage the associated risk.

Two primary factors are commonly referenced when analyzing the Challenger disaster.

First is the "normalization of deviance." This is a concept in which, over time, small, incremental compromises unofficially re-establish a new, lower standard for acceptable risk. In the case of the shuttle, this was primarily associated with the O-rings. Although concerns with the O-rings were documented as early as 1977, each successful launch that experienced O-ring erosion reinforced the acceptance of the flaw, based only on anecdotal evidence rather than sound engineering analysis.

Second was flawed decision-making. On the morning of the launch, there was no single person who made the final decision to launch, one who was fully aware of the history of the O-ring problem and the specific risk posed by the cold temperatures. That, in itself, is a significant failure caused by a structure and culture that allowed launch schedules to take precedence over technical safety concerns.

Current efforts and processes are established within ACC to prevent similar issues from developing. The ongoing Standards and Readiness Reviews are one of many examples used to highlight that there are no acceptable levels of non-compliance. The use of SAFEREP is just one tool that empowers Airmen to report dangerous conditions or cultural issues. Additionally, Safety Investigation Boards and quality assurance sections allow for independent oversight. Executing our mission will always include risk and pressure to perform, but maintaining high standards, executing effective risk management, and fostering a culture of reporting hazards and dangers can and will contribute to the best chance of achieving success in the safest way possible.

Photo by shutterstock.com/Tadondwa Namizinga

The Blue Spark

By MSgt Richard E. Korjack III

As a young NCO, I learned a valuable lesson about risk management and the crucial role of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during an electrical repair. It was an experience that has stayed with me, a stark reminder that even with experience and established procedures, complacency can lead to dangerous situations.

The task was straightforward: replace a faulty main circuit board of an Automatic Transfer Switch (ATS). These vital pieces of equipment switch a facility's power supply to a backup generator in the event of a power outage. My more experienced counterpart, a seasoned NCO, had diagnosed the problem and secured a replacement board. The procedure seemed routine.

He meticulously followed protocol. Donning his arc flash gear, he opened the disconnect switch to isolate the ATS from the main power supply. He then tested the system to ensure it was indeed de-energized, a critical step in any electrical work. Confident in the isolation, he proceeded to replace the faulty board. He mounted the new board and snapped the electrical connector into place.

Damage to the bolt hole
Photo by Shutterstock.com

So far, everything was by the book; however, the moment the ATS was re-energized, things took a dramatic turn. Within seconds, a distinct smell of burning plastic filled the air, quickly followed by visible smoke emanating from the ATS. Still protected by his PPE, the NCO immediately opened the panel to investigate. From my vantage point on the other side of the room, I watched as he focused on the electrical connector, the source of the smoke.

He reached for the connector and pulled it apart. The next moment, there was a blinding blue flash, a clear indication of an arc flash event. The look on his face was one of shock and disbelief. He had narrowly avoided serious injury.

We quickly assessed the situation. Upon closer inspection, a small hole burned through his leather outer glove was discovered, along with a corresponding black mark on his rubber inner glove. The PPE had undoubtedly saved him from a potentially devastating injury.

Afterward, we meticulously examined the control panel and the replacement circuit board, that's when we discovered the root cause of the incident: The replacement board was configured for a different voltage from the original board. This critical discrepancy had been overlooked, leading to the overcurrent and subsequent arc flash.

This experience, though frightening, was profoundly educational. It underscored the paramount importance of thorough verification before energizing any electrical equipment. We had followed the proper procedures for isolation and PPE, but we had failed to verify the compatibility of the replacement part with the existing system.

The incident served also as a powerful reminder that even seemingly routine tasks can be fraught with danger. It reinforced the critical role of risk management in every aspect of our work. It taught me that no matter how experienced you are, complacency can be a dangerous enemy. Most importantly, it highlighted the life-saving value of PPE. Had my counterpart not been wearing his arc flash gear, the outcome could have been significantly worse.

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Isaiah Rubio, an electrical systems specialist with the 378th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, performs maintenance on a Secondary Distribution Center, at Prince Sultan Air Base, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Rubio wore a 40 Cal high voltage suit as a secondary defense against an Arc Flash; the first line of defense was powering down the SDC.
U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt Noah J. Tancer

This experience has remained with me throughout my career. It serves as a constant reminder always to double-check, never to take shortcuts, and to respect the power of electricity. It's a lesson I carry with me, one I share with those I lead, emphasizing the importance of diligence, verification, and unwavering adherence to safety protocols in all electrical work.

Mixing It Up

By Anonymous

My buddy and I were sharing one of those you-wouldn't-believe-this stories one day, and he told me about something that happened to him and his A1C one Friday afternoon inside the munitions storage area, commonly known to most as "the bomb dump."

It was one of those scorching Davis-Monthan days when everyone's watching the clock, just waiting for the weekend to start. My friend, a Senior Airman in munitions, was almost finished with his shift when he realized the restrooms still needed to be cleaned before they left. No big deal, right? Grab an A1C, knock it out, and call it a day. When they went to grab the cleaning supplies, they found the disinfectant shelf nearly empty. Worse, the remaining bottles were unlabeled, just mystery liquids in random containers.

Instead of calling and waiting for a supervisor to come back to the shop and open the main supply closet, which had been locked at the end of the day, the SrA decided, "We'll make do." He grabbed a few half-empty bottles and poured them into a mop bucket, thinking it would be enough to finish the job and head home.

At first, everything seemed fine; however, both of them soon felt a burning in their eyes, their throats tightened, and a harsh chemical smell filled the air. That's when they realized they'd mixed chemicals that shouldn't have been combined, and had accidentally created chlorine gas.

They acted fast. The SrA opened the bay doors, rushed the bucket outside, and ventilated the area. They flushed the bucket and made sure no one else was exposed. Luckily, they caught the issue early, and there were no serious injuries, but it was a close call.

When I heard about this, I thought, "That could've been me." We've all been there: end of the day, tired, and ready to leave. That just-get-it-done mentality sneaks in, but shortcuts like that can cost more than just a few extra minutes.

This situation was a wake-up call. The biggest lesson is proper labeling. Without clear labels, no one knows what's inside a bottle, and that uncertainty can lead to dangerous mistakes. Accurate labeling isn't just about following procedures; it's about protecting everyone who might use that chemical next.

It also reminded us how dangerous the "just-get-it-done" mentality can be. That mindset is especially tempting when you're about to head out for the weekend. Rushing to finish the task might save a few minutes, but it's never worth the risk. Sometimes the safest choice is to slow down, like waiting for a supervisor to unlock the proper supplies instead of improvising.

Looking back, the human factors in this incident are obvious. Complacency played a part with the attitude of "It's just cleaning, what could go wrong?" There also was pressure to finish before the weekend, which clouded their judgment. Their situational awareness was lacking, as they focused on getting the job done instead of thinking about the potential dangers of mixing unknown chemicals. Finally, communication broke down. Instead of asking for help or clarification, they made assumptions and moved forward.

None of these factors are unique. We've all felt them at some point. But when they combine, they can turn an ordinary task into a near miss. Recognizing these factors early is key to stopping an accident before it happens. My buddy and his A1C got lucky that time, but it could have ended much worse. At the end of the day, luck isn't a safety strategy. No task is too small for safety. Cleaning might seem like a low-risk job, but every task deserves the same attention to detail as handling munitions.

The next time you feel the urge to cut a corner, remember: The mission starts and ends with safety discipline. Doing things the right way, even if it takes a little longer, keeps everyone safe, including you and your wingmen.

"Rushing to finish the task might save a few minutes, but it's never worth the risk."

U.S. Air National Guard photo by SrA Victoria Jewett

MOUNTAINS AHEAD

By TSgt Jacob T. Treasure

As members of an aircrew, we get to see the world and get paid for it. Some of my best memories are from flying in the back of a C-130J as a Flying Crew Chief (FCC). My job is maintenance on the road. At home station, a small crew ensures the plane is ready for its next flight by doing inspections, refueling, and cargo configurations. As an FCC, I was the entire crew, a mobile maintenance unit ensuring the mission could continue even far from home. This role forged close bonds with pilots, copilots, and loadmasters. I knew each pilot's style, everything from cautious and by-the-book to Maverick-esque and prone to pushing boundaries. I'd seen it all, or so I thought.

One pilot in particular flew a C-130J like he was driving a car. He was incredibly skilled and confident, and his comfort usually put me at ease. He had hundreds of hours in the air, and I trusted his abilities implicitly. That trust was almost shattered on what should have been a routine flight.

On the day of the incident, we departed from the west coast on a continuation mission bound for the east coast. We took off in a scheduled formation of four aircraft and flew with them for the first two

U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt Megan M. Beatty

hours. My plane was third in formation, making for a bumpy ride as we navigated the turbulent air currents. Then, my pilot spotted a canyon. His eyes lit up. He turned to the copilot and made a comment about a "fun little detour." He informed the formation of his deviation, a brief radio call that barely registered the potential consequences, and broke away from the formation.

As we banked right, we flew directly behind the plane ahead, its turbulent wake amplified by the proximity of the canyon walls. Suddenly, we dropped, losing around 200 feet in what felt like an instant. The gravity (no pun intended) of the situation hit hard. My stomach lurched, and I broke out in a cold sweat. The pilot tried to correct left, but the plane hesitated for what felt like an eternity, a delayed response that exacerbated the sense of impending doom. He regained control, but we were now heading straight for a mountainside, the jagged rocks looming large in the windshield.

Thankfully, with Herculean effort, he pulled up just in time, narrowly avoiding the terrain. The G-forces slammed us into our seats. I remember thinking about the structural integrity of the aircraft. C-130Js are built tough, but they have limits. We felt as though we had pulled more Gs than the airframe was designed to withstand, and had placed immense stress on the wings and fuselage.

The pilot and I exchanged a tacit glance. We both understood the severity of what had just happened. We had come to within seconds of disaster. I remember thinking "This could have been it." The remainder of the flight was tense, filled with unspoken anxiety. We landed safely, but the incident lingered in my mind, replaying in my head like a broken record. It was a stark reminder that even experienced pilots can make risky decisions, and the consequences can be catastrophic.

"I remember thinking, this could have been it."

U.S. Air Force photo by Capt Matthew Beckum

Close Call

By SrA Garet Williams

Being a Communications Squadron Technician (CST) isn't everyone's idea of hard work. As a matter of fact, many people probably would love to have my day-to-day routine. Show up at 0730, log into a few systems, run checks, and wait for someone to walk into your office with a problem you're uniquely equipped to solve. It's quite a fun career, and I genuinely enjoy what I do. I love the look on people's faces when we help them solve problems for which they think there's no answer. There's a deep sense of fulfillment in taking something technical, complicated, and even intimidating, and making it right; however, on an average sunny Monday in Texas, my wingmen and I found ourselves in a situation as critical as any you could find on any home station—one that can hopefully teach many others about the importance of due diligence, teamwork, and the human element in every task we perform.

We were conducting routine maintenance and, while checking on our Starshield device, we found it was malfunctioning. Nothing unusual—just another task to knock out before heading in for lunch. We decided to troubleshoot the first thing that came to mind: check the generator breaker and cut the power. It seemed like a simple next step, and we didn't think too much of it at the time. In hindsight, it was a major oversight.

We were hot, sweaty, probably a bit fatigued, and eager to wrap things up. As my wingman approached the breaker, he gave it a quick glance. In the harsh Texas sunlight, it appeared to be off: The indicator light was nearly impossible to read through the glare. Assuming it was safe, he moved forward. He rummaged through his tool bag, grabbed a screwdriver, and began unscrewing the casing on the base of the device.

At that moment, a cloud rolled overhead, briefly dimming the sunlight, and that's when my blood ran cold. In the change of lighting, I could see it: The indicator light was still blinking. It wasn't off; it was live. I shouted loudly, my voice cracking with urgency. Thankfully, he heard me and froze immediately. He was already pulling out his pliers. One second later, and we could have been calling for medics.

We stood there for a moment in silence, the weight of what had nearly happened settling over us like a brick. The only thing between him and serious consequences was my deciding to double check. We shut off the breaker properly, verified all indicators, and only then resumed our work. We finished up and made our way back inside. We were quiet, grateful, sobered, and a little shaken.

Later that day, I reported the incident to my supervisor. The look on his face said everything: concern mixed with relief. He knew he needed to have a conversation with the shop, but more importantly, he was thankful everyone walked away unharmed.

Later, we sat down as a team and reflected. It wasn't just about flipping a switch. It was about how complacency, even in something as routine as checking a breaker, can cost lives. We talked about the importance of checking, double-checking, and checking again. Of never assuming something is safe just because it looks that way. Of staying focused even when you're tired, even when you're hot, even when you're almost done. Most of all, we talked about what it means to look out for one another. We talked about all these things because sometimes the only thing standing between a close call and a tragedy is your wingman.

U.S. Air Force SSgt Chase Jordan-Alcañiz, 23rd Communications Squadron network infrastructure non-commissioned officer in charge, sets up a Star Shield satellite communications system
U.S. Air Force photo by A1C Iain Stanley

Near-Miss at Altitude

By TSgt Maurice Suggs

What began as a routine training mission over the Arizona desert nearly ended in tragedy. On a clear morning, two F-16 Fighting Falcons departed Luke Air Force Base for a basic intercept sortie. The lead pilot, a seasoned instructor with over a thousand hours of flight experience, was mentoring a junior wingman through a series of aerial maneuvers. The conditions were ideal, and the mission profile was familiar. Nothing suggested that anything could go wrong.

About 35 minutes into the flight, the aircraft were executing a high-speed intercept drill. During the final merge, the wingman turned prematurely into the instructor's path. At a combined closure rate exceeding 600 knots, the two jets came within 200 feet of each other. The instructor pilot, immediately recognizing the risk, initiated a defensive roll and dive to avoid contact.

Once back on the ground, the debriefing revealed a combination of small errors. The wingman had misjudged the maneuver's timing because of a delayed radio call and the distraction of intense glare from the rising sun. The instructor had assumed the maneuver was clearly understood based on prior flights, but he had not confirmed timing or mutual visual contact. Additionally, slight turbulence made visual tracking more difficult, which increased disorientation for the newer pilot.

This event served as a powerful reminder of how quickly an ordinary flight can turn into a dangerous situation. Fortunately, no one was injured. The aircraft returned without damage, but the margin for error was razor thin.

The safety lesson here is clear: Pilots never should assume mutual understanding. In the air, especially during complex or high-speed exercises, communication must be exact and confirmed. Flight leads must state each phase of the plan clearly, and verify understanding. Wingmen must speak up immediately if something is unclear or if situational awareness is lost.

The Air Force Safety Center reports dozens of near-collisions every year, often during training. While many do not result in damage or injury, each one reveals lapses in situational awareness, communication, or preparation that must be addressed to prevent a future mishap.

In this case, what happened after the flight was just as important as what happened in the air.

A 56th Fighter Wing student pilot scans the skies for "hostile" aircraft in an F-16 Fighting Falcon. Student pilots undergo a rigorous nine-month-long training course. Photo by Jim Haseltine

The instructor treated the incident as a learning opportunity, not a failure. The debriefing focused on lessons and improvement. The wingman accepted responsibility and committed to sharpening skills and communication in future flights.

This near-miss did not make headlines, but it left a lasting impression on those involved. It reinforced the importance of detailed flight briefings, assertive communication, and mentoring that prioritizes safety over pride. These lessons may one day prevent an actual collision, thereby saving lives.

"This event served as a powerful reminder of how quick an ordinary flight can turn into a dangerous situation"

Background illustration created using a photo by A1C Brooke Moeder

Knowing Your System

A pressure monitor is checked during a morning truck checkout Aug. 4, 2020, at McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas. The members of McConnell's fire department are required to check all functions of the trucks to ensure they are working properly in case of emergencies. U.S. Air Force photo by SrA Alexi Bosarge

A P-23 aircraft rescue and firefighting crash truck sits during a training exercise, Apr. 3, 2019, at Kadena Air Base, Japan. The P-23 Crash Truck is a larger version of the P-19 ARFF truck and has a larger fire suppression agent capacity. U.S. Air Force photo by A1C Matthew Seefeldt

By TSgt Anthony D. Shaw

Troubleshooting equipment is routine…most of the time. In 2014, I had one of my more eventful encounters with the Air Force's Crash fire trucks at Hurlburt Field, Florida. I was part of a two-man team tasked with diagnosing a malfunctioning dry-chemical fire-suppression system on an Air Force fire truck. The unit had failed to discharge its agent, and returning it to service was critical to avoiding disruptions on the flight line. What followed was an unexpected—and unforgettable—lesson in systems knowledge, environmental awareness, and the importance of following established maintenance procedures.

Our initial inspection revealed that the nitrogen tank used to pressurize the system was completely depleted. We replaced the tank, but the problem persisted. We began a deeper dive, checking every component: the agent tank, piping, actuators—anything that could be contributing to the failure. As someone who isn't a fire truck mechanic by trade, I was learning on the fly.

The breakthrough came when we extended the discharge hose and discovered that Florida's high humidity had caused the dry chemical agent, known as Purple K, to absorb moisture and becoming cakey—effectively forming a cement-like blockage inside the hose. We removed the hose from the truck and began experimenting with ways to clear the clog. Focused on the task, we didn't consider the consequences of having re-pressurized the system with nitrogen, while working with an active, charged line.

That's when we heard it: a slow, creaking noise coming from the truck. At first, we ignored it, thinking it was just residual pressure settling, something common with air systems. But the noise grew louder and more urgent. Suddenly, it clicked. The system was trying to discharge, and, with the hose removed, it was about to vent Purple K directly from the exposed pipe. We were standing right in front of it.

We didn't need to say a word. My coworker and I locked eyes, turned, and ran. Moments later, a powerful blast of dry chemical agent erupted from the pipe, engulfing the area in a thick, blinding cloud. Fortunately, we were clear of the danger zone in time. Also fortunately, the force of the purge cleared the blockage. We were able to return the truck to service and prevent a shutdown on the flight line.

Afterward, we reviewed the Technical Order and discovered that operator-level maintenance requires purging the system regularly to prevent chemical buildup. Had we followed that critical step, we would have avoided the entire situation. From that day forward, we made sure everyone on our team was aware of the requirement and the risks of skipping it.

This experience reinforced a vital safety principle: always consult the manual, and never assume anything, especially when working with pressurized systems. Environmental conditions, system readiness, and procedural compliance all matter. And perhaps most importantly, when you learn something the hard way, make sure you pass it on. It could be the lesson that keeps someone else out of harm's way.

4th Quarter FY25 Awards

Safety Career Professional

TSgt Jazmin Alfaro-Mageau
99 ABW/SEG, USAFWC
Nellis, AFB, NV

Pilot Safety

Mr. Gerrold G. Heikkinen
82 ATS, 53 WG, 15 AF
Tyndall AFB, FL

Unit Safety Representative

TSgt Jimmy Dang
NTTR, USAFWC
Nellis AFB, NV

AVIATION MAINTENANCE SAFETY

TSgt William M. Duffy
41 RGS, 23 WG, 15 AF
Moody AFB, GA

Weapons Safety Professional

MSgt Christopher B. Wright
57 WG/SEW, USAFWC
Nellis, AFB, NV

Explosives Safety

23 MUNS Inspection Element
SrA Ryan J. Christian and SrA Tyler W. Denny
23 MUNS, 23 WG, 15 AF
Moody AFB, GA

Flight Line Safety

A1C Grant E. Sampson
75 FGS, 23 WG, 15 AF
Moody AFB, GA

Aircrew Safety Award

MQ-9 Flight Crew - Capt Justin P. Willis,
1 Lt Alan D. Arnesen, SrA Dominic M. Mudloff-Orchard
89 ATKS, 432 WG, 15 AF
Ellsworth AFB, SD

Unit Safety

86 Fighter Weapons Squadron
53 WG, USAFWC
Hill AFB, UT

Air Combat Command Annual Safety Awards

Congratulations

Fiscal Year 2025 Award Winners!

AIRCREW AWARD*
Capt Elizabeth A. Archer
Capt Taylor R. Pond
336 FS, 4 FW
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC

PILOT AWARD*
Lt Col Ryan W. Martelly
88 TES, 53 WG
Nellis AFB, NV

INDIVIDUAL AVIATION MAINTENANCE SAFETY AWARD*
TSgt Justin E. Barber
757 AMXS, 57 WG
Nellis AFB, NV

TEAM AVIATION MAINTENANCE SAFETY AWARD*
Production & APG Team
9 AMXS, 9 RW
Beale AFB, CA

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY CAREER PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR*
TSgt Sarah L. Gonzalez
99 ABW
Nellis AFB, NV

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY CIVILIAN OF THE YEAR*
Mr. Brian J. Reynolds
366 FW
Mountain Home AFB, ID

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY TEAM OF THE YEAR*
99th Air Base Wing Occupational Safety Team
99 ABW
Nellis AFB, NV

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR WEAPONS SAFETY*
Mr. Blaine T. Schwartz
99 ABW
Nellis AFB, NV

TEAM ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR WEAPONS SAFETY*
Weapons Standardization Team
57 MXG, 57 WG
Nellis AFB, NV

NUCLEAR SURETY INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD*
TSgt Ricky P. Ratliff Boomer
55 WG
Offutt AFB, NE

NUCLEAR SURETY TEAM ACHIEVEMENT AWARD*
Coyote Nuclear Surety Team
72 TES, 53 WG
Whiteman AFB, MO

SAFETY SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD*
Wing Safety
432 WG
Creech AFB, NV

CHIEF OF SAFETY OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD CATEGORY II*
Wing Safety
55 WG
Offutt AFB, NE

CATEGORY IV*
823 RHS Safety
800 RHG
Hurlburt Field, FL

CATEGORY V*
436 Training Squadron
552 ACW
Dyess AFB, TX

SAFETY CIVILIAN PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARD*
Mr. Tristan J. Streetman
99 ABW
Nellis AFB, NV

SAFETY NCO OF THE YEAR AWARD*
SSgt David A. Miller
366 FW
Mountain Home AFB, ID

SAFETY SENIOR NCO OF THE YEAR AWARD*
SMSgt Jeremiah E. Jaber
355 WG
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ

SAFETY OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARD*
Capt Juan P. Lopez
20 ATKS, 432 WG
Whiteman AFB, MO

FLIGHT LINE SAFETY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
Weapons Standardization Section
4 MXO, 4 FW
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC

UNIT SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR AWARD
TSgt Morgan C. Phelps
57 MXG, 57 WG
Nellis AFB, NV

COMMANDER'S AWARD FOR SAFETY
Safety Directorate
16 AF
Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, TX

WING CHIEF OF SAFETY OF THE YEAR AWARD
Lt Col William F. Cornelius
366 FW
Mountain Home AFB, ID

WING SAFETY PROGRAM OF THE YEAR AWARD
Wing Safety
355 WG
Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ

** These winners also represented ACC at the Air Force-level safety awards competition.*

Mishap Statistics Scoreboard

FY26 Flight

Thru 31 Dec 2025

	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 Dec 2025

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

FY26 Weapons

Thru 31 Dec 2025

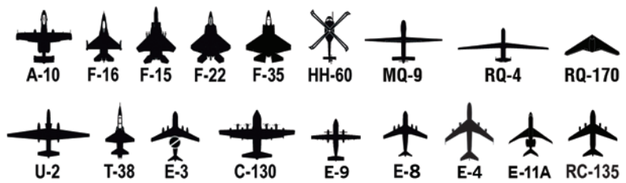
	Class A	Class B	Class C	Class D	Class E
ACC	0	0	1	1	0

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 two Class A mishaps in Q1 FY2026: one MQ-9A, and one F-16C (destroyed, but no fatalities). All mishaps are currently under investigation, as Safety Investigation Boards determine what happened and develop 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

Air Combat Command sustained one Class A Off-duty mishap during the first quarter of FY26. The mishap occurred when a 4WL PMV struck another 4WL PMV at a high rate of speed. The command also sustained one Class B On-duty mishap when a member lost the tip of his finger when it was caught in a GAU 22 (Gatlin Gun). As we continue to move forward in the year, I ask each of you to focus on your safety and the safety of those around you. Together we can make a difference.

Weapons Notes

While the start of FY26 has seen a low number of mishaps, the two reported incidents in the first quarter serve as a critical reminder of the constant need for vigilance. A Class D mishap during weapons load training and a Class C incident during a munitions transfer highlight the fact that the underlying causes for such events remain. These mishaps could have been prevented by increased attention to detail and following procedures. Let these events serve as a renewed call to action. We must redouble our efforts to ensure meticulous attention to detail and to foster clear communication in all operations in order to prevent these lapses, and continue our positive safety trajectory.

THUNDERSTORM SAFETY FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

BEFORE A THUNDERSTORM

- ✓ **Be Weather-Ready:** Check the forecast regularly to see if you're at risk for severe thunderstorms. Listen to local news or a NOAA Weather Radio to stay informed about watches and warnings. Preparation is key to staying safe and minimizing impacts.
- ✓ **Sign Up for Notifications:** Know how your community sends warnings. Check media severe thunderstorm alerts available in your area.
- ✓ **Create a Communications Plan:** Have a family plan that includes an emergency meeting place. Pick a safe room in your home such as a basement, storm cellar or an interior room on the lowest floor with no windows.
  Get more details at *ready.gov/make-a-plan*
- ✓ **Practice Your Plan:** Conduct a family severe thunderstorm drill regularly so everyone knows what to do if damaging wind or large hail is approaching. Don't forget pets.
- ✓ **Prepare Your Home:** Keep trees trimmed near your house. If you have time before severe weather hits, put away loose objects, close windows and doors, and move valuable objects inside or under a sturdy structure.
- ✓ **Help Your Neighbor**: Take CPR training so you can help if someone is hurt during severe weather. Conduct a drill with elderly or disabled neighbors.

Sit down with your family or friends and develop a communications plan. Photo NOAA

DURING A THUNDERSTORM

- ✓ **Stay Weather-Ready:** Continue to listen to local news or a NOAA Weather Radio to stay updated about watches and warnings.
- ✓ **At Your House:** Go to your secure location if you hear a severe thunderstorm warning and damaging wind or large hail is approaching. Take your pets if time allows.
- ✓ **At Your Workplace or School:** Stay away from windows if you are in a severe thunderstorm warning. Damaging wind or large hail could blow a heavy object at windows. Do not go to large open rooms such as cafeterias, gymnasiums or auditoriums.
- ✓ **Outside**: Go inside a sturdy building immediately if severe thunderstorms are approaching. Sheds and storage facilities are not safe. Taking shelter under a tree can be deadly. The tree may fall on you and you are at risk of getting struck by lightning.
- ✓ **In a vehicle:** Being in a hard-topped vehicle is safer than being outside; however, if you have time, drive to the closest secure shelter.

AFTER A THUNDERSTORM

- ✓ **Stay Informed:** Keep your NOAA Weather Radio or portable radio with you in your safe place/shelter, so you can listen for updates on watches and warnings and know whether the threat has passed.
- ✓ **Contact Your Family and Loved Ones:** Let your family and close friends know you're okay so they can help spread the word. Power may be out and phone lines may be down.
- ✓ **Assess the Damage:** After you are sure the severe weather threat has ended, check your property for damage. When walking through storm damage, wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and sturdy shoes. Contact local authorities if you see power lines down. Stay out of damaged buildings. Be aware of insurance scammers if your property has been damaged.
- ✓ **Help Your Neighbor:** If you see someone injured, call 911. Then, if you are trained, provide first aid until emergency responders arrive.

For more information, visit **weather.gov/safety/thunderstorm**

National Weather Service

SEVERE THUNDERSTORM RISK CATEGORIES

	Thunderstorms (No Label)	✓ No Severe Thunderstorms Expected, Lightning/Flooding threats exist with all thunderstorms, Winds to 40 mph, Small hail.
1	MARGINAL (MRGL)	✓ Isolated severe thunderstorms possible, Limited in duration and / or intensity. Winds 40 - 60 mph. Low tornado risk.
2	SLIGHT (SLGT)	✓ Scattered severe thunderstorms possible. ✓ Short-lived and / or not widespread, isolated intense storms possible. One or two tornadoes. ✓ Reports of strong wind damage ✓ Hail - 1", Isolated - 2"
3	ENHANCED (ENH)	✓ Numerous severe thunderstorms possible ✓ More presistent and / or widespread. ✓ A few tornadoes. Several reports of strong wind damage. ✓ Damaging hail - 1 - 2"
4	MODERATE (MDT)	✓ Widespread severe thunderstorms likely ✓ Long-lived, widespread and intense. ✓ Strong tornadoes. ✓ Widespread wind damage ✓ Destructive hail - 2"+
5	HIGH (HIGH)	✓ Widespread severe thunderstorms expected. ✓ Long-lived, very widespread and particularly intense. ✓ Tornado Outbreak. ✓ Derecho

Developed by the Storm Prediction Center (SPC)

THUNDERSTORMS WATCH VS. WARNING

Severe Thunderstorm Watch: Be Prepared!

Severe thunderstorms are possible in and near the watch area. Stay informed and be ready to act if a severe thunderstorm warning is issued. Watches are issued by the Storm Prediction Center (*spc.noaa.gov*) for counties where severe thunderstorms may occur. The watch area is typically large, covering numerous counties or even states.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: Take Action!

A severe thunderstorm has been indicated by radar or reported by a spotter producing hail one inch or larger in diameter and/or winds exceeding 58 mph. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property. Take shelter in a substantial building. Severe thunderstorms can produce tornadoes with little or no advance warning.

After a tornado, watch out for dangerous debris, such as sharp metal, glass, or downed power lines.. Photo: NOAA

For more information, visit **weather.gov/safety/thunderstorm**

#DAFRider

GEAR UP AND RIDE SAFE

ALL THE GEAR, ALL THE TIME (ATGATT)

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY GEAR

PROTECTIVE GEAR IS MANDATORY AT ALL TIMES, ON AND OFF BASE

What's Your Story?

Wisdom comes with age. Share yours with us.

You've spent years training to be a member of the world's greatest Air Force. Not only do you have skills, but you also have experience—and the wisdom that comes with it.

There have been countless times when you were confronted by challenges you met, obstacles you overcame. Each of them made you grow as an Airman.

Share a tale from your experience. Tell us about the time when ___. Write a "There I was ..." account of a mishap. Help other Airmen learn and grow. Give us the benefit of your wisdom.

Throughout the long history of our safety magazine, from TAC Attack (1961) to The Combat Edge (1992), the message of safety has remained the same. Help keep it current by telling it in your own, unique way. Write your safety story and send it to us at thecombatedge@us.af.mil.

You have something to say, and we're listening.

Critical Decision Making Could Save Your Life

By TSgt Christopher D. Juneau

When I was 17 years old, I was riding my motorcycle to meet up with some friends. The day was normal, and the weather was nice. I was traveling about 45 miles per hour on a divided four-lane road as I approached a major intersection.

I was going straight through the intersection, and I had a green light. The light turned yellow as I approached, and I looked down to ensure I was going fast enough to make the light. When I looked up, I saw the right side of a car about 15 to 25 yards ahead. The vehicle had made a left turn at the intersection, and crossed right in front of me.

My initial reaction was to brake hard and hold on for impact; however, I decided instead to brake more easily, then swerved to avoid the car. I missed hitting the rear of the vehicle by only a foot or so. Once through the intersection, I continued on to my destination. When I arrived, I lowered the kickstand and sat down to calm myself.

This scenario gives a great example of both deliberate risk management and real time risk management. On the deliberate side: I wore my gear, took my training, and ensured I was mentally prepared to ride. Things change on the road, though, and that is where real-time risk management came into play. I was saved from colliding with the other vehicle because I assessed the situation and made the correct decision at that moment.

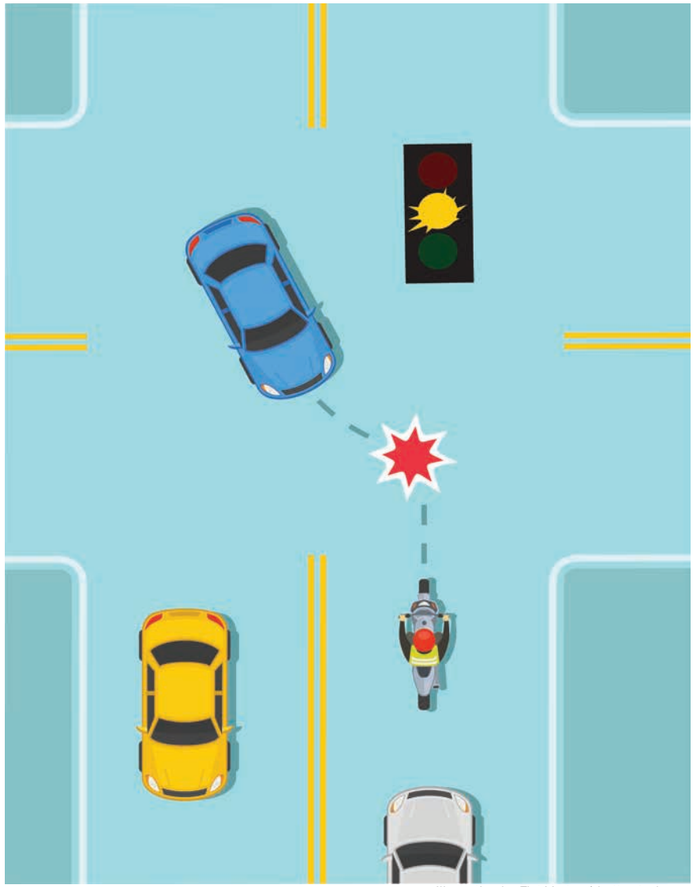


Illustration by Flat Vectors/shutterstock.com

This situation turned out to be a very good learning experience for me as a motorcycle rider. I was a novice rider, and even though the vehicle crossed into my path of travel and was supposed to yield to me, I learned very quickly that you must be prepared, and must assume motorists don't always see you on the road. The lesson from this event can be applied to many other situations. Things happen that we can't predict, and we have to be able to determine the best solution at that moment.

SAFETY SHORTS

~~Raising~~ Removing the Bar

By MSgt Armando E. Ramirez

After receiving the turnover briefing from the day shift, I headed out to inspect the aircraft. We had a doorway pull-up bar in our office entrance, a fixture I'd used countless times over the past two years. It had become a habit to knock out a few reps on my way in and out, almost a subconscious action.

On this particular day, complacency led to an accident. I failed to notice the bar wasn't fully secured to the door frame. As I walked out, I grabbed the bar and, saying aloud, "Let's get this day started!" I put all my weight into a pull-up.

The bar gave way, striking me directly on the forehead. I grabbed my head, asking my colleague "Am I okay?" His grim shake of the head was my answer. The warm, sticky feeling of blood running through my fingers confirmed it. Someone grabbed a tech wipe, and I applied pressure to the wound.

A colleague drove me to the hospital, where I received a tetanus shot and had the laceration closed. The incident highlighted a critical safety lapse. The next week, all pull-up bars were removed from our work area.

Photo by dba87/shutterstock.com

Surviving Road Rage

By SSgt Jazmin Alfaro-Mageau

Photo by AlexandrinaZ/shutterstock.com

Some moments in life shake you to your core. For me, it happened on what should have been an ordinary afternoon. I was seven months pregnant, returning from lunch with a coworker, when I found myself face-to-face with a furious driver—one who was armed and willing to escalate a traffic dispute to a terrifying level.

On a warm afternoon, my coworker and I had just finished lunch. I was driving back to work, taking it easy. I was well into my third trimester, and needed to avoid stress. Traffic was heavy, but nothing out of the ordinary. We were backed up outside the main gate due the construction taking place on the bridge.

Then it happened. I was coming off the highway when a driver cut me off abruptly, forcing me to tap my brakes hard. Without thinking, I honked—a quick, instinctive reaction. In hindsight, I wish I hadn't.

Now in front of me, the driver slammed on his brakes, nearly causing me to run into the back of his car. My heart pounded. Before I could react, he thrust his arm out the window, pointing something in my direction. My stomach dropped: It was a gun.

I was frozen with fear. For a moment, everything around me blurred. My coworker gasped, gripping the seat. My first thought wasn't even about myself; it was about the baby I was carrying. I had never felt so vulnerable. I wasn't responsible just for my own life, but for the little one growing inside me.

I didn't yell. I didn't gesture. I didn't make a single move that could be seen as a challenge. I took my foot off the gas and let my car slow down. Traffic was starting to merge, and I let another vehicle in to put space between us. The armed driver eventually drove off, disappearing into traffic as if nothing had happened.

Shaking, I called 911. I gave them as many details as I could, including the car's make, color, and license plate (My coworker had taken a picture of it). At that moment, I knew there was little chance he'd be caught. Road rage incidents like this happen too often, and unless there's a crash or clear evidence, many go unresolved.

Your Safety Is More Important Than Your Pride

I could have honked again. I could have shouted. But nothing—absolutely nothing—is worth risking your life over. De-escalation is always the best option.

Never Assume Someone Won't Take It Too Far

You never know what someone else is going through, or what they're capable of doing. Some people are carrying more than anger. They're carrying weapons, and they might not hesitate to use them.

Know How to React in a Crisis - If you ever face a situation like this:

- Stay calm.
- Do not engage the other driver.
- Create distance between yourself and the other driver.
- Call 911 as soon as you can do so safely.

That day forever changed the way I drive. I no longer react to aggressive drivers. I don't honk unless absolutely necessary. I don't make eye contact with angry people on the road. At the end of the day, making it home safely to my family matters more than proving a point.

No one should have to experience what I did, especially while carrying a child. Yet, there are violent people out there, and they're driving. In a world in which tempers flare too easily and people act without thinking, the best thing we can do is stay smart, stay safe, and never let road rage pull you into danger.

Motorcyclist Safety
If you ride a motorcycle, you already know how much fun riding can be. You understand the exhilaration of cruising the open road and the challenge of controlling a motorcycle. But motorcycling also can be dangerous. Per vehicle miles traveled in 2023, motorcyclists were about 28 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a motor vehicle crash and were 5 times more likely to be injured. Safe motorcycling takes balance, coordination, and good judgment.

Road Ready

Make Sure You Are Properly Licensed
Of the motorcycle operators involved in fatal crashes in 2023, 34% were riding without valid motorcycle licenses. Driving a car and riding a motorcycle require different skills and knowledge. Although motorcycle-licensing regulations vary, all states require a motorcycle license endorsement to supplement your automobile driver's license. To receive the proper endorsement in most states, you'll need to pass written and on-cycle skills tests administered by your state's licensing agency. Some states require you to take a state-sponsored rider education course. Others waive the on-cycle skills test if you've already taken and passed a state-approved course. Either way, completing a motorcycle rider education course is a good way to ensure you have the correct instruction and experience it takes to ride a motorcycle. Contact your state motor vehicle administration to find a motorcycle rider-training course near you.

Practice Operating Your Motorcycle
Given the fact that motorcycles vary in handling and responsiveness, be sure to take the time to get accustomed to the feel of a new or unfamiliar motorcycle by riding it in a controlled area. Once you feel comfortable with your bike, you can take it into traffic. Make sure you know how to handle your motorcycle in a variety of conditions (e.g., inclement weather or encountering hazards such as slick roads, potholes, and road debris).

Before Every Ride
Check your motorcycle's tire pressure and tread depth, hand and foot brakes, headlights and signal indicators, and fluid levels before you ride. You should also check under the motorcycle for signs of oil or gas leaks. If you're carrying cargo, you should secure and balance the load on the cycle; and adjust the suspension and tire pressure to accommodate the extra weight. If you're carrying a passenger, he or she should mount the motorcycle only after the engine has started; should sit as far forward as possible, directly behind you; and should keep both feet on the footrests at all times, even when the motorcycle is stopped. Remind your passenger to keep his or her legs and feet away from the muffler. Tell your passenger to hold on firmly to your waist, hips, or belt; keep movement to a minimum; and lean at the same time and in the same direction as you do. Do not let your passenger dismount the motorcycle until you say it is safe.

On the Road
If you're ever in a serious motorcycle crash, the best hope you have for protecting your brain is a motorcycle helmet. Always wear a helmet that meets U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 218. Look for the DOT symbol on the outside back of the helmet. Snell and ANSI labels located inside the helmet also show that the helmet meets the standards of those private, non-profit organizations.

Arms and legs should be completely covered when riding a motorcycle, ideally by wearing leather or heavy denim. In addition to providing protection in a crash, protective gear also helps prevent dehydration. Boots or shoes should be high enough to cover your ankles, while gloves allow for a better grip and help protect your hands in the event of a crash. Wearing brightly colored clothing with reflective material will make you more visible to other vehicle drivers.

Ride Responsibly
Experienced riders know local traffic laws - and they don't take risks. Obey traffic lights, signs, speed limits, and lane markings; ride with the flow of traffic and leave plenty of room between your bike and other vehicles; and always check behind you and signal before you change lanes. Remember to ride defensively. The majority of multi-vehicle motorcycle crashes generally are caused when other drivers simply don't see the motorcyclist. Proceed cautiously at intersections and yield to pedestrians and other vehicles as appropriate. You can increase your visibility by applying reflective materials to your motorcycle and by keeping your motorcycle's headlights on at all times, even using high beams during the day.

Stay Alcohol and Drug Free
Alcohol and drugs, including some prescribed medications, negatively affect your judgment, coordination, balance, throttle control, and ability to shift gears. These substances also impair your alertness and reduce your reaction time. Even when you're fully alert, it's impossible to predict what other vehicles or pedestrians are going to do. Therefore, make sure you are alcohol and drug free when you get on your motorcycle. Otherwise, you'll be heading for trouble.

Motorcycle riding is a great way to travel. The culture of the riding community is characterized by camaraderie and respect, including respect for the rules of the road. Enjoy the ride–safely!

Motorcyclists pose for a group photo after a Motorcycle Mentorship Ride at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Aug. 18, 2025. The mentorship ride gave F.E. Warren AFB personnel the ability to conduct recurring Motorcycle training and build up the community of military riders both active duty and retired.
U.S. Air Force photo by A1C Hunter Kirkland

May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
U.S. Dept of Transportation

"Ride safe today so you can ride again tomorrow."

Motorcycle riders continue to be overrepresented in fatal traffic crashes. In 2023, there were 6,335 motorcyclists killed — 15% of all traffic fatalities. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), this is the highest number of motorcyclists killed since 1975. To help keep everyone safe, we urge drivers and motorcyclists to share the road and be alert. We also remind motorcyclists to make themselves visible, to use DOT-compliant motorcycle helmets, and always to ride sober.

Motorist Awareness

Safe riding practices and cooperation from all road users will help reduce the number of fatalities and injuries on our nation's highways. But it's especially important for drivers to understand the safety challenges faced by motorcyclists such as size and visibility, and motorcycle riding practices like downshifting and weaving to know how to anticipate and respond to them. By raising motorists' awareness, both drivers and riders will be safer sharing the road.

Photo by r.classen/shutterstock.com

Photo by Oksana Mizina/shutterstock.com

Fueling the Fight Naturally

By Mr. Jack Gilliland

Author Bio:
Jack Gilliland is a retired member of the Air Force Reserves and current Occupational Safety Manager at Tinker AFB, OK. He is passionate about promoting health and safety practices across the Total Force and sharing lessons learned from real-world experience.

When mission tempo is high and the heat is relentless, staying hydrated isn't just about drinking water: Electrolyte balance plays a critical role in maintaining performance and preventing heat- related injuries. While sports drinks like Gatorade are popular, they often come with high sugar content and artificial additives. Fortunately, there are effective, natural alternatives that Airmen can prepare themselves, using basic ingredients.

One simple yet effective homemade electrolyte drink consists of water, a pinch of sea salt (to replenish sodium and trace minerals), the juice of a lemon or lime (for potassium and flavor), and a teaspoon of honey or maple syrup (for natural carbohydrates that help with absorption). This mixture mimics the hydration support of commercial products without the extra sugar or dyes.

For an off-the-shelf option, unsweetened coconut water is rich in potassium and magnesium, making it another excellent way to rehydrate naturally.

Solid food options can also support electrolyte replenishment. Bananas, salted nuts, low-fat yogurt, and even pickles offer essential minerals like potassium, sodium, and calcium— all vital for muscle function and fluid balance. These options are not only more natural, but also more adaptable to individual needs and availability.

Prior to retirement, I served as the lead safety representative during the Port Dawg Challenge at Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Most of the events in the competition took place on the flightline during the day in a hot Georgia summer. I even briefed participants on the dangers of dehydration in the summer heat.

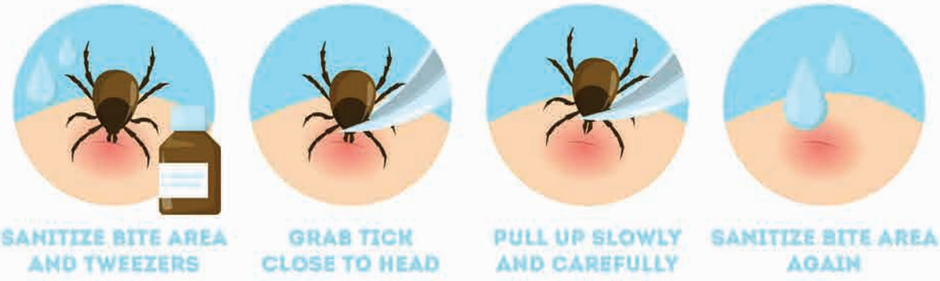
Despite my drinking plenty of water, I suffered a heat stroke. Unbeknownst to me, my salt and electrolyte levels were already critically low, and drinking more water only diluted them further, landing me in the ICU. That experience underscored a hard truth: hydration without electrolyte replenishment can be just as dangerous as not hydrating at all.

Hydration strategy isn't just about drinking more; it's about drinking smart. Whether you're working long hours on the flight line, gearing up for PT, or operating in high-heat environments, these simple solutions can keep you sharp, safe, and mission-ready without relying solely on store-bought supplements.

"That experience underscored a hard truth: hydration without electrolyte replenishment can be just as dangerous as not hydrating at all."

TIPS FOR TICK SAFETY

HOW TO REMOVE TICK



WHEN TO CALL A DOCTOR

OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

Cover Photo by Jag cz/shutterstock.com

OVER the Edge MAGAZINE

May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month

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