Safety Shorts
General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

December is time to gather with family and friends.

NIRMA staff would like to thank you for a great 2023 and wish you

a safe and happy New Year!

If you have topics that you would like covered in the Safety Short articles, please send us an email and tell us what you would like to see.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Risks and Rewards of Law Enforcement Agency Social Media Programs

Social media has become an integral tool for law enforcement agencies to enhance communication, community engagement, and public safety. The value of law enforcement agency social media accounts extends beyond mere information dissemination; when used properly they may serve as a bridge connecting members of the public and agencies, fostering transparency, and contributing to safer and more informed communities. Potential benefits to consider include:

Enhanced Community Engagement:
One of the primary benefits is the ability to engage with the community in real-time. Social media platforms provide a direct line of communication, allowing agencies to share important updates, safety tips, and event information. This engagement builds trust, fosters positive relationships, and empowers community members with knowledge, ultimately contributing to crime prevention.

Transparency and Information Dissemination:
Law enforcement agencies can leverage social media to disseminate timely and accurate information during emergencies, crises, or investigations. This transparent communication helps dispel rumors, provides situational awareness, and allows agencies to demonstrate their commitment to public safety.

Public Relations and Humanizing the Force:
Social media offers a platform to humanize the people behind the badge. Agencies can share behind-the-scenes glimpses of daily operations, introduce deputies to the community, and highlight positive interactions. This approach creates a more relatable image of law enforcement, breaking down barriers and strengthening community ties.

Emergency Communication and Public Alerts:
In critical situations, social media serves as a rapid and effective channel for emergency communication. Agencies can provide real-time updates, evacuation instructions, and safety tips to ensure the public's well-being. Social media platforms also facilitate the dissemination of AMBER alerts and other public safety warnings.

Crime Prevention and Public Education:
Law enforcement agencies can use social media to educate the public on crime prevention strategies, cybersecurity, and other safety-related topics. By sharing relevant information, agencies empower individuals to take an active role in their own safety and the security of their communities.

Recruiting
Social media can serve as a cost-effective recruiting tool and is becoming one of the primary ways agencies advertise employment opportunities. It provides an opportunity to showcase the agency from a career perspective, reach a broad, far-reaching audience, and share important information regarding qualifications, pay, and benefits.

Best Practices and First Amendment Considerations

Establishing an agency social media program takes work and involves risks. Before proceeding, the agency must be committed to managing the program in a professional and legally compliant manner. The following are some suggested best practices for establishing and maintaining agency social media accounts:

1. Define Clear Objectives:
    a. Clearly outline the agency's goals and objectives for social media, whether it's community engagement, public education, recruiting, or emergency communication.
2. Develop a Comprehensive Policy:
    a. Establish a robust social media policy that addresses content guidelines, moderation procedures, employee use, and privacy considerations.
    b. A model policy for agency social media pages from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) can be viewed/downloaded [here](#).
    c. Additional social media resources from the IACP can be found [here](#).
3. Engaging with the Community:
    a. Consider whether the account will be set to allow public comments/posts or configured as information only.
    b. If public comments are allowed on an agency's social media page, they are generally protected under the First Amendment (see important legal considerations below).
4. Provide Accurate Information:
    a. Ensure that all information shared on social media is accurate, timely, and aligns with the agency's commitment to transparency.
    b. When posting incident details or briefings, keep comments factual, respectful, and relevant.
5. Humanize the Force While Maintaining Professionalism:
    a. Share positive stories, deputy profiles, and community events to humanize the law enforcement image and build trust.

    b. Be cautious in how humor might be perceived. Clean humor can be a great way to humanize the agency, but it is also important to remember that what is funny to some may not be perceived the same way by others. Avoid humor that could be deemed offensive or that comes at the expense of someone's privacy or dignity.
6. Use Multimedia:
    a. Incorporate multimedia content such as videos and images to make posts more engaging and shareable.
    b. Remember that copyright laws apply when posting images, videos, or other creative content on social media. Best practices to avoid potential copyright violations include obtaining permission from the content owner, linking to the original source of the content, using royalty-free content, or creating your own content.
7. Emergency Preparedness:
    a. Develop and regularly update an emergency communication plan, ensuring rapid and effective response during crises.

Retired New Jersey State Police Captain/Director of Communications Stephen Jones teaches an excellent course on law enforcement media relations at the FBI National Academy. Much of his course material is based on experience he gained while developing and overseeing the [New Jersey State Police (NJSP) Facebook page](#) which serves as a great example for other agencies to follow when developing their own social media program.

First Amendment Considerations for Moderating the Account (such as deleting or hiding public comments):

1. Content-Neutral Moderation:
    a. An important step in moderating public comments is to include a community guidelines or terms of use statement on the agency's social media page. Including such statements establishes ground rules for public comment while honoring First Amendment rights. An excellent example of an agency Facebook Community Guidelines Statement from the New Jersey State Police Facebook page can be found [here](#).
    b. Content moderation should be based on content violations based on your posted terms of use rather than the viewpoint expressed. Avoid suppressing dissenting opinions.
2. Transparency in Moderation:
    a. Clearly communicate terms of use and reasons for content removal or user blocking. Transparency builds trust with the audience.
3. Respect First Amendment Rights:
    a. Recognize and respect individuals' First Amendment rights to express opinions, even if critical of law enforcement.
4. Balanced Moderation:
    a. Exercise discretion in content moderation, ensuring a balanced approach that upholds terms of use without stifling free expression.
5. Regular Policy Review:
    a. Periodically review and update the social media policy to align with legal developments, community expectations, and emerging trends.

Conclusion:

Law enforcement agency social media accounts may hold significant value in building community trust, enhancing transparency, recruiting, and contributing to public safety. By adhering to best practices, complying with all laws, and respecting First Amendment considerations, agencies can effectively leverage social media to strengthen their relationship with the communities they serve.

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

The Money for Minutes Deadline is Approaching

Looking at the calendar I see it is time for the annual Money for Minutes deadline friendly reminder. Safety committee chairpersons and secretaries have until 5:00 p.m. Central, January 31st, 2024, to submit last calendar year's safety committee minutes if you wish to be considered for the 2023 Money for Minutes drawing. Another reminder, this year NIRMA increased the number of $500 awards from five (5) to ten (10)! Those member counties and agencies that meet the Money for Minutes eligibility requirements will have double the chance they did last year to receive an award.

The Money for Minutes eligibility requirements remain the same:
- Conduct at least four quarterly safety committee meetings and keep minutes.
- Discuss all incidents, events, injuries, and accidents that occurred during the last quarter and make recommendations about how to prevent reoccurrence of similar events.
- Submit the safety committee minutes, to include the recommendations, to NIRMA for review. Email them to chad@nirma.info.

If your county or agency meets the requirements outlined above, your committee will be entered into a drawing for one of the ten $500 awards. These awards are intended to be used for loss prevention and safety related purposes. The winners will be announced in February of 2024.

Good luck to those counties and agencies that committed to holding quarterly safety committee meetings and work hard to protect their employees and prevent workplace incidents and injuries.
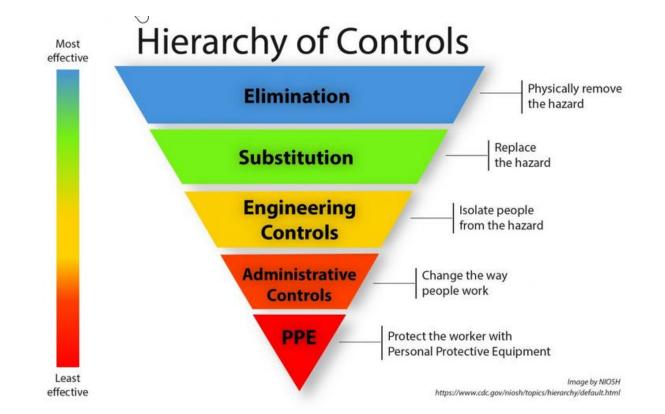
Safety Committee Responsibilities and Duties

Beginning this month, and for the next four months, I'm going to discuss the different responsibilities and duties of a safety committee as outlined in NIRMA's new *Safety Committee Resource Handbook.* Hardcopies of the *Safety Committee Resource Handbook* were distributed to attendees during a breakout session at the Self Defense for County Officials conference in October. Don't worry, if you were unable to attend and pick up your county or agency's copies, I would be happy to deliver them. I plan to distribute the remaining copies during my travels this winter and spring. If you would like to arrange a time to meet and go over the information in the new manual, please get in touch and we can set something up.

In the meantime, let's talk about the responsibilities and duties of your safety committee. In my opinion the first and most important duty of a safety committee is that of **Incident Review**. The safety committee should review every incident, event or injury that did or could result in a claim. This involves near-misses. A near-miss is an incident in which an accident or injury was narrowly avoided, a situation that really could have turned out bad, but didn't. Incidents should be reported to supervisors, the initial investigation of the incident is the responsibility of the involved employee's supervisor. The investigation results

should then be provided to the safety committee for review. A quarterly incident report is available to the safety committee chair on Origami Risk, NIRMA's risk management information system or RMIS. To obtain access to Origami Risk, safety chairpersons should ask their contact person to reach out to Tod Thieman, NIRMA's Senior Systems Engineer, and request a login and password. Once they have obtained the login and password, they will be able to download the quarterly incident report to ensure they review all incidents that occurred during the previous quarter.

After reviewing the investigation reports the safety committee is tasked with making recommendations intended to reduce the chance of reoccurrence. The recommendations should be made to the department head and other management staff as deemed appropriate. When considering recommendations, it helps to refer to the Hierarchy of Controls, they are arranged from most to least effective. Please see the NIOSH diagram below:

My last thought on **Incident Review**, do your best to avoid simply labeling an event "preventable" or "not preventable." We're going to operate under the assumption that all the events are preventable and brainstorm to see what we can change, within the Hierarchy of Controls, to reduce the chance that it ever happens again. When we label an event as "not preventable" we have all but given up. As always, I can be reached at chad@nirma.info and 800.642.6671 if you have any questions.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Are Your Signs Larger Than They Appear?

County road departments must install and maintain signs according to the latest edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). I understand with the 864 pages in the MUTCD someone could get lost in all the guidance that the manual provides. As I travel the state, I've noticed some, to put it nicely—*creative*—sign mountings used by both state and county governments here in Nebraska.

One of the practices I commonly see on the county road system is the mounting of two signs on one signpost. Typically, traffic signs should be installed on separate posts, but it is allowed to post more than one sign on a single post in some instances. One of those instances is when the signs supplement each other. For example, an advisory speed plaque on a horizontal alignment sign. Typical horizontal alignment signs are turn and curve signs.

I'm encouraged to see that most seem to understand which advisory speed plaque should be used with a curve or turn sign. This is great news, as generally it has little to do with the geometric shape of the road, and everything to do with the safe speed at which we can navigate the road. This safe speed is found by completing a curve speed study.

Now when it comes to the installation of the necessary warning signs, either curve or turn with an advisory speed plaque, that's where I am seeing problems. The typical size of a county road sign is 30"x30" and advisory speed plaques are 18"x18." The minimum height of the warning sign is 5 feet from the edge of the traveled way according to the MUTCD. NIRMA recommends taking this measurement from the crown of the road. When an advisory speed plaque is added, it needs to be installed at the height of 4 feet from the crown of the road. The reason for this recommendation is to allow for potential shifting of the road edge through routine maintenance and natural conditions.

When the advisory speed plaque is added, it is important to note that the signs should NOT be overlapping over one other. When the advisory speed plaque is mounted to the signpost at the correct height, 4 feet, that is going to move the bottom of the curve or turn sign up to 5 ½ feet to accommodate the 18" sign below it. Keep in mind, these are MINIMUM heights. We can move the signs up, but not down below the minimum.

The MUTCD speaks directly to sign shape and specific height installations for each sign. It also has very detailed specifications for the size of signs and applications related to speed and traffic volume of roads. These are all mandatory legal requirements for sign installations.

When a warning sign and advisory speed plaque overlap, it arguably alters the size and shape of the signs. This might give a Plaintiff's attorney a chance to assert that the signs no longer comply with the size and shape requirements in the MUTCD. When the advisory speed plaque overlaps the warning sign, it also reduces the exposed surface area of the warning sign and may make one or the other less likely to be noticed or heeded by drivers. Please refer to the picture below for a visual example of one such overlap:

If you find that your county has signs mounted in an overlapping manner, or that any of your signs do not meet the minimum heights, please get them corrected as soon as possible. The intention of the sign auditing process is to limit your exposure to any claims that might arise out of incorrect or inadequate signing. As always, if you have any questions regarding road signing practices, I can be reached at kcpawling@nirma.info or 402-310-4417.