



# Safety Shorts

## General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

March 2024

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## March is Save Your Vision Month

Did you know that “Save Your Vision” month is **held every March to increase awareness regarding good eye care**? The American Optometric Association (AOA) organizes this annual wellness observance where the main goal is to encourage individuals to get regular eye exams.

A record number of people of all ages are spending many of the hours each day looking at a computer, tablet or phone. Try this helpful trick! Limit your digital eye strain by adopting the 20/20/20 rule developed by the American Optometric Association. Take a break from your screen every 20 minutes, focusing on something at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

For more information, check out this eye health initiative (to spread awareness) at <https://oregoneyeconsultants.com/10-healthy-eye-tips-for-save-your-vision-awareness-month/>

### **GENERAL SAFETY**

**By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager**

#### **Safety Committee Responsibilities and Duties – Final Installment**

This month’s article is my fourth and final installment in my safety committee responsibilities and duties series.

**Policy Review** and **Program Review**, while listed separately in the Safety Committee Resource Handbook, are similar enough that we can discuss them in the same article.

**Policy Review** is recommended annually. It is also recommended that policy review be completed prior to year-end so that a report summarizing the past year can be provided to management in January. The policy review should be conducted by safety committee members with management or representatives of management from each office or department and should cover their office or department’s safety and health policies. Specifically, the team should be addressing what, if any, policy revisions in these areas are necessary. Safety and health policies are always evolving and need to be reviewed regularly. During a best safety practices audit, it is common for a member to answer affirmatively that it has adopted a safety manual, but also acknowledge that the existing manual needs updating. Taking the time to make regular revisions provides policies that are consistently up to date and serve the employees and county or agency as intended. The longer a member goes between policy reviews the greater chance that the policies are out of date. This can lead to liability, safety and security issues. Cyber security policies are an excellent example. Cyber threats are ever

changing, and we must ensure that our policies protect us from current threats, not threats from years past.

**Program Review** is also recommended annually. The safety committee should conduct this internal review or audit to evaluate its effectiveness and the relationship between the committee and the various offices and departments in the county or agency. This evaluation is to determine whether the committee is meeting its goals and fulfilling its responsibilities and duties. NIRMA's Safety Committee Resource Handbook contains a Safety Committee Audit Checklist intended to aid a safety committee in completing an annual program review. Once the review is completed, recommended changes or suggestions should be brought before the County Board or governing body to be considered for implementation.

Conducting regular policy and program reviews keeps your county or agency up to date with the latest regulations, technology and best practices. Up to date policies and programs are consistent and effective at helping to protect your county or agency, your employees, and the people that you serve. As always, I can be reached at [chad@nirma.info](mailto:chad@nirma.info) or 1.800.642.6671 with questions.

# **HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT**

**By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist**

## **No Matter Which Way You're Headed, Go Safely.**

I think most of us have heard the saying "we shouldn't live life by looking in the rearview mirror." I do not disagree with this saying, but there are times when we should pay closer attention to the rearview mirror than we do.

After reviewing the last five weeks of liability claim reports that the NIRMA Loss Prevention Department receives, I found four different claims resulting from backing accidents. I know that backing accidents are a common claim seen in these reports, and I can also recall having an incident or two myself while backing.

The first of those incidents that I can recall involved backing a motor grader into a shop door that did not open completely. The door not opening completely was a common occurrence, but it did not happen every time we opened the door. This time the door did not open completely, and I failed to check that I had adequate clearance. This resulted in me backing the machine into the door.

The second incident I can recall was when I was in high school. I had gotten up at 3:30 in the morning to go to work and load market hogs for a 4 a.m. load. I came out of the house, climbed into my car, and backed up as I did every time I left home. But this time I rather abruptly found that someone had parked in my normal backing path. So, as you can see, I have not always been as situationally aware as I should have been.

According to the National Safety Council, backing a vehicle accounts for about 1% of all drive-time. And backing accidents are to blame for 25% of all collisions, causing 500 deaths and 15,000 injuries per year. Keep in mind, these are on-road vehicles, cars, and trucks. This doesn't include construction vehicles like loaders and motor graders out on off-road job sites.

The following are some safe backing tips that every driver or operator should consider before hopping into the operator's seat:

- **Learn to use both outside vehicle mirrors.** I am very often surprised how many people cannot use the mirrors on the sides of their vehicles to safely back their vehicle. This is applicable to all types of vehicles from passenger cars to commercial trucks to construction equipment.
- **Keep your mirrors adjusted correctly.** There is a correct way to adjust your mirrors to reduce or eliminate the blind spots alongside your vehicle. Todd Duncan discussed this and included a visual guide in a [past Safety Shorts article](#).
- **Know your vehicles' blind spots.** Every vehicle is different with varying sizes of blind spots. Get to know where they are located and how big they are.
- **Don't become backup camera reliant.** It is easy to become accustomed to backing while only relying on your vehicle's backup camera but make a conscious effort to be aware of all your surroundings while backing. Keep in mind technology can fail.
- **Do a walk around.** Before crawling into the operator's seat, do a complete walk around of your vehicle if possible. Note any objects that are around your vehicle or vehicles that have arrived after you parked.
- **Keep your windows, mirrors, and backup cameras clean.**

- **Get Out and Look.** G.O.A.L. is printed on a sticker that is affixed to many commercial truck drivers' side mirrors. It is a reminder for drivers to get out and look at their surroundings before backing.
- **Avoid backing blindside.** For those that don't know, the blind side of a vehicle is the opposite side of the vehicle that an operator sits. It would also be known as the passenger side of the vehicle. Truck drivers refer to it as the "blindside" because it is harder to see that entire side of the vehicle while backing. If you back from the driver's side, you can always stick your head out of the window if needed.
- **Use a spotter.** For the more difficult backings, use a spotter to assist you to see all obstacles that might be in your path.
- **Use a pull through parking space.** When choosing a parking space in any large parking lot, use a pull-through space if it is available. This will eliminate the risk of backing into someone else, especially those parked on the opposite side of the traffic aisle.
- **Turn your head.** There are times I need to practice this one. I sometimes think I am skilled enough with the use of mirrors that I do not need to simply turn my head, but I should.

If we all would practice the suggestions above, I believe we could substantially reduce the number of collision claims caused from backing. This not only applies while we are at work, but we can put these into practice to reduce our personal insurance claims also. I don't want to make this sound like it is just about property loss, the bigger goal is keeping everyone safe, healthy, and alive.

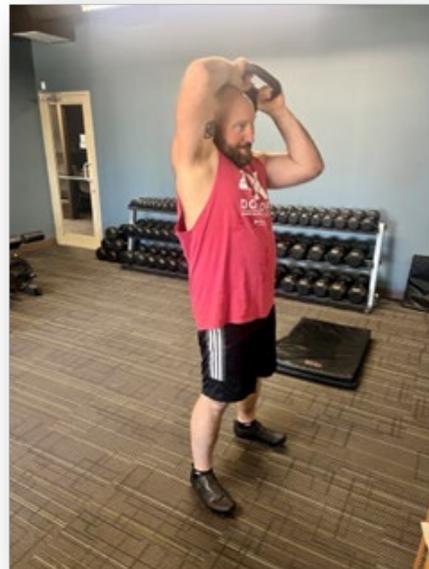
If you have any questions, training requests, or any guidance we can provide, do not hesitate to contact me or anyone here at NIRMA. I can be reached at [kcpawling@nirma.info](mailto:kcpawling@nirma.info), (cell) 402-310-4417, or (office) 402-742-9236.

# **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS**

**By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist**

## **Officer Wellness**

In conjunction with First Responder Wellness Week in March, this Safety Short will focus on officer wellness. Heart disease remains the leading cause of death for adults<sup>1</sup>. Major contributing factors to this include obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Unfortunately, law enforcement officers have one of the poorest cardiovascular disease (CVD) health profiles of any occupation<sup>2</sup>. Equally alarming is that law enforcement officers have a 54% increase in suicide risk when compared to the civilian population<sup>3</sup>. So, what's the good news? We don't have to accept these grim statistics. We have the power to make positive changes and protect our physical and mental health from the hazards of our chosen profession.



## **Your Survival Depends on Your Physical and Mental Health**

Law enforcement is one of the most stressful careers in society. Officers are routinely exposed to shift work, violence, trauma, and sudden changes from being sedentary to all out physical exertion (fights, chasing fleeing suspects on foot, pushing stalled cars off the road, etc.). Additionally, research has shown that violent offenders often "size up" officers' physical stature and tactical readiness when deciding whether to launch a deadly attack. Prevailing under these conditions requires mental and physical stamina. If you are going to survive this career over the long run, prioritizing physical and mental health is essential.

## **Muscle: Use It or Lose It**

We begin losing muscle (sarcopenia) and strength in our 40s. Left unchecked, this loss in muscle and strength can have a major impact on the quality and quantity of our lives. While some of this is due to the natural process of aging, much of it is simply due to inactivity as we get older. The good news is that studies have shown it is possible to stave off this physical decline and gain muscle and strength into our 60s and 70s with proper exercise<sup>4</sup>. Key takeaway: It's never too late to start an exercise program, and you can gain muscle and strength at nearly any age.

<sup>1</sup> Hartley TA, Burchfiel CM, Fekedulegn D, Andrew ME, Violanti JM. Health disparities in police officers: comparisons to the U.S. general population. *Int J Emerg Ment Health*. 2011;13(4):211-20. PMID: 22900455; PMCID: PMC4734372.

<sup>2</sup> Franke WD, Ramey SL, Shelley MC 2nd. Relationship between cardiovascular disease morbidity, risk factors, and stress in a law enforcement cohort. *J Occup Environ Med*. 2002 Dec;44(12):1182-9. doi: 10.1097/00043764-200212000-00014. PMID: 12500462.

<sup>3</sup> Violanti, John M.; Steege, Andrea. *Policing: An International Journal*, 25 Jan 2021, Vol. ahead-of-print, Issue ahead-of-print, pages 18 – 31.

## **It Just Feels Good**

Although the first week or so of a new exercise routine can bring some muscle soreness, your body adapts, and in the end, you will notice significant improvements in your energy levels and overall feeling of wellbeing. There are few things that feel better mentally and physically than the sense of accomplishment and flood of dopamine that follows a hard workout.

## **If Not for Yourself, Do It for Your Friends and Family**

As law enforcement officers, we are protectors by nature. Our friends and family are at the top of the list of those we want to protect. The last thing we want is to subject our loved ones to the grief and loss that comes with an untimely death from a preventable illness or accident. Think of prioritizing your mental and physical health as an investment in your family's future. If you are like most people, you want to be able to play with your grandkids and pursue your favorite hobbies well into retirement, whether it's hunting, fishing, motorcycle riding, cycling, traveling, etc.

## **We Owe It to the Citizens We Serve**

As law enforcement officers, there are times when the lives of others depend on our ability to perform difficult physical tasks under stressful conditions. We are held to a higher standard morally, ethically, and physically. The citizens we serve expect us to bring order to chaos, stay calm in the face of danger, and perform physically demanding tasks to protect the public. To fulfill our duty to protect and serve the community, we need to maintain a reasonable degree of physical and mental fitness.

## **Practical Steps**

Starting a new exercise and/or eating program can feel overwhelming at first. But what's important is taking that first step. Once you gain traction in one area, it becomes easier to make positive changes in other areas. The following are examples of the things you can start doing today to improve your overall health and wellbeing. And remember, perfection is the enemy of progress when it comes to exercise and nutrition, so keep it simple. If you miss a workout or decide to enjoy a piece of cake at a wedding, it's not the end of the world. Just pick up where you left off. What matters most is consistency over the long run.

*Disclaimer: Consult with your physician before embarking on a new exercise program.*

### **• Strength training**

- When it comes to things you can do to improve both the quality and quantity of your life, regular vigorous exercise ranks at or near the top.



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<sup>4</sup> Cannataro R, Cione E, Bonilla DA, Cerullo G, Angelini F, D'Antona G. Strength training in elderly: An useful tool against sarcopenia. *Front Sports Act Living*. 2022 Jul 18;4:950949. doi: 10.3389/fspor.2022.950949. PMID: 35924210; PMCID: PMC9339797.

- Focus on movement patterns, e.g. push, pull, squat, hip hinge, instead of body parts.
- Current evidence supports strength training two to four times a week for 30 to 60 minutes.
- There are many ways to design an effective strength training program. An excellent book with sample workout routines is [The New Rules of Lifting: Six Basic Moves for Maximum Muscle by Alwyn Cosgrove](#).

## • Cardiovascular training

- Cardiovascular exercise is essential to health and longevity. Depending on how you set up your workouts, you can get some cardiovascular benefit during your strength training sessions (i.e. circuit training). However, it is highly recommended you do some dedicated cardio throughout the week in addition to strength training.
- The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week. For more information on this, Google "Zone 2 cardio" and "high intensity interval training."

## • Sleep

- The research is clear; sleep is essential to both physical and mental health, improving productivity and overall quality of life. For more on this, see [Dr. Matt Walker's YouTube video, Sleep Is Your Superpower](#).
- Prioritize sleep, aiming for 7-9 hours a night (or day for those who work nights).
- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule; try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day as much as possible.
- Avoid caffeine after lunch or within eight hours of bedtime.
- Alcohol is a depressant, but it can disrupt the sleep cycle and decrease sleep quality. Long-term alcohol use can result in chronic sleep problems and disorders like sleep apnea<sup>5</sup>. If you choose to drink alcohol, try to avoid it close to bedtime.
- Create an environment that enhances sleep, e.g. dark, cool (~65 degrees), and quiet.

## • Nutrition

- Total daily calories matter. Consuming more calories than you expend will result in weight gain, regardless of whether you follow a keto, carnivore, or plant-based diet. Regardless of the diet, consistently maintaining a slight calorie deficit is the key to weight loss.
- Avoid processed foods and beware of misleading labels like "all natural" or "low fat" as neither necessarily means the product is good for you. An occasional cheat meal or snack is not the end of the world; it's our daily habits and consistency over the long run that matter most.
- Stick to whole and single ingredient foods as much as possible. The shorter the ingredients list on the packaging, the better. For instance, a box of old-fashioned oatmeal has one ingredient, oats. An apple has one ingredient, apple. A steak has one ingredient...you get the point.



<sup>5</sup> Park SY, Oh MK, Lee BS, Kim HG, Lee WJ, Lee JH, Lim JT, Kim JY. The Effects of Alcohol on Quality of Sleep. Korean J Fam Med. 2015 Nov;36(6):294-9. doi: 10.4082/kjfm.2015.36.6.294. Epub 2015 Nov 20. PMID: 26634095; PMCID: PMC4666864.

- Simple formula for planning your main meals throughout the day:
  - 1/3 plate (about a fist-size serving) of lean animal or plant-based protein
  - 1/3 plate (about ½ to 1 cup of complex carbohydrates such as brown rice, oatmeal, sweet potatoes, etc.)
  - 1/3 plate or more of vegetables, the more colorful the better
  - Go easy on the butter, dressings, and condiments.
- Ditch the donuts and other junk food and opt for healthy snacks such as:
  - Fresh fruits and veggies
  - Nuts (calorie dense, so watch portions)
  - Greek yogurt
  - Cottage cheese
  - Tuna
  - Jerky
  - Shelf stable protein shakes
  - Protein blender smoothie (frozen banana, frozen berries, handful of spinach or kale, milk or water, and a scoop of protein powder).
- Protein needs increase as we age and is especially important in slowing down age-related muscle loss. Aim for around one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight per day.
- Meal prep can be a game changer when it comes to improving your nutrition and eating habits. By keeping pre-made frozen meals on hand, you are more likely to make good food choices. Here are just a few examples of healthy meals, most of which can be frozen in serving size containers or Ziplock bags and conveniently thawed out or heated up in a microwave later for a quick, easy meal:
  - Grilled/baked chicken breast, brown rice, and a vegetable of your choice
  - Pot of chili, cornbread, and carrot/celery sticks
  - Grilled chicken wraps with veggies and hummus
  - Meatloaf, mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes, and vegetables
  - Turkey spaghetti with whole wheat pasta and vegetables
  - Grilled sirloin steak, baked sweet potato, and vegetables

## • Lifestyle choices

- Avoid smoking and tobacco use.
- Make a habit of getting an annual physical/wellness check, including routine cardiovascular and colon cancer screenings as recommended by your physician.
- Regular health screenings are particularly important for personnel who are required by employers to participate in strenuous fitness for duty assessments as a requirement of membership on specialized teams such as SWAT, search and rescue, etc.
- Educate yourself on how to avoid preventable injuries. Common causes of injury include slips and falls, motor vehicle crashes, inmate assaults on staff, training injuries, and poor ergonomics and lifting techniques.
- Limit alcohol consumption. I love a cold beer or good bourbon as much as the next person, but moderation is key. New research suggests that even moderate drinking can have negative health effects<sup>6-7</sup> (sorry, don't kill the messenger)

## • Mental health

- Prioritizing physical health positively impacts mental health.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/moderate-drinking.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html#:~:text=Breast%20cancer%3A%20Drinking%20even%20small,their%20risk%20of%20breast%20cancer.>

- Practice mindfulness and meditation. Regular meditation can help your brain better manage stress and anxiety that can trigger depression<sup>8</sup>.
- Don't go it alone; seek help if needed. Routine sessions with a mental health professional can help tremendously, especially when the counselor has previous experience working with first responders. Check with your employer to determine if an employee assistance program (EAP) is available.
- Consult your employer-sponsored health plans to familiarize yourself with any mental health care services that may be available under your plan.
- Things employers can do to promote officer wellness:
  - Examine shift schedules and help employees prioritize rest and sleep.
  - Invest in mental health awareness and stress management training.
  - Speak directly about mental health and create a culture of acceptance and support.

## **Below 100**

Lastly, any discussion about officer wellness would be incomplete without mentioning the [Below 100 initiative](#). Remember:

- Wear your belt.
- Wear your vest.
- Watch your speed.
- WIN- What's important now?
- Remember- Complacency kills!

It's never too late to begin investing in your physical and mental health. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. So, what single step will you take today to begin working on a healthier tomorrow?

Additional Resources:

[Officer Safety & Wellness | International Association of Chiefs of Police \(theiacp.org\)](#)  
[First Responder Wellness Week Toolkit](#)  
[Below 100 Initiative](#)

Please contact Todd at 531-510-7446 or [tduncan@nirma.info](mailto:tduncan@nirma.info) if you have any questions or would like to request training.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/how-meditation-helps-with-depression>

## CYBER SECURITY KEYPOINTS February

From the County  
Network Security  
Cooperative



### RANDOM DRIVES

NEVER plug in a piece of removable media found in the wild! Let's be frank, do you lock your car? Using a strange removable drive is like handing over your keys to a criminal. Welcoming them to wreak havoc in your virtual world. It's just asking for trouble!

Even random drives found in the office should not be assumed safe—especially if found in a well-traveled space of the building—as there is always the potential that it was left maliciously to gain access to devices and networks. Even if the owner is not a hacker it could contain malware, viruses, or other unintentional downloads that could compromise security.



### REMOVABLE MEDIA

What is removable media you might ask? Well, we've all probably seen a version or two, most likely even used one, but perhaps weren't aware that something so small and innocent looking could be potentially lethal to an organization's security.

Portable devices such as a USB drive (or flash drive, or dongle, or stick, or thumb drive or whatever one chooses to call it), an external hard drive (for computer back-ups), CDs, DVDs, or SD cards are all removable media.

### WHAT TO DO

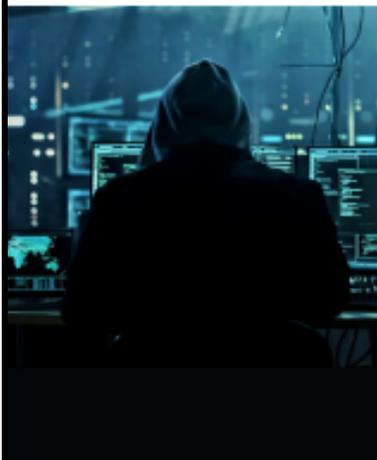
Files on removable media can be accessed without putting networks, accounts, and devices at risk. If you come across a stray at work, you should hand it over to the IT department. Not at work? Proceed with caution and don't let curiosity get the best of you!

*Here's how you can reduce risk:*

*\*Use a data blocker: little connectors used as a line of protection between the device & USB drive.*

*\*Use an "air-gapped" computer (this is "nerd talk" for a device not connected to the internet).*

*\*Do nothing: Are you uncomfortable with more advanced cyber security protocols? Then don't mess with the device. If it is worth anything to the owner, they will come looking for it.*



### BEST PRACTICES

- \*Install anti-malware/anti-virus software on computers.
- \*Disable auto-run and autoplay features.
- \*Password-protect your removable media & devices.
- \*Remove all sensitive material from removable media once data is transferred.
- \*Use encryption.

The most effective protocol is employee security awareness training. Educate on the importance of data security and provide resources to handle removable media properly. Organizations that follow these practices are better positioned to defend against threats.

The County Network Security Cooperative is a collaboration of partners including:



- AND -



Disclaimer: This document reflects current guidance and is subject to change due to the evolving cyber security environment.