

SafeShield Summary

Making Officer Safety a Priority

In 2002, the IACP's Division of State Associations of Chiefs of Police (SACOP) created an initiative dedicated to protecting our nation's law enforcement officers. The SafeShield committee was designed to focus on officer safety. There has been a long standing belief that in the line of duty deaths are unacceptable and law enforcement professionals have done everything they can to help reduce them. However it is the conviction of this committee that this philosophy should also extend to officer injuries. Law enforcement leaders can not accept the proposition that accidents or injuries are a reality of the law enforcement profession. The only acceptable belief is ***zero officers killed or injured.***

In 2003, the SACOP SafeShield committee commissioned a survey to gather information about what types of on-duty injuries officers sustain as well as the severity and frequency of these injuries. During a one year period, 698 agencies reported 2,800 officer injuries, causing more than 24,000 lost workdays. The survey results made clear that the law enforcement community not only has a personal incentive to protect its officers but also a financial incentive to identify the causes of on-duty injuries and institute changes to eliminate them.

SafeShield Goals:

- Track how officers are getting hurt and identify those that cause the greatest number of injuries or deaths
- Address each area of vulnerability by determining where existing solutions can be adapted for officer safety and where other solutions are lacking
- Work to develop specifications for equipment solutions and identify training and policy remedies as applicable
- Provide best practices, updates, recommendations, product warnings and guidelines for keeping officers safe
- Support a culture of zero tolerance for injuries

In order for this program to be successful, there has to be a cultural shift towards the opinion that injuries are preventable. Safety must become a priority and agencies must become familiar with the importance of supervising for safety. It is the belief of SafeShield that although we have limited control over dangerous situations an officer may face in the line of duty, we can help control the outcomes through comprehensive planning, training, and equipment.

Eight Principles for a Safe Work Environment

Responsible Management: Management, which includes all levels from the chief to the first-line supervisor, is responsible for preventing injuries and illnesses. Safety and health are line management responsibilities; they cannot be delegated. Only when senior management exerts sustained leadership in establishing safety goals, demanding accountability for safety and health performance, and providing necessary resources,

can a safety and health program be effective in a law enforcement environment. An agency's leaders must visibly demonstrate their commitment to the safety and well-being of their officers.

Proper safety and health management necessitates involvement. The lead must come by example rather than rhetoric alone. The command staff of a law enforcement agency sets the safety and health standards for the entire agency staff. Law enforcement executives are responsible for the safety of their officers, and supervisors must accept responsibility for the safety and health of the employees under their direction.

As a result of this principle, concern for safety should be considered a major yardstick of performance. The ability to carry out safety and health responsibilities must be a primary measure of an individual's leadership and prospects for promotion.

Control of Operating Exposures: All operating exposures that may result in injuries or preventable illnesses can be controlled, no matter what the exposure is, and effective safeguards can be provided. It is preferable, of course, to eliminate the sources of danger; but where this is not reasonable or practical, supervision must specify measures such as special training, safety devices, and protective clothing. If injury is predictable, it is preventable

Safety as a Condition of Employment: Conscientious assumption of safety and health responsibility is required by all employees from their first day on the job. This means that all employees must be convinced that they have a responsibility to work safely. Employees will respect the safety and health program and accept safety as a condition of employment when they understand that management has adopted a zero tolerance policy on officer injuries.

Training Employees to Work Safely: All employees must be trained to work safely. Without effective training programs to teach, motivate, and sustain safety knowledge, injuries cannot be eliminated. Training can only be effective when officers both understand and accept it.

An effective training program requires that procedures and safety rules be established for all job functions. Each major activity must be covered by a procedure and safety performance standards, and the training for those activities must stress officer safety.

Supervision for Safety: Management must monitor performance in the workplace to assess safety and health program success. Safety assessments must be performed continuously and must be considered in all decision making. Comprehensive assessments and inspections not only confirm the effectiveness of the facilities and programs in achieving desired performance but also detect specific problems and help to identify weaknesses in law enforcement safety and health efforts. All supervisors should conduct safety audits and frequent safety inspections depending on the operations performed in their area of responsibility. They should review specific operations with their employees to verify that safety procedures are understood and have not become outdated.

Prompt Correction of Deficiencies: Without prompt action to rectify deficiencies, the risk of injuries will increase and the credibility of the safety program will suffer. Correction may take the form of facility modification, equipment replacement, procedure changes, training, or constructive discipline. Discipline must be exercised when needed, and disciplinary actions must be consistent and predictable if they are to be effective. Follow-up audits must be made to verify the effectiveness of prescribed remedies.

The Most Important Element—People: The one essential ingredient in the recipe for a safe workplace is its people. Intelligent, trained, and motivated employees are an agency's greatest resource. Success in safety depends on officers following procedures, participating actively in training, and identifying and alerting management to potential hazards. When management demonstrates a real concern for each employee, a mutual respect is established, and the foundation is laid for a solid safety program.

Safety While off Duty: An off-the-job injury or preventable illness is no less difficult than one suffered on the job. In addition to the personal suffering employees and their families feel, off-the-job injuries and illnesses can seriously affect a police department's operations in the following ways:

- Staffing
- Additional workloads placed on supervision
- Limited productivity of injured employees upon their return to work
- Increase in payments for health insurance

Consequently, departments should be engaged in a continuing off-the-job safety program. This program should receive the full attention and interest of every member of the management team. It is an integral part of the safety effort.

VESTS SAVE LIVES

Recognizing that police officers are often the target of violence, SafeShield strongly recommends that agencies stress the importance of utilizing all levels of protection afforded to them to include soft body armor. Despite the fact most officers understand the benefits of wearing soft body armor, many still choose not to. Officers often complain about the comfort, fit, and breathability of the vest, especially in the warmer months. Research has shown that since 1980, approximately 1200 officers have been killed in the line of duty. More than thirty percent could have been saved by body armor. The save percentage is even higher when evaluating felonious assaults involving firearms. It is estimated that the risk of dying from gunfire is fourteen times higher for an officer not wearing a ballistic vest than one that is.[1] To date, over 3,000 individuals working in law enforcement have survived both ballistic and non-ballistic incidents because they were wearing body armor. Many realize that soft body armor has proven to be extremely effective against firearms, but it has also helped protect officers from other potentially fatal situations to include blunt force trauma, fire incidents, and explosions.

Realizing that ballistic vests are imperative to officer safety and the harsh reality that a number of officers across the country who are issued them do not wear them,

SafeShield has implemented the **VESTS SAVE LIVES** campaign. The goal of the campaign is to heighten the awareness of the positive impacts of wearing soft body armor by reminding officers of the dangers they face every day. Officers need to realize that the benefits of wearing their armor far outweigh and supposed negatives. Using a mass media campaign, posters and articles will be distributed to agencies across the country to remind officers of the benefits of wearing soft body armor. The IACP is requesting that law enforcement executives support and participate in the **VESTS SAVE LIVES** program by publicizing the significance of wearing ballistic vests and to encourage their officers to protect themselves so that they can protect others.

RAYMOND "BUCKY" MASS AWARD FOR OFFICER SAFETY

Recognizing the importance of safety in protecting officers from unnecessary injury, the SafeShield committee has created the prestigious Raymond "Bucky" Mass Award for Officer Safety. This award will annually recognize an individual law enforcement officer or agency that has made significant, outstanding, and effective contributions in the field of officer safety. Each year, law enforcement officers and agencies will be able to compete for the Raymond "Bucky" Mass Award by addressing identified officer safety issues in their department and implementing programs to take a proactive step toward protecting the officers, demonstrating their commitment to *zero officers killed or injured*.

Nominees will be evaluated based upon:

- The development of a creative and innovative approach that promotes quality and excellence in the field of officer safety
- The significance of the contribution and its impact on the agency and the officers

The Raymond "Bucky" Mass Award is open to all law enforcement agencies and full time, paid law enforcement officers of state, county, metropolitan, municipal, or tribal agencies. Everyone has an equal chance of winning regardless of the size of the agency or the scope of the project. Selection is made based on the quality of the work provided and the positive impact it has on the department and individual officers. The quality, innovation and effectiveness of the nominee's service as well as their overall dedication to officer safety will be evaluated. Although funding is still being sought, the committee hopes to present the first award at the 2009 IACP Annual Conference.

This award honors the late Raymond "Bucky" Mass who dedicated his life to serving others. Chief Mass served as an Executive Board member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, an Advisory Board Member of the IACP's State Associations of Chiefs of Police Division, past president of the F.B.I National Academy Association's New Jersey Chapter and New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, and served 40 years as a Governing Board member of the New Jersey State Law Enforcement Planning Agency. He was instrumental in the development of the IACP's State Associations of Chiefs of Police and spent his years mentoring newer members on the vision of division and what it took to serve. Chief Mass is remembered for his dedication to law enforcement.

Database

In 2004, the State Associations of Chiefs of Police identified the creation of a national database to track officer injuries as a priority. The ultimate goal is to be able to use the database to define, analyze and prevent the causes of police injuries. Without such a vital source of information, it is almost impossible to accurately target those causes that result in the most significant and greatest number of injuries or deaths. SafeShield is actively seeking the most effective means of gathering this information and creating an informative database that can be utilized to direct the efforts of the committee.

While working toward this goal, a preliminary database has been constructed using existing information to give a rough cross-section of injuries from across the country. Data has been solicited from individual law enforcement agencies as well as risk management companies from nationwide sources to try and get a fundamental understanding of how officers are getting hurt. A total of 1550 usable entries have been collected and thus far the preliminary findings have identified motor vehicle accidents, foot pursuits, and slips/falls as major contributors to officer injuries.

Training:

Utilizing the information obtained from the preliminary database and research conducted regarding officer injuries, SafeShield has been scheduled to present a workshop at this year's IACP annual conference in San Diego, California. "Protecting Our Officers: A Dynamic Look at Officer Safety" identifies some of the significant causes of law enforcement injuries and addresses potential solutions to those deficiencies.

In addition to the IACP Annual Conference Workshop, SafeShield has created a number of individual training modules to be presented at various conferences throughout the country depending on the time allocated to present as well as what is important to a particular region/state. A number of the presentations can also be formatted for quick "Roll Call" style training as well. The topics all focus on identified officer safety issues and are reviewed annually. The current list is as follows:

- Supervising for Safety
- Foot Pursuits – Training and Policy Issues
- Driving Behavior – Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Protective Eyewear and Standardization
- Ballistic Vests – Fit, Coverage, Care and Maintenance
- Taking A.I.M (Awareness Image Mindset)
- Physical Fitness and Wellness Programs
- Officer Fatigue: Sleep Deprivation, Shift Work, Overtime
- Recognizing Armed Individuals
- Safe and Legal Traffic Stops: Vehicle Placement, Approach, and Patrol Car Lighting and Reflective Enhancements.

If you would like further information on the training modules or to schedule a training program, please contact Adrienne Quigley at quigley@theiacp.org.

The SafeShield website is currently under renovation to reflect the many new programs being implemented by the committee. The new web page will include an "officer safety" section that will provide best practices, updates, recommendations, product warnings and guidelines for keeping officers safe. The web site will be updated continuously and should be utilized as a resource to notify agencies and officers across the country about identified officer safety issues.

http://iacp.org/div_sec_com/div/SACOPSafeShield.htm

Current Studies:

Safeshield is currently following two important studies into the performance of soft body armor. The first study is being conducted by Dr. Cynthia Bir regarding Behind Armor Blunt Trauma (Back Face Trauma Injuries resulting from vest saves.) The current research pool includes subjects from the Survivors club cases. The study involves officer interviews as well as a review of medical findings and police reports. An update on the study is expected in November of 2008.

Another study being conducted in the field of soft body armor relates to ballistic vest failures due to coverage issues. This two year study being conducted by Dr. Marianne Wilhelm and Mississippi State University seeks to analyze the types of injuries sustained by officers wearing body armor as compared to injuries sustained by those not wearing armor or in areas where there was no armor coverage. The focus of the study is to develop risk assessment specific to areas of the body where armor coverage should be increased.

Publications :

Members of the SafeShield committee have already published 5 articles this year in *Police Chief* Magazine on various topics to include physical fitness and wellness, the eight safety principles for a safe working environment, and ballistic vests and backface injuries. The committee seeks to continue publishing an article each month regarding officer safety issues. Scheduled topics include: New York State's officer safety initiatives, issues and developments with soft body armor, low light operations, less lethal weapons and changing threats.

SafeShield firmly believes that the prevention of all injuries and illnesses is a realistic goal and not just a theoretical objective. Other professions do not accept on-duty injury as a normal part of the job. The first step on the road to increasing officer safety is an attitudinal and cultural shift to **zero tolerance** for officer injury. Zero tolerance involves building a culture in which obstacles to officer safety are identified and eliminated. Law enforcement leadership must set the tone to create an environment in which officer injury is considered preventable.

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Notes:

[1] House Report 107-193-James Guelff and Chris McCurley Body Armor Act of 2001