

Marine Corps Safety

How safety applies to the reserve force

by Mr. Larry Simon

At Marine Forces Reserve Safety, we strive to ensure the Marines, sailors, and civilians across the force understand how the concepts of safety and risk management are applied occupationally as well as operationally. We strive to ensure our reserve force demands a culture of continuous improvement and the pursuit of the highest standards. We need to consciously focus more on operational excellence and less on safety because safety is what naturally happens when we are performing to high standards.

The Marines, sailors, and civilians of Marine Corps Forces Reserve (MARFORRES) must maintain the highest levels of risk management to successfully augment and reinforce active forces for employment across the full spectrum of crisis and global engagement. As such, our ideas of what safety is and how it is applied must always evolve to remain *relevant, ready, and responsive*. To do this, we manage the many different elements of the Marine Corps Safety Management System (MCSMS) independently.

Safety and occupational health is the element of the MCSMS concerned with the safety, health, and welfare of our Marines, assigned sailors, and civilian personnel in the workplace. The Marine Corps Reserve makes up roughly one-third of the entire Marine Corps, serving in 48 states and Puerto Rico. Elements of safety and occupational health include aviation, occupational safety, traffic (government and private motor vehicles), explosives, systems safety, recreational, off-duty, and radiation safety (ionizing, laser, and radiofrequency). The MARFORRES Safety guidance provides employees a safe and healthful workplace and serves as the enforcement function, as the Occupational Safety

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and Health Administration dictates what must be accomplished in the workplace, but in some cases, this is not necessarily how it will be accomplished or by whom. The focus is on maintaining a safe and healthful garrison, operational and training environment, which will meet the requirements of the reserve force's mission essential tasks. Ensuring we keep the reserve Component a functional, capable, and ready war fighter, whether in peacetime training and exercises or involved with an active campaign/major military operations.

Expeditionary/operational safety includes support across all MARFORRES operations and training related to

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arms and ammunition, contingency preparation, and personnel readiness. The MARFORRES Safety provides qualified safety professionals to the reserve force's major subordinate commands for operational training, pre-deployment, and deployment phases. We ensure the availability of safety expertise and guidance to identify hazards, assess risks, and develop and implement control measures to mitigate hazards. Additionally, expeditionary/

operational safety includes oversight and expert guidance on the storage, handling, transportation, and employment of military munitions at our more than 150 geographically dispersed sites. As such, it is critical to aggressively pursue a robust safety program aimed at minimizing explosives-related risks at all levels.

Safety training, promotion, and outreach consists of a wide range of activities that shape organizational safety culture through multi-faceted communications and training in the reserve force. It is an essential piece of the MCSMS, which cannot succeed by mandate alone. Safety promotion increases awareness of MCSMS objectives and benefits among members of the reserve command. By utilizing resources such as the MARFORRES Safety Microsoft Teams page and the MARFORRES SharePoint page, Marines can get information regarding everything that could assist in helping units establish their SMS program. The MARFORRES Safety conducts a hybrid one-week online/one-week in-residence Ground Safety Marine Course to train safety professionals across the command. It is the only schoolhouse in the enterprise that does so. Training, promotion, and outreach is responsible for communicating lessons learned, audit and evaluation results, mishap and near-miss data, rationale behind the selection of controls, and preventative or corrective actions. This communication promotes transparency and a shared understanding of command priorities and goals.

Safety assurance is the evaluation, review, and monitoring that confirms the MCSMS is being effectively implemented and guides continuous improvement efforts. Within MARFORRES, safety assurance identifies system deficiencies and opportunities for improvement,

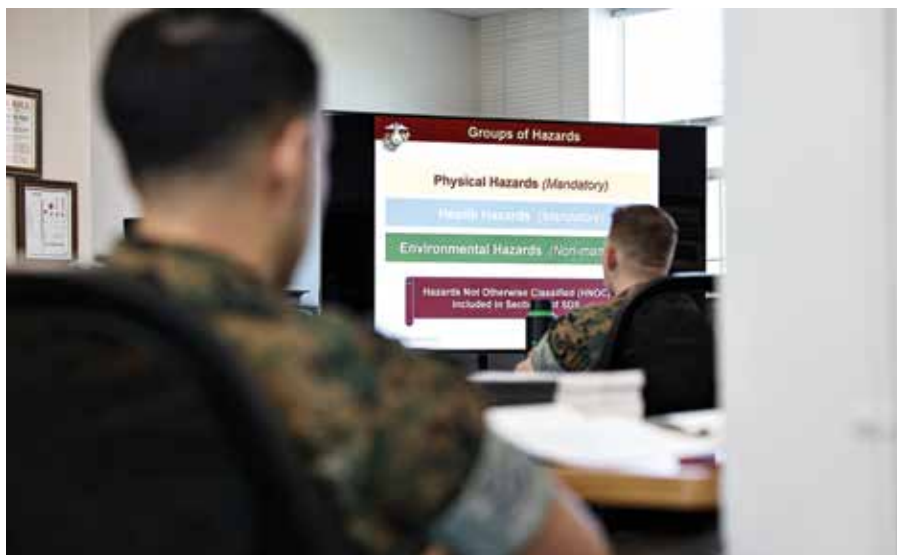
identifies new hazards, measures the effectiveness of and the conformity with risk controls, and ensures compliance with regulatory requirements. This is accomplished via our annual Safety Program Evaluation process. Safety assurance validates operations, processes, and systems through the collection and analysis of objective evidence and data evaluation, the review and monitoring of data tracking and analysis, and investigations. This assures compliance with MCSMS requirements across the reserve force. Safety assurance is accomplished using these elements: inspections, self-assessments, monitoring, safety climate surveys, and command and command culture workshops. Assurance programs will assist and ensure the reserve force maintains compliance and is continually improving with the goal of overall risk reduction.

Mishaps result in damaged or destroyed equipment, injuries and fatalities to sailors, Marines, and civilians, and degraded Navy and Marine Corps Reserves' warfighting potential and ability to augment the active force. When mishaps or near misses occur, we must investigate each thoroughly to identify the factors and causes; then devise sufficient controls to prevent any reoccurrence.

Additionally, we must continuously assess our operating environment and personnel to identify hazardous conditions and risks so that we can take proactive measures to reduce risk before mishaps occur. For the reserve component, this extends past the day-to-day on-site, but also to the risks and trends our reserve Marines and sailors are exposed to in their everyday lives outside of their drilling period.

Finally, we must carefully monitor the risk controls already implemented to validate their effectiveness, innovating and implementing adequate controls if those risks remain too high.

Safety within the reserve force is not so different from the active fleet. There are just a few command specifics we contend with, the primary being that our Marines receive a fraction of the regular training time as their active-duty counterparts and must balance the life of a Marine with their civilian careers.



Marines and sailors attend a class on hazard communication during the Ground Safety for Marines Course on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC. The Ground Safety for Marines Course is a course for Marines and sailors that provided occupational safety and health training to military and DOD civilian personnel assigned to duties regarding ground safety.
(Photo by LCpl Loriann Dauscher.)



Marines and civilians practice cardiopulmonary resuscitation and rescue breathes during a National Safety Council- First Aid, Adult, Child and Infant CPR & AED course, at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA. (Photo by LCpl Indiana Supensky.)

These distractions can sometimes lead to what we refer to as *compound risk*. Compound risk is the inherent risk that comes with most activities, combined with the fact that a Marine may have worked a double shift the day before drill, or had to drive four or five hours to get to the reserve training center, and shows up more fatigued than expected. Because of this, the safety culture and climate within the reserve force must strive to exceed all expectations. These

efforts were recognized and detailed during a 2023 study of the Ground Climate Assessment survey, in which MARFORRES "had higher (*more favorable*) averages as compared to the MEFs" regarding the overall Safety culture of its units.

At MARFORRES, safety is about maintaining compliance, reducing risk, and continually improving.

