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April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

HQMC (MR) Quantico, VA – Installations across the Corps are taking part in Sexual Assault Awareness Month during April. This year's theme is "My Strength is for Defending."

It's the fifth consecutive year that April has been designated for the campaign by DoD and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. The week of 27 April to 1 May has been designed as "Marine Week" and there will be a host of activities such as a webinar, a congressional reception, display booths at the Pentagon and live interactive theatrical presentation at several installations.

"Installation Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Unit Victim Advocates are planning many events to expose the myths about, and to explain many of the realities of, sexual assault," said Ray Bruneau, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program (SAPR) Manager, Headquarters Marine Corps. "The Marine Corps does not tolerate sexual assault. Sexual assault, as with any other behavioral health issue, has effects that reach way beyond the immediate victim and the perpetrator. Sexual assault hurts mission effectiveness by causing division and distrust within our ranks."

In FY08, 254 victims came forward and asked for help. Bruneau said "we believe the combination of increased program awareness, the availability of a restricted reporting option, the issuance of guidance to commanders allowing delayed action on collateral

misconduct, and increased victim confidence in our response system are encouraging more victims to report these crimes and get the help they need.”

Because sexual assault is believed to be an under reported crime, all Marines need to remain vigilant and on the look out for warning signs.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

If you see these warning signs, it is your duty to step in and protect your fellow Marine. Be watchful if you notice a Marine:

- Behaving as if they are more intimate with their date or partner than they really are, pressures them to “go be alone,” or uses a lot of “we” phrases and appears to be working too hard to make their date or partner trust him/her.
- Giving their date or partner more personal detail than most would.
- Ignores, interrupts, or makes fun of their date.
- With a reputation for being a “player” spending a lot of money on their date and appears to be expecting something in return; or makes promises such as, “I’ll just come over for one drink, and then I’ll go.” They are trying to buy time or gain control over the situation.
- Doesn't appear to accept “No” for an answer. If they do not accept “No” for an answer on something small, such as having another drink, they may not accept “No” in regard to sex, either!
- Gets angry or sulks if they do not get what they want. This is another form of manipulation.

BE SMART – REDUCE YOUR RISK!

- Travel with a buddy, plan your outings and avoid risky situations.
- Introduce your date to your roommate and/or friends before going out and tell them when you anticipate returning. If it is a first date, drive your own transportation and meet during daylight hours.
- Stay sober. Never leave a drink unattended - if possible, pour your own.
- Never leave a gathering with someone you do not know or trust.
- Carry a cell phone or calling card, or know where a phone is located.
- Have enough cash to take a taxi, bus, or other public transportation if necessary.
- Be aware of what is happening around you. Trust your instincts - if a person or place feels unsafe, they probably are. If you sense trouble, go to a safe place immediately. If you feel you are in danger, attract help using any way possible.
- Communicate up front with your date or partner how you feel about a physical relationship. Remember “No” means NO. If you do not want to be intimate, tell him or her clearly. Speak confidently and forcefully. Match your body language to your words. Do not just go along for the wrong reasons.
- Watch out for Warning Signals or Red Flags from your date or partner.

Bruneau added, “As Marines we take care of our own! All Marines should intervene when they observe a fellow Marine participating in conduct that violates our core values. After all, wouldn’t you want to know another Marine’s got YOUR back?”

If you become a victim of sexual assault, or would like more information about Sexual Assault Awareness Month activities contact your unit Uniformed Victim Advocate or visit the HQMC SAPR website at www.usmc-mccs.org/sapro/ for more information.