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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS III CORPS AND FORT HOOD
FORT HOOD, TEXAS 76544-5056

AFZF-GA-SAFE

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION 18 APR 2002

SUBJECT: Home Fire Safety -- Fatality Memo 02-10

1. A few mornings ago, a mobile home fire surprised three soldiers who were sleeping at the time. Two soldiers escaped and were treated for smoke inhalation. The third soldier, a sergeant, perished in the fire. The sergeant only began receiving Bachelor Authorization for Housing (BAH) a month earlier to live off-post. The cause of the fire is not yet known. The last III Corps soldier to die in a house fire occurred a little over a year ago. In that case - also involving a mobile home - the sergeant who lived off-post used gasoline in a kerosene heater, causing it to malfunction and start a fire. The sergeant was trapped in the burning mobile home and died in the fire. A contributing factor was the absence of a functional smoke alarm. Add to these two cases several recent civilian fire deaths in our surrounding Central Texas communities, and the fire safety challenge becomes apparent.

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2. Let me share some sobering facts regarding dwelling fires. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people die each year in home fires. Half of all home fire deaths occur between 2200 and 0600 hours, although only 20% of all home fires occur in that period. This means that fires start and get bigger while people sleep, when they have little chance to escape. Smoking is the overall leading course of home fires; however, in the winter months, heaters cause their share of fire deaths. Young children and older adults are especially at risk in home fires. Less than one fifth of all home fire deaths were caused by fires where a smoke alarm was present and functional. Smoke alarms save lives! As with all safety subjects, soldiers need to be educated on fire prevention. I expect commanders and leaders to integrate fire prevention into unit programs such as health and welfare checks (on/off-post), safety stand-downs, and fall/winter/holiday seasonal programs. Emphasis should be on safe smoking habits, properly operating heating equipment, and other fire prevention techniques, to include smoke alarms.

FATALITY

3. To ensure our soldiers/families reside in safe and healthy quarters, commanders must re-evaluate their soldier quarters visitation programs as outlined in III Corps Command Policy, DPW-01-04. A member of the chain of command must physically locate and visit each set of on- and off-post quarters within 60 days of initial occupancy and at least every six months thereafter. Require that an inspection checklist/form be used to document the visit. Installation Engineers, Fire Departments, or Safety Offices can provide checklists. A housing condition checklist (FHT Form 210-X10-2) is available on the Phantom Clerk web site. House fire fatalities are a needless and tragic.

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B. B. BELL
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding

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