



COPS
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

National Officer Safety and Wellness Group Report

September 22, 2011

I. Overview

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) understand the important nexuses between the safety, health, and wellness of law enforcement officers and the effective delivery of police services. The U.S. Department of Justice has established the National Officer Safety and Wellness (OSW) Group to bring together law enforcement thought leaders, criminal justice practitioners, and other colleagues to share their broad perspectives on improving officer safety and wellness. Participants in this group will contribute information, ideas, and recommendations that may help enhance officer safety and wellness products, tools, resources, and services available to the field. The group comprises representatives from law enforcement agencies and associations, federal agencies, and the research community who can impact public safety, and officer health and wellness.

OSW Group Mission

The OSW Group will contribute to the improvement of officer safety and wellness in the United States by convening a forum for thoughtful, proactive discussion and debate around relevant programs and policies within the law enforcement field. Information and insight gained and shared will help enhance programs, policies, and initiatives related to officer safety and wellness.

Goals

- To create an opportunity and environment for law enforcement organizations and researchers to collaborate on improving officer safety and wellness.
- To bring law enforcement organizations and researchers together quarterly to share knowledge and information about officer safety and wellness initiatives.
- To broadly disseminate information and best practices to the field through the government and law enforcement organizational communications mechanisms.

II. Background

The planning meeting for the OSW Group was held on July 20, 2011. During this meeting, 16 issues relevant to officer safety and wellness were identified to determine the priorities of future work. These 16 officer safety and wellness issues are reflected in the chart below, and they are also available at the COPS Office website Officer Safety and Wellness Group page (www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2603).

The first meeting of the OSW group was held on September 22, 2011, with more than 40 participants representing the COPS Office; BJA; other Department of Justice and federal agencies; federal, and local law enforcement; national associations; unions; and researchers. The group examined the problems and challenges of ensuring officer safety and wellness, prioritized future issues based on work from the planning meeting, and focused on deaths and injuries related to gunfire. Based on guidance from the Attorney General, the following three of the 16 issues will be the first priority of the OSW Group:

- Injuries and death due to gunfire
- Premeditated and unprovoked ambush situation,
- Rifle/long-gun threats/assault weapons

The next priorities of the OSW Group, in order, are:

- Education and Training
- Leadership and Safety Practices
- Emergency Vehicle Operation and Safety
- Physical Health Training (fatigue, alcohol, weight, and nutrition)
- Psychological Health

The final group of priorities will be addressed (in no particular order) by the OSW Group at some point in the future, and will include:

- Foot Pursuit
- Safety Task Force Operations (federal/local)
- Offenders (incident behavior and history)
- Court Security
- Deployment Strategies and Communication Technologies
- Equipment
- Former Military now in Law Enforcement
- Maintaining Good Health

III. September 22, 2011 OSW Meeting Summary

Understanding the Problem

At the September 22 meeting, National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) Chairman and CEO Craig Floyd noted that in the past 40 years there has been a decline in felonious deaths of officers and an increase in accidental deaths. In the 10 years from 2000–2009, an average of 59,051 officers were assaulted each year, with 16,144 injured and 164 deaths. Historically, the homicide rates have mirrored the officer fatality rate—in 2010 that trend changed as the homicide rate declined by 7.2 percent and officer deaths increased by 25 percent. And, as of September 20, 2011, officer fatalities have increased by 16 percent and those due to gunfire by 26 percent.

Law Enforcement Officer Fatalities

	2010 9/20/10	2011 9/20/2011	% Change	2009	2010	% Change
Total Fatalities	117	136	+16%	122	152	+25%
Gunfire	42	53	+26%	49	59	+20%
Traffic Incidents	58	50	-14%	52	70	+35%
Other Causes	17	33	+94%	21	23	+9%

Source: Officer Down Memorial Page—website www.odmp.org

Mora Fiedler from the COPS Office tracked officer shooting fatality incidents from January 1, 2011 through August 31, 2011. Ambush and warrant service situations account for a substantial number of the officer fatalities in 2011. Eighty percent of the incidents were ambushes resulting in 82 percent of the fatalities. Further, 20 percent of the fatalities involved the serving of warrants. (See charts below.)

Types and Number of Incidents by Number of Fatalities

Incident Type	Total	# of Incidents	# of Fatalities by Incident Types
Ambush		37	41
Foot pursuit		2	2
Friendly fire		2	2
Struggle		2	2
Exchange of gun fire		1	1
Attempting to take into custody		1	1
Stand off		1	1
TOTAL		46	50

Source: Mora Fiedler – COPS Office

Officer Fatalities Serving Warrants by Agency or Task Force

Serving Warrants	# of Incidents	Total # of Fatalities by Incident Types
Federal Deputy Marshals	1	1
Fugitive Task Force	1	1
Local Law Enforcement Officers	1	1
Regional Task Force	1	2
Joint Task Force - U.S. Marshals and Local Law Enforcement	4	5
TOTAL	8	10

Source: Mora Fiedler – COPS Office

Summary of Presentations

As part of the information sharing and exchange goal, the OSW group was given updates on five active projects.

William Haskell, Center for Disease Control, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, discussed their National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA). NORA is a partnership program to stimulate innovative research and improved workplace practices. The program has 10 sector councils, which draft goals, performance measures, and implementation plans for the nation. The Public Safety sector has established 16 research goals. Two of the ongoing research projects focus on law enforcement: Cops & Cars: Reducing LEO Deaths in Motor Vehicle Crashes, and Analysis of the Cardiovascular Effects of Stress in Police.

International Association of Chiefs of Police: Safe Shield, Adrienne Quigley, and National Center for the Prevention of Violence Against the Police, Erin Vermilye. — The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Division of State Associations of Chiefs of Police (SACOP) created the Safe Shield initiative in 2002. Safe Shield's organizing philosophy is that law enforcement leaders cannot accept the proposition that accidents or injuries are a reality of the law enforcement profession. A 12-month national study was conducted in 18 agencies from 5 states, involving 10,000 officers overall. Injuries were reported in real time. Information collected included the type of injury, when it was sustained, the environmental conditions, the location, the age of the officer, the experience of the officer, and the equipment involved. The preliminary data have been collected and the findings should be available at the 2012 IACP conference.

In partnership with BJA, the IACP established the **National Center for the Prevention of Violence Against the Police**. The mission of the center is to prevent felonious assaults against police officers through the collection and analysis of data and dissemination of findings and recommendations to the field.

Task Force Shootings, David Harlow, United States Marshals Service — In March 2011 the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) Director Stacia A. Hylton created a team of

senior USMS law enforcement officials to conduct a formal Fugitive Apprehension Risk Mitigation Assessment. As of August 31, 2011 the USMS has had four incidents with five officer fatalities—all of them were ambush situations. The USMS is looking at a fatigue assessment risk tool and examining existing policies, procedures, and equipment to determine if there are any gaps.

Deadly Force Decision Making, David Klinger, Ph.D., University of Missouri–St. Louis — Dr. Klinger described his ongoing research into situations in which officers have discharged their firearms. To date, he has conducted in-depth interviews of 144 officers involved in 161 incidents. His research will continue until he has interviewed about 200 officers. He is seeking to better understand the decisions that officers make during these encounters. Dr. Klinger hopes to be able to improve training and decision making through the knowledge gained from his research.

Focus on Gun Deaths and Injuries

The OSW Group began its work on this priority by identifying and discussing strategies and ideas that may have an impact on reducing officer deaths and injuries involving firearms. They included:

- **Ensuring that officers have the equipment** needed to operate safely (e.g., gun lights, ballistic shields, vests, rescue vehicles, thermal imaging).
- **Investigating gunfire deaths and injuries** through an independent body similar to the processes the fire service uses or those of the National Transportation Safety Board.
- **Increasing research** on all aspects of officer safety and wellness.
- **Improving understanding of mental health laws.** Better information needs to be provided to officers responding to calls to enhance their ability to recognize and assist the mentally ill as well as recognize the signs of stress or mental health issues in themselves and their colleagues.
- **Enhancing education and training** was a focus of all the groups; in particular, threat assessment, more situational firearms training, mental preparedness, and use of technology.
- **Creating a clearinghouse** for data and information on officer deaths and injuries; develop relationships with the medical community for research.
- **Clarifying vest policies.** Some OSW members called for mandatory vest policies while others believe the decision should rest with the officer on the street. Some departments are looking into external vest carriers as an option.
- **Creating a culture of safety** in policing—one in which safety is a way of doing business and officers reinforce sound safety practices with peers.
- **Ensuring that support services** are available for officers and their families.

Next Steps

The next meeting of the OSW Group will be held on January 26, 2012 with a focus on issues associated with gunfire deaths and injuries. The suggestions above will be explored in greater depth to gain further insight and develop information that can be shared with the field to support and encourage action aimed at reducing officer deaths and injuries.