



# CHIEF's Sight Picture

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## **Motorcycle Safety: Each Rider A Mentor**

How many times have you heard a story like this one: A couple of friends at a party had been drinking and one suggested they take his new motorcycle to get more alcohol. They hop on the bike, no helmets, and the operator decides to show how fast the bike can go. He's been signed up for training, but he hasn't completed the course yet. Before long they're traveling at 120 mph in a 60 mph zone. The operator loses control and they crash. The passenger is killed, and the operator spends 30 days in the hospital.

Or one like this: A new motorcycle owner decides to get the biggest, baddest Harley he can get. He doesn't wear a helmet because he doesn't think it's "cool." He had preliminary motorcycle training and a learner's permit. He decides he can pass a car on the right around a curve. He loses control and launches 100 feet into the air. He dies on impact. These actual incidents are only two examples of many similar stories that pass across my desk, and illustrate why we need to change the way we think about and approach motorcycle safety.

Motorcycles can be a great form of transportation and entertainment, but they must be respected. Lately, our Air Force members have been involved in a high number of motorcycle accidents, many of which were fatal. In FY03, we lost 24 Airmen to motorcycle accidents, most of which involved unsafe operation of single vehicles and operators who practiced poor risk management or operated beyond their abilities, and lost their lives in the process.

Every member of our Air Force is critical for mission success. On the job, we exercise good operational risk management in performing difficult and dangerous tasks. We take care to train new operators in the safest practice of our profession. We provide oversight and guidance for inexperienced Airmen and young officers as they advance from apprentice to journeyman and craftsman. We pass on the benefits of our experience and correct mistakes to help our Airmen succeed. We should also do so during our off-duty activities. Our concern for our people should not end with the workday, and our safety consciousness should not end there either. Learning about a favorite activity can be enjoyable in itself. The proper training, safety instruction, and skill level make any activity more enjoyable.

Just as we ask experienced operators to mentor and train our less experienced ones, I am asking experienced motorcyclists to mentor new riders and help them develop their skills and knowledge about riding. For that reason, I have asked the Air Force Chief of Safety, with the assistance of the Vice Chief of Staff and the Air Force Operational Safety Council, to explore, develop, and field a motorcycle mentoring concept that could foster the education and skills development of our motorcycle riders. This Air Force-wide network of motorcycle clubs could

foster relationships between riders who have been riding in an area for years and those new to the area or new to riding. They can also create a supportive environment of responsible motorcycle riding and enjoyment while serving as a force multiplier for commanders' mishap prevention programs.

My vision is for a mentoring program that will provide motorcycle operators the opportunity to work together to maximize their skills, reduce their chances for mishaps, and have fun in the process. The formula is simple: fundamental knowledge in the form of street strategies and well-honed skills coupled with the most critical element -- a responsible riding mindset.

I am also asking commanders to look out for their motorcycle riders. Make sure that the troops under your command who ride are trained to do so. A commander's responsibility for safety does not end with the duty day. Actively seek out those who have bikes or are interested in taking up motorcycle riding. Make sure they take the safety courses offered on our bases, even if they have no intention of riding on base, and encourage them to join these clubs. I ask commanders to encourage all their people to live life off-duty with the same regard for safety we practice on duty.

To those who ride motorcycles, I respect your right to choose a motorcycle as a form of transportation and/or recreation. But, I ask you to operate them safely, practice good risk management, and operate within your abilities. Above all, make sure you are wearing the proper safety equipment. Also, look out for those who aren't ready for more advanced challenges and prevent them from engaging in dangerous behavior. I'm a new rider myself, and I will be taking an approved motorcycle training course to make sure I am qualified to ride before I take my bike on the road. I'm looking forward to riding, but only when I have the skills necessary to ensure I won't be a danger on the road. And I won't go anywhere without my helmet.

Only through your efforts will we reduce the mishap rate throughout our Air Force. We will provide the tools necessary -- it is every rider's responsibility to put them to use.



  
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