



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

NOV 22 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDANT OF THE COAST GUARD
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Safety First This Winter Holiday Season

The winter holidays are a festive time of year to celebrate and relax with family and friends. Unfortunately, the holidays can also present unique dangers. Tragically, between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day last year, the Department lost 25 Service members to off-duty accidents. Each Service member and civilian employee is vital to the Department's ability to carry out its mission. One loss is one too many. As we prepare to ring in the New Year, please remain vigilant of the risks posed by seasonal activities.

I ask each member of the Department to continue exercising sound judgment to keep yourself, your teammates, and your families safe during on- and off-duty activities. There is a concerning increase in motor vehicle fatalities. Pay close attention to weather conditions, wear your seat belt, obey the speed limit, and do not drive if impaired or fatigued. Be responsible and look out for your colleagues, friends, and family. Think through every plan and have a backup plan for contingencies.

While many of us look forward to the holiday season, others may struggle during this time of year. Continue to take notice and stay connected with your colleagues and loved ones. As you celebrate, check in on your teammates, let them know that you care, and remind them that resources and support are always available. Anyone in distress can always dial 988 to access the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for free and confidential support 24/7. Selecting Option 1 will connect to the Veterans Crisis Line/Military Crisis Line to provide help for Service members, veterans, and their loved ones. For our civilian employees, confidential help is available through your Employee Assistance Program.

I encourage all of you to enjoy the holidays while remembering that each of us plays a critical role in keeping our country secure and creating an enduring culture that prioritizes safety and care for one another. I offer my sincere gratitude to all our Service members, civilian employees, and contractors for the outstanding accomplishments we have achieved this past year. I wish all of you a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Lloyd J. Austin III", is located in the bottom right area of the page.



OSD009367-23/CMD012515-23