

Remarks by the
Honorable BJ Penn
Secretary of the Navy (Acting)
National Capitol Region
Joint Motorcycle Safety Event
Pentagon
Arlington, VA
Friday, 1 May 2009

Thank you and welcome.

Today, I'd like to emphasize that motorcycle safety is a top priority for the Department of the Navy, and I strongly support today's 3rd Annual Joint Safety Event.

This event represents the continuing concern amongst the services for the lives of our men and women in uniform, as we have seen the number of people attending this event increase each year.

That so many of you are here today reflects well upon Mr. Davis, the Army, and the entire team of safety professionals who are working so hard to implement our motorcycle safety policies.

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When average Americans think about the dangers that go into waging war, they think of threats in lands far, far away.

But when a year goes by when we lose more Sailors and Marines on motorcycles than in support of a War, we are, in many ways, referring to a battle being fought at home - in our own backyard.

This challenge is equally worthy of our attention.

Since last year, the Services have stepped up their efforts to reverse that disturbing trend.

The statistics are showing that your efforts are working, which is an encouraging step in the right direction.

But you don't work such long hours and make so many sacrifices to improve "the statistics."

Indeed, these policies are about people, and like most of you, motorcycle safety is a deeply personal issue for me.

Several years ago, a motorcycle accident took the life of Richard Dawson. Richard was not just a member of the Navy family; he was also one of my best friends.

We shared so many memories, and there was no man in the world more dedicated to his country. He was equally dedicated to his beautiful wife, son and daughter.

A Purple Heart recipient, Richard survived extreme combat conditions in Vietnam - but could not survive an extreme motorcycle collision in Virginia.

Too many of our heroes share his tragic fate. I am sure many of you have your own stories to tell.

The best way to honor Richard and those he represents is to make motorcycle safety a top priority.

That's why your efforts are so relevant, timely, and important.

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I look forward to the day when motorcycle safety is so instilled in our culture and our military that we don't have to grieve another young man or woman lost.

In that sense, the only statistic that matters is zero. Zero new stories about our friends like Richard Dawson - zero lives lost.

Let's make that our goal.

In the meantime, I applaud your hard work in this Joint Service Motorcycle Safety effort. May we continue to build upon the improved safety of our service members.

After all, you never know whose life you will save.

Thank you.