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AEAGA-S

3 October 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: USAREUR 2003 Holiday Safety Campaign

This memorandum expires 1 June 2004.

1. REFERENCES

Enclosure 1 lists references.

2. GENERAL

a. The holiday season is approaching quickly. This time of year brings with it increased risk for our soldiers, civilians, and their families. High operating tempo combined with winter weather will contribute to this risk. Our number-one priority during this time will be ensuring the safety and welfare of every soldier, civilian, and family member. Our goal is not a single death over the holiday period—from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. To reach this goal, we must begin our holiday accident-prevention programs now.

b. The holiday season can be deadly. Last year, although we are thankful that not a single USAREUR soldier was killed over the holiday period, two were involved in very serious vehicle accidents. One accident occurred when the driver lost control of the vehicle on a slippery road; the other when the driver fell asleep at the wheel. Several serious personal injuries related to the weather and holiday activities also occurred during this time. These accidents could have resulted in fatalities.

c. The holidays will find many of our personnel separated or preparing to separate from loved ones because of our commitments to the Global War on Terrorism or operation in the Balkans. Activity over this year's holiday period will be extremely demanding as we train, redeploy, and deploy units, and provide support for the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Program. However, we must not forget our obligation to take care of our soldiers, civilians, and their families. Commanders, including Rear Detachment Commanders, must concentrate on avoiding risks and using the unit chain of command to provide care and maintain discipline during the holidays. We must not rely on simply giving safety briefings before releasing our personnel for the holidays. That approach is not good enough, and we can do much better.

3. HOLIDAY-SAFETY PROGRAMS

I have a range of concerns where experience tells me Commanders must carefully focus during the Holiday period. At the top of the list are the following areas of greatest challenge:

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- Drinking and Driving
- Unattended alcohol injuries / deaths (soldiers alone in the barracks asphyxiating from excessive alcohol consumption / alcohol poisoning)
- Domestic violence / spouse abuse
- Home / apartment fires emanating from holiday decorations, open candle flames, electrical circuit overload, or food preparation
- Illegal use of fireworks and resultant injuries
- Suicide ideations and attempts

Clearly, there are many more risks than those I highlight above. Commanders of USAREUR major subordinate commands (AE Reg 10-5, app A) will develop aggressive holiday-safety programs that address, as a minimum, the subjects I've outlined above, and the ones listed below. These programs should be designed to complement the ongoing Winter Safety Campaign requirements. Please provide your written plans to BG Frutiger, USAREUR G-1, NLT 15 November. I want a personal e-mail from each major subordinate commander also NLT 15th to provide your personal assessment and perspective on how you are attacking the challenges of the Holiday period.

a. Vehicle-Accident Prevention. Increased travel and deteriorating weather conditions significantly increase the risk involved with driving during the holidays. The primary risk factors include speed, fatigue, failure to wear seatbelts, and alcohol. Remember, there are many more alcohol impaired drivers on the highways during the Holiday period, so defensive driving is a must. Snowchains are highly recommended for travel to areas with historically high levels of snowfall. First-line leaders need to be personally involved in helping soldiers plan their travel.

b. Weather-Related Hazards. Reduced hours of daylight and hazardous conditions (including black ice, fog, and snow) combined with dense holiday travel increase the likelihood of accidents. These include vehicle accidents, winter-recreation accidents, as well as slips and falls. Cold-weather injury is another hazard to be considered during outdoor activities.

c. Recreational Safety. Winter sports and recreation activities represent significant risk to our soldiers, civilians, and family members. Personnel need to be reminded to prepare themselves for these activities by taking advantage of the excellent training programs offered by morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) activities and the Armed Forces Recreation Center. Additionally, personnel participating in winter activities should ensure they have the proper equipment for the activity and that the equipment is in proper working condition. The use of a safety helmet is recommended for skiing and snowboarding.

d. Suicide Prevention. The holiday season can be a very lonely time for some soldiers and family members. Separation from family and home over the holidays can be difficult. Deployments and pending deployments place an additional stress on individuals and families. Leaders should refer to DA Pamphlet 600-70 and Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 28 for guidance on suicide prevention.

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e. Seasonal Events and Fire Prevention. Decorations such as trees, candles, and electrical lights and devices all increase the risk of fire in the home during the holidays. Carbon-monoxide hazards should not be ignored. Children playing with lighters and matches are a significant risk. The cooking demands of the holidays are another area of concern that needs to be addressed. Other issues associated with holiday celebrations include food safety, decorations, responsible party hosting, “safe gift” giving, and plant safety.

f. Alcohol. The increased number of social functions, parties, and separations over the holiday period can lead to increased opportunities for excessive or binge drinking. The likelihood of drinking-and-driving incidents will increase as well. The use of alternative transportation at command-sponsored functions, emphasis on unit “ride-home” programs, and the use of designated drivers must be the mainstays of the Holiday Safety Campaign.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Beginning on 1 November 2003, the Safety Division, Office of the G1, HQ USAREUR/7A, will—

(1) Help the Office of the Chief, Public Affairs, HQ USAREUR/7A, distribute holiday safety-campaign articles and materials.

(2) Post holiday-safety information on the on the USAREUR Safety website to support the Holiday Safety Campaign.

b. The United States Army Installation Management Agency, Europe Region Office (IMA-Europe), will—

(1) Coordinate with area support groups for support of the Holiday Safety Campaign.

(2) Publish tailored holiday-safety articles in local community newspapers and media, beginning on 1 November 2003.

(3) Publish guidance on holiday decorations in offices and Government housing.

(4) Beginning on 15 November 2003, emphasize moderation in alcohol consumption, responsible party hosting, and the use of designated drivers and ride-home programs. MWR activities will promote the designated-driver program.

(5) Emphasize suicide prevention and outreach during the holiday period.

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(6) Ensure that MWR activities conduct risk assessments of all sponsored winter activities according to AR 215-1. MWR managers should use self-inspection forms to detect unsafe practices and conditions.

c. The Chief, Public Affairs, USAREUR, will publish holiday safety-campaign information in appropriate media beginning mid-November 2003 and continuing until 2 January 2004.

d. The Provost Marshal, USAREUR, will enforce road standards for vehicles and operators, including enforcement of the "Click It or Ticket," "Booze It and Lose It," and sobriety-test programs.

e. Commanders and directors will—

(1) Develop a holiday-safety program by 15 November 2003 that concentrates, as a minimum, on the subjects outlined in paragraph 3. Programs must be submitted to USAREUR, G-1 for approval by 15 November 2003. Provide CG, USAREUR with an e-mail assessment and overview of command approach to Holiday safety NLT 15 November 2003.

(2) Aggressively oversee subordinate units in their execution of this holiday campaign.

(3) Ensure that units have an emergency-contact and functional ride-home program.

(4) Ensure that a process is in place to address off-duty risk for holiday and winter recreational activities. First-line leaders must develop comprehensive, hard-hitting, holiday-safety briefings on the subjects in paragraph 3. These talks should be a two-way dialogue between leaders and their soldiers. Raise the awareness of the "at-risk" population and of the geographic areas and roadways where accidents are likely to occur. Enclosure 2 identifies topics. Tools are available on the USAREUR Safety website at <http://www.per.hqusareur.army.mil/services/safetydivision/main.htm>.

(5) Ensure soldiers, in conjunction with their first-line leaders, complete the Driver's Risk Awareness Questionnaire on the USAREUR Safety website as required by Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 3. First-line leaders will look soldiers identified as "high-risk or extremely high-risk" in the eye and explain to them their risk and responsibility for correct behavior.

(6) Ensure that a mechanism is in place that requires junior leaders to get involved in their soldiers' planning for off-duty activities during the holiday period.

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5. ENCLOSURES

The enclosures provide references and information needed to accomplish the tasks in this memorandum. The USAREUR Safety website has information that will help first-line leaders concentrate on risks and risk-mitigation measures.

6. SUMMARY

I need the complete commitment of commanders, including rear detachment commanders, in this holiday accident-prevention effort. We must be aggressive in giving this campaign priority over other competing issues. The entire chain of command must be involved. Commanders at all levels are responsible for the safety of their personnel—it's fundamental to our craft. Together we can make this a safe and enjoyable holiday season for all our soldiers, civilians and family members.

- 5 Encls
1. References
 2. Holiday Safety Topics and Tools
 3. Winter Driving in Europe
 4. Wellness
 5. Seasonal Events and Fire Prevention



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REFERENCES

1. Army Regulations

AR 385-55, Prevention of Motor Vehicle Accidents, 12 March 1987

AR 600-63, Army Health Promotion, 28 April 1996

AR 600-85, Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), 1 October 2001

AR 608-18, The Army Family Advocacy Program, 1 September 1995

AR 215-1, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Activities and Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities, 25 October 1998

2. Army Pamphlets

DA Pamphlet 600-24, Suicide Prevention and Psychological Autopsy, 30 September 1988

DA Pamphlet 600-70, US Army Guide to the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Destructive Behavior, 1 November 1985

3. Other Department of the Army Publications

FM 21-305, Manual for the Wheeled Vehicle Driver, 27 August 1993

FM 100-14, Risk Management, 23 April 1998

Training Circular 21-3, Soldier's Handbook for Individual Operations and Survival in Cold-Weather Operations, 17 March 1986

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AMEDD Suicide Event Report (ASER), 10 June 2003

4. Army in Europe and USAREUR Regulations

AE Regulation 190-1, Registering and Operating Privately Owned Vehicles in Germany, 29 July 2003

AE Regulation 600-55, Driver- and Operator-Standardization Program, 24 July 2003

USAREUR Regulation 40-6, Referring Soldiers for Mental-Health Evaluations, 8 February 1996

USAREUR Regulation 385-55, Prevention of Motor Vehicle Accidents, 26 January 2000

5. Army in Europe and USAREUR Pamphlets

AE Pamphlet 190-34, Drivers Handbook and Examination Manual for Germany, 2 June 2003

AE Pamphlet 385-15, Leader's Operational Accident-Prevention Guide, 1 May 2003

USAREUR Pamphlet 350-7, Winning in the Cold, 22 November 1995

USAREUR Pamphlet 385-17, Leaders Guide to Force Protection in Physical Training Running, 3 November 1999

6. Other Army in Europe and USAREUR Publications

AE Command Policy Letter 3, Safety, 4 May 2003

AE Command Policy Letter 28, Suicide Prevention, 4 May 2003

Bell Sends #1, Deployment Safety, 31 January 2003

Bell Sends #3, SAFETY ALERT - Rail Operations, 19 April 2003

Bell Sends #4, SAFETY ALERT - Fatalities, 13 May 2003

Bell Sends #5, SAFETY ALERT - Motorcycle Fatalities, 17 June 2003

Bell Sends #7, Motorcycle Carnage Continues, 8 July 2003

Bell Sends #9, Motor-Vehicle Safety - Auto Crash Kills Soldier, 1 August 2003

Bell Sends #11, Labor Day Weekend Safety, 11 August 2003

Bell Sends #13, 2003-2004 Winter Safety Campaign, 8 September 2003

HOLIDAY SAFETY TOPICS AND TOOLS

Topic	Available Class Topics/Checklists
Chains	Tire-Chain Safety Briefing, Chain Inspection, and Serviceability Checklist
Cold Weather	Cold Weather and Weather-Related Injuries
Designated Driver	Commander Holiday Safety Hero Briefing (Designated Driver), Click It or Ticket, Booze It and Lose It
Electrical Hazards	Electrical Hazards in the Home
Fire Prevention	Holiday Fire-Prevention and Carbon-Monoxide Briefing and Checklist, Fire-Prevention Issues and Measures
Fireworks	New Year's Fireworks Safety Briefing
Food Safety	Food-Safety Briefing
Holiday Travel	Holiday Travel Briefing/Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 3
Recreation	Skiing, Snowboarding, and Sledding Safety Briefings
Tree Safety/Toys	Holiday Tree and Plant Safety, Toy Safety Checklist
Vehicle-Accident Prevention	Wheeled Accident Avoidance/Reducing Motor-Vehicle Accidents in USAREUR—A Risk-Management Approach
Winter Vehicle Preparedness	Winter Vehicle Prep Checklist/Vehicle-Lighting Inspection/Winter Vehicle-Preparedness Briefing
Winter Driving	Vehicle Operations in Snow, Rain, Fog, and Ice (All); Limited Visibility

USAREUR Safety Website:

<http://www.per.hqusareur.army.mil/services/safetydivision/main.htm>

WINTER DRIVING IN EUROPE

1. Driving during the holiday season can be hazardous. Road conditions can change very quickly in Europe, which can be deadly for unsuspecting drivers. Heavy rain, snow, black ice, freezing rain, and fog are conditions that are frequently responsible for soldier, civilian, and family-member deaths and injuries on European roads every winter. All drivers need to be prepared for possible changes in road conditions to avoid injury to themselves and others. Many times, simply reducing speed will significantly reduce the risks and prevent accidents.
2. The inclement-weather road-condition status policy is in USAREUR Regulation 385-55, appendix I. Every leader will ensure that soldiers and civilian employees are briefed on this policy. Each base support battalion is responsible for determining local road conditions and status. Soldiers and civilians must understand the hazardous road conditions they can expect to experience while driving in Europe. They need to pass this information to their family members, as well as how to access up-to-date information on road and traffic conditions in their areas through the “Winter Safety” section of the USAREUR Safety website at <http://www.per.hqusareur.army.mil/services/safetydivision/main.htm>.
3. The following provides information on winter road conditions that people can expect when driving on roads in Europe. Recommended precautions are also given for each of these conditions to reduce the potential for accidents. All soldiers and civilian employees should be briefed on these hazardous driving conditions and precautions before the Thanksgiving Day weekend.

a. Ice.

(1) Expect icy conditions any time the outside air temperature is 40°F (4°C) or lower. Although water freezes at 32°F (0°C), road surfaces can freeze when the air temperature drops to 40°F (4°C) or less. An important place to watch for icy conditions is on bridges. Bridge surfaces are exposed to the wind and cool off faster than the rest of the road. Freezing rain can glaze these road surfaces with ice, causing extremely hazardous driving conditions.

(2) The following terms are often used to describe specific icing conditions that drivers can expect to see. Some are more easily recognized than others, and all are dangerous.

- **White Ice.** Snow that has been compacted during the day and has slightly melted will freeze at night. This is called white ice. White ice can usually be seen on the road. When traveling on white ice, drive very slowly. If you cannot find a place to park until conditions improve, put on tire chains for better traction.
- **Glare Ice.** Glare ice may appear on an otherwise clear road in shaded areas where a cold wind can freeze a wet road surface quickly. If you see a patch of ice ahead, brake before reaching it and try not to brake while actually on the ice.

- **Black Ice.** Black ice fools drivers. Its shine tricks drivers into thinking they see water on the road. What drivers may not realize is that condensation, such as dew and fog, freezes quickly on the road surface. This forms an extra-thin layer of ice on the road that is difficult to see. This shiny ice surface forms one of the most slippery road conditions. Black ice is likely to form first under bridges and overpasses, in shady spots, and at intersections.

(3) When roads are icy or slushy—

- Drive slowly and allow extra room to slow down and stop. It can take ten times longer to stop in icy conditions than on a dry road.
- Use the highest gear possible to avoid wheel spin.
- Maneuver gently and avoid sharp braking and acceleration.
- To brake without locking your wheels, get into a low gear early, allow your speed to decrease, and use the brake pedal gently.
- If you skid, ease off the accelerator, but do not brake suddenly. Turn the front wheels toward the direction in which the rear wheels are skidding.

b. Snow.

(1) Drivers can expect to experience snow while driving on highways in Europe. Falling snow can cause reduced driver visibility, which can worsen in with windy conditions. Snow can accumulate very quickly, especially at higher elevations, and cause slippery driving conditions. Drifting snow (snow displaced by the wind) can create very deep snow on roads at all elevations. Drivers should be prepared for this condition before venturing out on the highways during winter. Snowdrifts can be a very serious hazard to drivers, because they can render any vehicle immobile, which in turn can lead to large traffic jams. Proper use of snowchains can make driving in the snow safer. Snowchains can be rented from many gas stations midway through your journey and then dropped off at another station down the road. Sometimes membership in one of the European-based automobile clubs is necessary for this service, but not always. The cost is low and is based on the number of kilometers traveled. Stop as soon as you think you may need snowchains, because supplies are limited at each station. Better yet, buy a set of snowchains properly sized for your vehicle and keep them in the vehicle during winter. Practice putting them on before the snow begins to fall.

(2) The following precautions and recommendations for driving in the snow should be considered:

- Slow down. Triple the usual 3-second following distance between your car and the one ahead.
- Stay in the plowed lane and avoid driving over the ridges between the plowed areas. If you must switch lanes, slow down, signal, and move over slowly.
- If you skid, steer into the skid. If the back of your vehicle is skidding to the left, for example, turn the steering wheel to the left.

- Do not pump your brakes and avoid locking them up. If your brakes lock, take your foot off the brake pedal for a moment.
- If you are involved in a fender-bender, move the vehicles out of the lanes of travel.
- Keep a blanket and flashlight in your vehicle.
- While driving, keep your headlights on. Keep snow and ice off your mirrors, windows, and lights.
- As always, wear your seatbelts.
- If your vehicle has an antilock braking system (ABS) and you must brake, be sure to press the brake pedal and hold it down.

c. Fog. Fog is the condensation of moisture in the atmosphere near the surface of the earth. This can happen in several ways, but always results from the same basic conditions: warm, moist air meeting cold air, or cold, moist air meeting warm air. These conditions occur throughout the year, but mainly during spring and winter. Fog can form quickly and may reduce visibility to zero. Fog is a major hazard on European highways and contributes to many vehicle accidents each year. The following safety tips should be used when fog is expected:

- Consider postponing your trip until the fog clears.
- Slow down before you enter a patch of fog.
- If your vehicle is equipped with foglamps, turn them on.
- Be sure that you can stop within the distance that you can see.
- Turn on the wipers and defroster to remove moisture from the windshield.
- Use your low-beam headlamps, whether it is day or night.
- Do not use high beams; they reflect off the fog and can reduce visibility.
- Use the right edge of the road or painted road markings as a reference.
- Watch out for slow-moving and parked vehicles.
- Do not change lanes or pass other vehicles unless absolutely necessary.
- If you must pull off the road, signal, then carefully pull off as far as possible.
- After pulling off the road, turn on your hazard flashers.

d. Rain. Winter in Europe tends to be very wet. Long periods of rain can lead to flooding and standing water on the roads. Even thin layers of water on the road can create dangerous conditions. Heavy rains can reduce a driver's visibility to dangerously short distances and make roadway markings and other traffic difficult to see. Water mixed with roadway dirt and oil can create slick surfaces. Wet brakes can increase stopping distances. Hydroplaning can occur when the tire's tread cannot move the water from underneath the tire fast enough. The tire begins to ride on top of a ridge of water and loses contact with the ground, which can cause the driver to lose control of the vehicle. The combination of fast speeds and wet European highways results in many hydroplaning accidents each year. Many variables lead to hydroplaning, but slower speeds and good tires are the best way to prevent it. The following safety tips should be used when driving in wet weather:

- Most important, slow down.
- Stay in middle lanes, since water tends to pool in outside lanes.
- Follow vehicles using the 3-second rule of spacing.

- Try to follow in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you.
- Avoid hard braking; take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.
- Ensure tires and windshield wipers are serviceable.
- Always drive with your headlights on in wet weather.
- Never drive beyond the limits of visibility.
- Never drive through moving water or puddles that touch the vehicle frame.
- Beware of high winds during storms and blinding lightning at night.

4. Winter road conditions in Europe can be a challenge for all drivers, but especially for those who do not have experience driving in Europe. When driving in these challenging conditions, slow down and increase the distance from the vehicle in front of you. Decreasing your speed will allow more time to respond when a difficult situation arises. Factors such as the type of vehicle you are driving, the quality and type of tires your vehicle is equipped with, and your abilities as a driver should all be considered in the speed adjustment. Prepare for unplanned events by carrying a cellphone and having emergency supplies in the vehicle, such as the following:

- Abrasive material (cat litter, sand, salt, or traction mats).
- Brightly colored cloth to signal for help.
- A compass, a warning light or road flares, and booster cables.
- First-aid kit.
- Flashlight (with extra batteries).
- Scraper with a brush on one end.
- Snow shovel.
- Tow chain or strap.
- Warning device (reflective triangles).

5. For many winter road conditions, the right risk decision is to delay travel and pull off the road until conditions improve. For other conditions, simply reducing speed and increasing the following distance between vehicles may be appropriate to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. Leaders will ensure that every soldier and civilian employee knows how to evaluate these risks and make the proper decision when road conditions begin to deteriorate.

6. Safe driving demands your full attention. If you feel your eyelids getting heavy, then your next actions may determine not only whether or not you will stay awake; they may determine whether or not you will stay alive. Fatigue on the road can be a killer over the holidays. It happens frequently on long drives, especially long night drives. Traffic density is increased and weather conditions may not be the best. All these factors increase stress and produce fatigue. Signs of fatigue include back tension, burning eyes, shallow breathing, inattentiveness, and any kind of erratic driving, such as drifting, abnormal speed, tailgating, or failure to obey traffic signs. The single greatest cause of fatigue is alcohol consumption. Alcohol is a depressant and a driver does not have to be drunk to fall asleep at the wheel. Even one drink can be enough to induce fatigue. The National Safety Council offers these tips for staying awake while driving:

- An obvious cause of fatigue is lack of sleep. If you have not received 7 or 8 hours of sleep the night before a trip, you are likely to experience fatigue. Get enough rest. Do not start a trip late in the day or in the evening. Long-distance driving is hard work and you need to be fresh and alert.

- If possible, do not drive alone. Passengers can take turns driving and help to keep you awake.
- Avoid long drives at night. The glare of lights increases the danger of highway hypnosis.
- Adjust your car's environment so that it helps keep you awake and alert. Keep the temperature cool, with open windows or low amounts of heat in the winter. Turn the radio volume up and switch stations frequently, but avoid soft, sleep-inducing music.
- Do not use cruise control; keep your body involved with the driving. Watch your posture. Drive with your head up and your shoulders back. Tuck your buttocks against the seat back. Legs should not be fully extended, but flexed at about a 45-degree angle. Take frequent breaks. At least every 2 hours, stop at a gas station, restaurant, or rest stop. Get out of the car, walk around, even jog or do calisthenics. In addition to exercise breaks, stop for light meals and snacks. Avoid alcohol entirely.
- Do not allow your eyes to become fatigued or hypnotized. Wear sunglasses to fight glare, but never wear sunglasses at night.
- Break the monotony. Turn the radio on for a while, then off. Vary speed levels. Chew gum, stretch your legs, talk to yourself, or sing. Keep your eyes moving.
- If anti-fatigue measures fail and you start noticing the danger signs of fatigue, there is only one solution: sleep. Remember, good planning can avoid your having to deal with fatigue and ensure a safe holiday trip.

7. POC: USAREUR Safety Division, DSN 370-8084.

WELLNESS

1. General

a. This enclosure highlights wellness-program areas that support the USAREUR Holiday Safety Campaign. Every base support battalion has a working community health-promotion council that can be used as a forum to address Holiday Safety Campaign issues. Health-promotion coordinators are located in every area support group (ASG). They facilitate community health-promotion councils chaired by the installation commander according to AR 600-63. The council is a multidisciplinary team that identifies redundancies and voids of health-promotion programs and services by evaluating population needs, assessing existing health-promotion programs, and coordinating targeted interventions. Health-promotion councils in the Army in Europe form an ideal partnership with the new Army Well-Being Strategic Plan, which sets forth the Army's direction for establishing well-being as an integral part of the institutional strength of the Army. More information may be obtained by contacting the ASG health-promotion coordinator or by e-mail: wellness@cpe.amedd.army.mil.

b. Wellness encompasses a variety of activities designed to facilitate behavioral and environmental alterations to improve or protect health. This includes a combination of health education and related organizational, social, emotional, spiritual, and health-care activities and initiatives. These are integrated to produce a single, comprehensive program. The operational side is delegated to a diverse set of operational entities (the USAREUR G3 for physical conditioning, the USAREUR G4 for nutrition, the USAREUR Chaplain for spiritual fitness, the United States Army Dental Command for oral health, and the USAREUR Command Surgeon for most clinical and operational areas).

2. Holiday Stress Management

a. The holiday season can result in added stress because of deployments and separation from loved ones, uncertainty in a time of war, time crunches and demanding schedules. Spouses and children who are separated from their deployed soldiers are at special risk for stress related challenges. The increased demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests may also contribute to tension and sadness during the holidays. Common stress reactions during the holidays include headaches, excessive drinking, overeating or not eating enough, and difficulty sleeping. For some people, particularly those living in northern, darker regions like Europe, the "holiday blues" may be caused by seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD results from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months. The holiday blues can affect both men and women, young and old. Factors contributing to the holiday blues include increased stress and fatigue, unrealistic expectations, too much commercialization, and the inability to be with one's family. Post-holiday letdown resulting from emotional disappointments during the holidays, continuing deployment separation, and physical reactions caused by excess fatigue and stress may cause the holiday blues to continue into the new year. Holiday blues can range from mild sadness during the holidays to severe depression. This sadness or depression can be prevented or, if present, eased. Follow the tips below from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Psychological Association, the National Mental Health Association, and the Mental Health Association of Colorado to help prevent the holiday blues:

(1) Establish realistic goals and expectations for the holiday season and do not consider the holiday season as a time to cure all past problems. The holidays in themselves do not prevent sadness or loneliness.

- Plan ahead. Allow extra time for last-minute changes. Keep a calendar of events.
- Simplify traditions and delegate work. Give priority to activities that enhance the holidays.
- Keep in contact. Express your feelings to those around you in a constructive, honest, and open way. If you need to confront someone with a problem, begin your sentence with “I feel.”

(2) Limit your drinking. Alcohol is counterproductive and unhealthy. It is actually a depressant. Consuming alcohol can contribute to nutritional deficiencies of vitamins needed for good mental health. It disturbs normal sleep patterns, which makes sleep less refreshing.

(3) Do not feel obliged to feel festive. Accept your inner experience and do not force yourself to express specific feelings. Try to do something that is decidedly “non-holiday.”

(4) If someone you know is experiencing the holiday blues—

- Try to involve that person in holiday activities, but do not be forceful.
- Be a good listener. If people express suicidal thoughts or feel depressed, hopeless, or worthless, be supportive. Let them know you are there for them and are willing to help them seek professional help. Never issue challenges or dares.
- Familiarize yourself with the resources available in your community, such as mental health professionals, counseling centers, and hotlines.
- If the depressed person is chronically ill, express that you understand that the holidays do not cure the illness. Be aware that holidays can be difficult for people, especially when reality does not measure up to their expectations. Help them establish what is realistic and what is not.

b. The United States Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) has a training package that identifies resources and techniques to reduce stress at home and at work, called “Targeting Health: Stress Management.” The package may be tailored to personal study, group presentations, individual assistance, or organizational and installation impact. The four major sections in the workbook are Lesson 1: Targeting Stress—An Introduction; Lesson 2: Personal Stress Management; Lesson 3: Work-Place Stress; and Lesson 4: Stress on the Home Front. The workbook also includes four articles on the following topics of interest in the field of stress management: The Nutrition and Stress Connection, Exercise and Stress, Stress Management: A Guide for Senior Leaders, and Stress and Combat Performance. The Stress Management Manual Technical Guide 225 is available at <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/documents/TG/TECHGUID/Tg225.pdf>.

c. The holidays place additional demands on your time with extra shopping, baking, and holiday parties. To make more time, you may be tempted to cut exercise from your routine. Physical activity can help relieve the stress of the holidays) not to mention exercising away all those calories). Try to spend 30 minutes on an aerobic activity most days of the week in addition to muscle-strengthening and flexibility exercises. Use those 30 minutes to recharge your spirits and organize what you need to do. Choose physical activities that you like to do and include your family in the activities.

d. In addition to keeping activity in your routine, remember to eat well and stay hydrated. With the colder weather, you lose water as your body works to stay warm, so consume plenty of water-based fluids—8 to 12 cups each day. Remember alcohol and caffeine-containing beverages like coffee can be dehydrating and are not as effective for hydrating. Depression and stress are not caused by a poor diet, but a link between food and mood can exist. When one becomes depressed, energy levels and initiative are much lower than normal. Enthusiasm for most things, including meals, is lost. Healthy eating practices can suffer as a result. Eating patterns are important. During periods of stress, some people may eat less, some may eat more, and others may turn to alcohol or subsist on coffee alone. Each scenario can cause an imbalance in your system and lead to a mind and body that looks, feels, and reacts poorly. Timing of meals is important. Eating every 4 to 6 hours refuels your mind and body and replenishes glycogen reserves. Skipping meals exhausts glucose reserves and leaves your brain and body with an energy deficit. Choose carbohydrate snacks like pretzels, bagels, fruits, vegetables, yogurt, crackers, and cereal to meet your nutritional demands between meals. Carbohydrates are an important part of a healthy diet to combat depression and should comprise 50 to 60 percent of the daily intake. Carbohydrates increase the brain's production of serotonin, which heightens the feelings of well-being and improves your mood. To avoid overeating at holiday parties, drink water or eat an apple beforehand.

e. Stress reduces the ability to fight colds, infections, and disease, which leaves your body vulnerable to attack. A diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains protects against the harmful effects of stress. Antioxidants and phytochemicals are substances found naturally in plant foods that can boost the immune function and reduce the risk of disease. Some good food sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals include apricots, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, greens, peppers, pumpkin, soy, spinach, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes.

f. Long-term stress can damage the body and increase the risk of illness. Many people respond to stress by overeating. Prolonged stress can lead to chronic health conditions like cancer, heart disease, stroke, and ulcers. Studies have shown that eating a diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains protects against the harmful effects of stress. When stressed—

- Do not binge or grab whatever is in sight. Take time to eat well.
- Eat plenty of carbohydrate foods like fruits, vegetables, and grains.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol.
- Do something other than eating. Exercise can help relieve stress.
- Try quick foods and recipes. Order in if you have to, but do not skip meals.

g. Performance Power. . .the Nutrition Connection (PPNC) is a triservice education package developed by the United States Army Research Institute for Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) and distributed throughout the Department of Defense by USACHPPM. The objective of PPNC is to improve wellness and readiness by increasing awareness and communicating performance-nutrition information. The PPNC webpage includes general program information, downloadable materials, and instructions for ordering PPNC materials. Module 7, Performance Your Weigh, is the latest module available in the series. This seventh module explains how body weight can affect performance and health. The module also provides diet and exercise guidelines and behavioral strategies for successful long-term weight management (<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Wellness/ppnc.aspx>).

h. Weigh to Stay is an intensive standardized weight management and education program. This program includes a three-part education series with designated follow-ups. Weigh to Stay will provide soldiers with the tools they need to learn and establish healthy eating and exercise habits. It can be found at <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/Wellness/weight.aspx>.

i. Hooah 4 Health (H4H) is a comprehensive health-promotion program based on an interactive website. The H4H website is used to deliver educational materials in the areas of environmental and occupational health, physical health (nutrition and weight management), mental (stress management) health, and spiritual health. H4H also includes an entirely electronic correspondence course. The H4H website is <http://www.hooah4health.com>.

3. Alcohol and Substance Abuse

a. Alcohol is a common ingredient in holiday celebrations. It is often inappropriately used by individuals to deal with holiday stress. Soldiers returning from deployment for rest and recuperation or redeployment have been operating under General Order One. They have not been exposed to alcohol for a long time. Abuse of alcohol and other substances during the holidays remains a significant problem. Commanders need to maintain an active role in deterring this behavior. Since alcohol and substance abuse often leads to unsafe behavior, a solid program of alcohol education may be one of the most far-reaching safety programs a commander can oversee.

b. The Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) is a comprehensive program that combines prevention education, urinalysis testing, and (for civilian employees) counseling services. These programs are designed to strengthen the overall fitness and effectiveness of the Army in Europe and to enhance the combat readiness of personnel and units. The main purpose is to eliminate alcohol and other drug abuse. The prevention education function will provide current substance-abuse prevention information for all members of the Army in Europe, military and civilian.

c. Alcohol has a debilitating effect on your body and mind. These effects must be considered when you put your life, the lives of those you care about, and your career on the line. Alcohol—

- Dulls judgment and concentration.
- Slows reflex and reaction time.

- Leads to multiple, blurred, and restricted peripheral and night vision.
- Hinders muscle control and coordination.
- Exaggerates emotions.
- Increases drowsiness.

d. The holiday season is filled with fun and parties for many of us. Unfortunately, it also brings with it more drunk drivers on our roadways. Drinking and driving are a lethal combination. Never get behind the wheel of a vehicle after consuming alcohol.

Myths and Facts About Alcohol and Driving:

Myth: Coffee can sober up someone who has had too much to drink.

Fact: Only time sobers. It takes about 1 hour to oxidize each drink.

Myth: Hard liquor is more intoxicating than beer or wine.

Fact: A 12-ounce can of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, and a 12-ounce wine cooler contain the same amount of alcohol and the same intoxication potential as an ounce-and-a-half of liquor.

Myth: Someone who has had too much to drink will look intoxicated.

Fact: Someone's physical appearance can be misleading. One drink can impair someone's ability to drive. Judgment is the first thing affected when someone has been drinking; important motor skills are next.

e. Responsible party-hosting is a key to reducing alcohol-related accidents over the holidays. Follow these basic safety tips to prevent injuries when hosting a holiday party or feast:

- Collect car keys when guests arrive.
- Arrange for alternative transportation for unit or organization functions before the function.
- Arrange for designated drivers before the party or allow guests to stay overnight.
- Always serve food with alcohol. High protein/carbohydrate foods stay in the stomach longer and slow the absorption of alcohol. Foods that are high in protein and carbohydrates include cheeses and meats.
- Offer plenty of nonalcoholic drink alternatives. Keep all drinks—alcoholic or not—away from children.
- Do not force drinks on guests or rush to refill their glasses.
- Provide jiggers or 1-ounce bottle spouts for measuring alcohol in mixed drinks. Guests are less likely to drink excessively when standard measures are used.
- If serving alcoholic punch, use a noncarbonated base, such as fruit juice. The body absorbs alcohol faster when mixed with carbonation.
- Stop serving alcohol about 2 hours before the party will end. Serve coffee or other nonalcoholic beverages as well as food.

f. Associated with prevention of alcohol abuse are two USAREUR programs that should be communicated to soldiers, civilians, and family members:

(1) The emergency-contact and ride-home programs for soldiers. These programs provide soldiers a safety net as required in Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 3. Each unit must ensure that their soldiers know whom to call when they are at risk. Encourage soldiers who need a ride to request one from their unit, the military police, or personnel involved in voluntary community programs.

(2) The Army in Europe's "Booze It and Lose It" campaign. This campaign specifically targets drinking drivers both on- and off-post during long holiday weekends. Commanders must emphasize the use of designated drivers to reduce the possibility of soldiers driving under the influence.

4. Holiday Food Safety

a. Americans manage to gobble millions of pounds of turkey, ham, assorted side dishes, and desserts safely every holiday season. But there is an increased risk during the holiday season. The nature of holiday cooking makes some of our favorite traditional holiday foods rich sources of food-borne disease. Holiday cooking is often a group effort and cooked foods are often transported and not eaten until hours later. Cooking the traditional holiday turkey dinner creates concern and questions every holiday season. The United States Department of Agriculture's food safety and inspection service website at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov> should be used as a source of information. Butterball® also has a very good website at <http://www.butterball.com/index.jsp>. Click on the FAQs link on either site to help answer your questions, ease your holiday fears, and ensure a delicious and a safe meal for you, your family, and friends.

b. More than 250 different types of food-borne diseases have been identified. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there are 38 cases of salmonellosis for every case that is actually diagnosed and reported. To help prevent food-borne illnesses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following steps in food preparation:

- Cook meat, poultry, and eggs thoroughly. Use a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of meat to be sure that it is cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria. For example, ground beef should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.
- Do not cross-contaminate one food with another. You can avoid cross-contaminating foods by washing hands, utensils, and cutting boards after they have been in contact with raw meat or poultry and before they touch another food. Put cooked meat on a clean platter rather than back on one that held the raw meat.
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly. Bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature, so refrigerate leftover foods if they are not going to be eaten within 4 hours. Large volumes of food will cool more quickly if they are divided into several shallow containers for refrigeration.

- Wash produce. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables in running tap water to remove visible dirt and grime. Remove and discard the outermost leaves of a head of lettuce or cabbage. Because bacteria can grow well on the cut surface of a fruit or vegetable, be careful not to contaminate these foods while slicing them up on the cutting board, and avoid leaving cut produce at room temperature for many hours.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food. Avoid preparing food for others if you have a diarrheal illness.
- Report suspected food-borne illnesses to your local veterinary or health clinic.

c. During the holiday season, many home kitchens work overtime. Family and friends gather, schedules get even more hectic, and many hands want to help. It is no wonder that food-safety practices are likely to fall by the wayside. No one wants to spoil a holiday celebration with food-borne illness. Here are some tips to help you make sure your holiday-dinner guests enjoy a delicious, satisfying, and safe holiday meal:

- Check your refrigerator temperature. Use a thermometer to ensure your refrigerator holds foods safely between 37 °F and 40 °F. Warmer temperatures allow harmful bacteria to thrive and foods to spoil. If you will be cooking for a crowd and are short on refrigerator space, fill a cooler or two with ice for extra items.
- Thaw frozen meat and poultry safely in your refrigerator or under cold water in the sink. If you are really pressed for time, microwave thawing is the fastest, but make sure you finish cooking immediately after thawing. Defrosting any perishable food on the counter is dangerous, because bacteria can thrive in the outer portions of the food before the inside thaws.
- Wash hands with warm, soapy water before and after handling food, as well as after using the toilet, diapering children, blowing your nose, and playing with pets.
- Prevent cross-contamination. Keep raw meat and poultry and their drippings separate from other foods. Wash counters, cutting boards, and knives before, during, and after food preparation. Use paper towels to wipe up meat and poultry drippings. Dishrags and sponges can soak up and spread bacteria throughout your kitchen.
- Roast your holiday turkey in an oven set no lower than 325 °F. Avoid shortcut-cooking methods that call for cooking the bird overnight.
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure safety and quality. Your turkey is cooked to perfection when the thermometer inserted into the inner thigh—but not touching the bone—reads 180°F, the breast reads 170°F, and turkey juices run clear. Cooking dressing in a separate casserole dish is safest, but if you prefer to stuff your holiday bird, fill the cavity loosely and make sure the center of the stuffing reaches 165°F.
- Keep cold foods cold—below 40 °F—and hot foods hot—above 140°F. Use hotplates, chafing dishes, and crockpots to keep hot holiday-buffet foods at a safe temperature. Serve small quantities of perishable foods, such as meat, cheese, and dips, and refill as needed, or keep cold foods chilled by nesting dishes in bowls of ice.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within 2 hours after serving. Remove the turkey from the carcass and refrigerate in small, shallow, covered containers that protect quality and allow for rapid cooling.

- Consume leftovers within a few days. Use your freezer for longer storage. Reheat leftovers to 165°F or until hot and steaming. Bring leftover gravy to a rolling boil before serving.
 - Clean up with a sanitizing solution of 1 teaspoon bleach added to 1 quart of water. Spray on washed countertops, kitchen tables, and refrigerator-door handles—the single dirtiest spot in a busy kitchen.
- d. One-stop information on holiday food safety is available at <http://www.foodsafety.gov>.

5. Suicide

a. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the Army during peacetime. It is imperative for leaders at all levels to take a proactive stand on this issue to prevent suicide and respond to those who may be at risk. You are the first line of defense for the people you work with and interact with on a daily basis, because you will be the first to detect the warning signs and changes. Bell Sends #4 discusses the losses to USAREUR due to suicidal incidents. Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 28 sets the requirements for suicide prevention.

b. It is a long-held belief that suicide rates increase during the holidays. Actually, the opposite is true. There is a noticeable decrease in the suicide rate during November and December. Every year, the media warns us of the potential for an increased suicide rate at Christmas. A full 66 percent of the articles printed about suicide rates around the holidays erroneously state that the suicide rates will go up during the holidays. These include well-meaning Army community newspapers. What they fail to stress is that the greatest danger we face in dealing with suicidal behavior during the holiday period occurs immediately after the holidays. There are reports of a sharp increase in suicide attempts in the United States several days after the New Year's Day holiday. The actual peaks in suicide rates occur in the spring and summer months. In fact, the highest single month for suicide rates in United States is April. However, this is no reason to let down our guard during and immediately after the holidays. Even one suicide during the holidays or any other time is one too many.

c. The suicide warning signs include verbal warnings (talk of suicide or stating a wish to be dead), behavioral warnings (isolation, moodiness, arranging affairs (for example, paying off debts, giving away possessions)), and symptoms of depression. Specific information is available in DA Pamphlet 600-70. The early months of the new year are a particularly bad time for suicides. Concern, observation, and early intervention are the main weapons we have in the fight against this foe.

d. Commanders at all levels must be sensitive and responsive to the needs of soldiers, civilian employees, and their families, and familiar with the community agencies and individuals available for suicide-prevention activities. Immediate resources for suicide-prevention activities include members of unit ministry teams, behavioral health professionals, local health professionals, and social work services. Know the telephone numbers in your local community or command for emergency counseling assistance.

e. Ensure that your unit suicide-prevention training is current. Check with your chaplain or unit ministry team to repeat training during Sergeants Time Training if your last training was in the spring. In addition to annual training, advanced training is available for hand-picked individuals in a unit. The Army has adopted Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). It is a new approach to enhance our suicide-prevention efforts. ASIST is the most widely used, acclaimed, and researched suicide-intervention skills training available today. ASIST involves 2 days (16 hours) of intense training—no exceptions—during which select individuals become additional eyes and ears for the command. ASIST provides high-quality recognition and enhanced intervention skills. Certified ASIST trainers are available in every ASG to provide advanced suicide training.

f. Suicide prevention should be a primary topic during noncommissioned officer professional development. Army in Europe Command Policy Letter 28 endorses suicide-prevention training as an element of Sergeants Time Training and considers suicide prevention a direct contributor to the health of a unit and its readiness.

g. First-line leaders should ensure each and every soldier and DOD civilian receives the wallet-size Suicide Prevention Card (AE Poster 600-63-5).

h. Soldiers potentially at risk of suicide must be promptly referred to the appropriate servicing mental health agency. Commanders are reminded of the requirements of DODD 6490.1 and DODD 6490.4. Consult with a mental-health provider to ensure compliance. Commanders must ensure that any soldier referred to mental-health agencies makes all scheduled appointments.

6. Domestic Violence

a. Holiday stressors, children home for the holidays, and financial obligations can result in additional stress. Add to this soldiers returning for rest and recuperation leave or redeployment, and a situation can easily reach the boiling point. Life has not stopped while soldiers were off serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom or operations in the Balkans. Couples often find that face-to-face communication may be difficult after a separation. Children grow up during separations; they may seem different in some ways. Spouses sometimes become more independent and may need more space. Families may be faced with changing outlooks regarding priorities in the household. Any combination of these factors of “reentering” a changed family can result in additional stress and potentially violent confrontations. Your local chaplain is one of the best sources of counseling when the pressure builds.

b. Domestic violence encompasses a wide range of activities. These include patterns of behavior resulting in emotional and psychological abuse, economic control, and interference with personal liberty. They also include the use, attempted use, or threatened use of force against a person of the opposite sex.

c. Child abuse and neglect include physical injury, sexual maltreatment, emotional maltreatment, deprivation of necessities, withholding of medically indicated treatment, or combinations of these inflicted on a child by an individual responsible for the child's welfare.

d. The Army Family Advocacy Program has a requirement based on AR 608-18 to provide educational information, resources, and services to assist all individuals who may be victims of violence, an offender in an abusive relationship, or a person affected by violence. Programs and services include but are not limited to advocacy services, safety planning, domestic-violence-awareness programs, and child-abuse-prevention programs. The program also has a requirement to provide education to childcare providers on the prevention and identification of child abuse. Multiple pamphlets and additional information are available at http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_advocacy/user/res/res_user_display.asp.

7. POC: Wellness, USAREUR G1, DSN 370-7585

SEASONAL EVENTS AND FIRE PREVENTION

1. Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat thousands of people for injuries related to holiday lights, holiday decorations, and Christmas trees. Christmas trees are involved in many fires resulting in death, injury, as well as property loss and damage each holiday season. Decorating our homes and offices for the holidays is a beautiful tradition. To ensure that this holiday season is a safe and happy one, apply the following safety tips.

a. Trees. Trees are one of the most popular traditions of the season—and one of the most dangerous. Whether you choose a living or an artificial tree, safety should be your top consideration.

(1) When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label “Fire Resistant.” Although this label does not mean the tree will not catch fire, it does indicate that the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

(2) When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches, and needles do not break when bent between your fingers. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin and, when bounced on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.

(3) When setting up a tree, place it away from heat sources such as fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms rapidly dry out living trees, be sure to keep the treestand filled with water. Place the tree away from where people normally walk, and do not block doorways.

(4) Dispose of the tree properly. Never burn it in the fireplace. Instead, recycle or discard your tree according to local regulations.

b. Lights.

(1) Indoors or out, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory. Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and discard damaged sets. If you string lights together using built-in connectors, do not join more than 200 midget lights or 50 large lights. Use no more than three standard-size sets or strings of lights for each single extension cord.

(2) Keep cords out of high-traffic areas where people can trip over them. Do not run a cord under a rug or carpet, since wires can overheat and surrounding material can catch fire. Keep cords and plugs away from the water under the tree. Keep lights away from carpeting, furniture, and drapes.

(3) Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted. Do not insert new bulbs or change fuses when lightsets are plugged in. Position the bulbs so they are not in

direct contact with needles or ornaments. Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples or hooks to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks.

(4) Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

(5) Do not overload electrical circuits. For added protection against electric shock, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground-fault-circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased.

c. Decorations. Decorations can add to the enjoyment and beauty of the holidays—and to the hazards. Consider how safe your decorations are, and remove items that could cause potential risks to your family, especially small children and pets. Consider these precautions as you decorate a tree or place items around your home or office:

(1) Use only noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.

(2) Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens or flammable decorations. Always use nonflammable holders and place candles where they will not be knocked down or objects such as curtains blown over them. Keep matches, lighters, and candles away from children.

(3) Take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable in homes with small children. Keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.

d. Fire Safety.

(1) Residential fires sparked by candles are twice as likely to occur in December as any other month in the year. These holiday-associated fires are coming at a time when home-candle fires are at an all-time high. Candles show no signs of losing their appeal. Their soft light, rich fragrances and cozy glow make candles trendier than ever this holiday season. Their colors and scents enhance everyday life and evoke memories of special events. However, candles can also become a factor in a chain of events that can result in unnecessary injury and even death.

(a) Candle fires account for 2.4 percent of all fires and result in 6 percent of total injuries from fires and 3 percent of all fatalities from fires. About 10 percent of candle fires are caused by children playing with candles. These figures are increasing as use of candles increases. Candles, however, still rank far behind cigarettes, matches, and lighters as the primary causes of residential fires.

(b) Candle-safety precautions for the holidays are as follows:

- Never leave burning candles unattended. Place candles well away from curtains, bedding, and other flammable materials.
- Keep candles away from table decorations, trees, and other greenery.
- Do not place lighted candles in windows.
- Do not use candles to decorate a tree.
- Extinguish tapers when they are less than 2 inches tall.
- Trim candle wicks to ¼ inch.
- Extinguish all candles before going to sleep or leaving the room where candles are lit.

(2) Smoking and the careless use of smoking materials are the major cause of home fires and related deaths and injuries. Children playing with matches or lighters start around three out of every four fires. Almost half of home fires start in the bedroom. Holidays increase the potential for fire. Holiday decorations, candles, and cooking are the primary causes for the increase. Based on the number of families residing in Army family housing and our annual fire experience, more attention is required to provide our soldiers and their families with the information and emphasis for fire safety during the holidays. Plan ahead and establish an evacuation plan for your building or home in case of fire. Practice your evacuation plan. Keep the emergency number by the telephone. In the event of a fire during the holidays—

- Quickly get everyone out of the building or house. Notify your neighbors.
- Call the fire department immediately before attempting to fight the fire yourself. Be sure everyone in your unit and family knows how to call the fire department.

(3) Army family housing has hard-wired smoke detectors installed, but occupants must test these devices. If you have battery-operated smoke detectors, be sure you test them to ensure they work this holiday season.

(4) Equip your home with a fire extinguisher. Remember to use the correct type of fire extinguisher for the correct type of fire. Know how to maintain and use it. Before you attempt to fight a fire that is rapidly growing or smoky, you should call the fire department and get everyone else out of the building or house. Suggestions for proper use of a fire extinguisher include the following:

- Keep the extinguisher in good working order. Check the pressure at least once a month. Store it in an accessible area at a height that makes it easy to reach. Be sure you know how to use it.
- Use the “PASS” method: Pull, Aim, Squeeze, and Sweep:
 - P** - Pull the pin or break the paper seal.
 - A** - Stand the recommended distance from the fire (read the label on the extinguisher) and aim the extinguisher at the base of the flames.
 - S** - Squeeze the handle or press the button while holding the extinguisher upright.
 - S** - Sweep the extinguisher from side to side, covering the area of the fire with the extinguishing agent.

- Only use a fire extinguisher when it is safe to do so. If the fire is too big or if it is spreading or threatening to block your path of escape, leave the area immediately. If necessary, do not hesitate to use the extinguisher to clear an escape path to exit.

(5) Never leave cooking unattended. Keep combustibles away from burners. Establish a “kid free” zone 3 feet around your stove. Turn pot handles inward, toward the back of the stove, so pots cannot be knocked off or pulled down by small children. Keep your stovetop and oven clean.

e. Toy Safety. Toys are meant to provide joy and entertainment, but they are linked to all too many injuries. Children ages 4 and under are at especially high risk. The majority of toys are safe but can become dangerous if misused or wind up in the hands of children who are too young for them. Appropriate selection and proper use of toys, combined with parental supervision, can greatly reduce the incidence and severity of such injuries.

(1) Because of their natural desire to put everything into their mouths and the small size of their upper airways, children under age 3 are at greater risk than older children from choking on toys. However, older children are as likely to choke on latex balloons as children under age 3.

(2) The Federal Hazardous Substances Act bans any toy or children’s article that consists of or contains any hazardous substance, including hazardous levels of lead, or that presents an electrical, mechanical, or thermal hazard.

(3) The Child Safety Protection Act requires choking-hazard warning labels on packaging for small balls, balloons, marbles, and certain toys and games having small parts that are intended for use by children ages 3 to 6. This act also bans any toy intended for use by children under age 3 that may pose a choking, aspiration, or ingestion hazard.

(4) The Labeling of Hazardous Art Materials Act mandates the labeling of hazardous art materials as inappropriate for use by children.

(5) The toy industry has established voluntary toy-safety standards under the Standard Consumer Safety Specification on Toy Safety (ASTM F963) to minimize the risk of injury from toys during normal intended use and reasonable foreseeable abuse.

(6) Toy guns must conform to marking requirements under the U.S. Department of Commerce “Marking of Toy Look-Alike and Imitation Firearms” regulation to distinguish them from real guns.

(7) When selecting toys, consider the child’s age, interests, and skill level; look for high-quality design and construction; and follow age and safety recommendations on labels.

(8) Always supervise children at play. Play is even more valuable when adults become involved and interact with children during play rather than supervising from a distance.

(9) Teach children to put toys away safely after playing. Ensure that toys intended for younger children are stored separately from those for older children.

(10) Inspect old and new toys regularly for damage and potential hazards. Make any necessary repairs immediately or discard damaged toys.

(11) Check the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website (<http://www.cpsc.gov>) regularly to obtain information on recent toy recalls.

f. Poisonous Plants. A large percentage of calls that are received by a poison-control center are related to people having eaten plants. The majority of these involve children under 6 years old. Most of these calls do not report any adverse effects from the plant, but there are always a few who have symptoms or even require a visit to a medical facility. Two of the most frequently reported plant exposures involve the poinsettia and holly plants.

(1) General. Teach children never to put any part of a plant (bark, stems, leaves, berries) into their mouths. Keep toxic plants out of reach of young children. For any questions or concerns, call your local medical facility poison-control center.

(2) Holly (Toxic). Exposure to holly most often occurs in young children during the winter holiday season. Holly is often used as a decoration during this time of the year. Eating a small number of holly berries may result only in mild to moderate gastritis (nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea) and possibly drowsiness. Some of these symptoms may last up to 20 hours after the holly is eaten. There is no antidote for exposure to holly. The specific toxin that causes the above symptoms has not been determined. Treatment is often unnecessary for a small exposure. Serious problems are seen after a large number of berries are eaten. In severe cases, treatment at a medical facility may be necessary. The leaves of the holly are thorny and may cause irritation in the mouth and throat.

(3) Mistletoe (Toxic). Mistletoe is a parasitic plant on trees that is seen most often around Christmas as a decoration. It has also been used as an herbal remedy and for tea. All parts of the mistletoe plant are poisonous, especially the berries. Eating the berries can cause abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions, mental confusion, hallucinations, rapid heartbeat, and high blood pressure among other heart problems. Eating a small amount of berries will probably cause only mild gastritis (nausea and vomiting). It is believed that ingestion of less than three berries or two leaves will not cause significant problems. Medical attention should immediately be sought, however, if more are eaten.

(4) Poinsettia (Non-Toxic). Poinsettias are commonly seen around Christmas. This plant has wrongly received a bad reputation for being poisonous. Most cases of eating the plant will cause little if any symptoms. The most common symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Treatment is often not required as long as the vomiting does not continue for a long time. Contact dermatitis or skin irritation has also been reported. These occur in 5 to 20 percent of reported skin exposures. There is no antidote. This is believed to be because of the white milky sap. This sap is very irritating and can be toxic in large amounts. The sap is very bitter, so

small children will often spit out the leaves or stop sucking on the stems after a short time. Exposed areas of the skin or eyes should be washed with a lot of water for about 15 minutes. If the irritation or pain continues, a physician may need to examine the area. No other special treatment is required when the plant is eaten or the skin is exposed to it.

2. POC: USAREUR Safety Division, DSN 370-8084.