



Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

January 2025

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January is National Winter Safety Month

The fall and winter seasons are full of safety hazards: cold, snow, and ice; heating and maintenance challenges; and seasonal décor hazards and workplace safety challenges. Taking time ahead of the cooler seasons to make sure you and your family are prepared for whatever winter brings will help you reduce your chances of illness, injury, or death from winter conditions.

Before You Start, be Safety Smart” in this year’s winter safety campaign. It provides information and advice on fire safety, driving safety, home maintenance safety, hunting safety, winter alcohol safety, emergency preparation, home decoration safety, and weather safety tips, to include signs of frostbite and hypothermia.

To link directly to this toolkit from your websites, use this link: www.health.mil/WinterSafetyToolkit

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

Money 4 Minutes Reminder

Happy New Year to all NIRMA member safety committees! I hope 2024 was everything you had hoped for and that 2025 will bring you new opportunities to seize! In the meantime, I wanted to provide you with one last reminder to be sure to submit 2024’s safety committee minutes if you wish to take part in NIRMA’s Money 4 Minutes program. The deadline is January 31st, 2025. The minutes must be received in our office by 5:00 pm central time. I am excited to distribute awards to those counties that made the extra effort to protect their employees, their county or agency and the NIRMA membership from preventable losses.

Annual Mandatory Tasks for Counties with Employees Using a CDL

As an employer of Commercial Driver License (CDL) holders that operate DOT-regulated Commercial Motor Vehicles (CMVs), here are two annual tasks you are required to complete:

- Run a Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse query on all your DOT-regulated drivers each year. The timeframe in which you perform these queries can be based on your employee’s date of hire or another 12-month period determined by you. A limited query will fulfill this requirement. A limited query reveals if a driver’s record exists in the Clearinghouse, but specific information about the violation will not be released. To perform this query, you will need to have an electronic or paper copy of a general consent signed by the driver.

If the limited query shows that the driver has violations in Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse, you will need to run a full query within 24 hours. You are required to obtain a driver's full query consent to obtain access to the detailed information provided in a full query. This consent must be provided electronically within the Clearinghouse.

Remember to keep records of all Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse queries and the information received for three years.

- Conduct an annual Motor Vehicle Records (MVR) check on each DOT-regulated driver to ensure that they are still qualified to operate a CMV and determine if there are any other safety issues you may need to be aware of. NIRMA recommends that you conduct annual MVR checks on all employees that operate county and agency vehicles or operate their personal vehicle on county business.

If the MVR check exposes violations, you will need to determine the severity of the violations and take whatever corrective action is required by your county or agency's policy. These records must also be maintained for 3 years.

These annual requirements are not best practices recommended by NIRMA. They are requirements of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Failing to comply can result in fines of up to thousands of dollars, per violation.

Best wishes for the New Year and remember that I can always be reached at chad@nirma.info or 1.800.642.6671.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Let Us Talk About Leadership...and Safety

I recently read an article about how leadership behavior sets the safety tone for an organization. This got me thinking about those I would view as leaders and their role in a safety program. So, we are going to unpack this just a little.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a leadership as: "*The office or position of a leader.*" With this definition in mind, if I were to ask you who are the leaders of your county, most of you would give me a list of the county elected officials, department heads or even supervisors of the various districts or crews within your department. Now let me ask, who are your safety leaders? Again, elected officials, department heads and all the members of the county's safety committees would be recited OR even no one at all.

When I read articles like this and tie the definition of leadership together with it, I feel like it is putting the responsibility of our safety into someone else's hands. While I understand and agree that the formally designated leadership of any organization should be concerned about *and* play a critical role in a good, effective safety program, this should not be the be-all and end-all.

I have always thought leadership should not only fall on the shoulders of individuals with the office or position of leader. I believe that all of us play the role of leader in our daily lives. The following is a definition of leadership that better fits my belief of leadership:

Leadership is the ability of an individual or a group of people to influence and guide followers or members of an organization, society, or team. Leadership often is an attribute tied to a person's title, seniority or ranking in a [hierarchy](#). However, it is an attribute anyone can have or attain, even those without leadership positions. It is a developable skill that can be improved over time.

You have probably figured out by now where I am going with this. We are *ALL* leaders regardless of our office or title. We all have the opportunity to guide and influence those we interact with daily. We should not leave our safety and our family's well-being to someone else. There is always someone watching and we are influencing them whether it is intentional or not. Influence them in the right direction; lead by example.

Regardless of your organization's commitment to a safety program, which I do hope is a good one, commit yourself as an individual to good, safe practices. If you are not in the habit of safe practices, start. Just as leadership is an attribute anyone can have or attain, so is safety consciousness. Make a commitment, educate yourself, be aware and take responsible actions. Safety consciousness is not confined to your workplace; it extends to your personal lives and your family's well-being. Let us start 2025 with the right attitude and intentions.

If I can help you with your safety and loss prevention efforts, reach out to me at kcpawling@nirma.info or 402-310-4417. Have a safe and happy New Year!

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Inmate Suicide Prevention

Inmate suicide is a critical issue in local jails, posing significant emotional, legal, and financial risks. Corrections officers play a vital role in preventing these tragedies. This month's Safety Short outlines the risks associated with inmate suicide and provides practical strategies for prevention.

Understanding the Risks and Liabilities

Suicide is the leading cause of death in jails¹, with individuals often at heightened risk due to mental health issues, substance withdrawal, or the stress of incarceration. Common risk factors include prior suicide attempts, depression, isolation, and feelings of hopelessness.

For corrections officers, the implications of inmate suicide extend beyond the loss of life. Legal liability can arise if proper care, supervision, or intervention protocols are not followed. Under the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments, corrections officers and facilities have a constitutional duty of care to protect inmates from harm, including self-harm. Failing to meet this duty can result in claims of "deliberate indifference," which focus on whether jail staff knew of and disregarded an inmate's serious medical or mental health needs.ⁱ

A specific example of a violation occurred in *Farmer v. Brennan*² (1994), where the U.S. Supreme Court clarified the standard for deliberate indifference. In this case, the Court ruled that a prison official may be held liable under the Eighth Amendment if they were aware of a substantial risk of serious harm to an inmate and failed to take reasonable steps to prevent it.

Another notable case out of Nebraska is *Wever v. Lincoln County*³ (2004), where an appeals court ruled that a county sheriff was not entitled to qualified immunity from a claim that he was deliberately indifferent in his training and supervision of personnel in dealing with the risk of suicide in a jail where two prior inmate suicides had occurred in the previous five years. According to court records, police officers responded to a 911 call from an emotionally despondent Dennis Wever. During his contact with officers, Wever consented to go to a hospital to see a doctor and offered to go with the police on the condition that he not be handcuffed. Officers eventually struggled with and arrested Wever, after which Wever made statements that "he would kill himself if jailed." Officers booked Wever into jail where he was placed in an isolation cell and given a blanket upon his request. Wever hung himself with the blanket a short time later. Wever was the third person in five years to commit suicide in the Lincoln County jail.

Beyond legal consequences, inmate suicide impacts staff morale and the facility's reputation, emphasizing the importance of proactive efforts.

Strategies for Prevention

- **Sound policy.** Implement a comprehensive inmate suicide prevention policy that includes training requirements; recognizing risk factors and indicators; intake screening; housing; observation/checks; treatment; intervention; responding to emergencies; and notification/reporting.

- **Adequate Staffing.** It is common to see smaller jails operating with a single jailer on duty, and oftentimes this person must also function as a dispatcher/911 operator. This practice poses significant risks, including diminished ability to respond to emergencies, increased likelihood of security breaches, inadequate inmate supervision, and heightened liability for the facility due to potential harm to staff, inmates, or the public. It is strongly recommended that agencies always maintain a minimum of two dedicated jailers on duty when there are inmates being held.
- **Training and Awareness:** Regularly train all staff to recognize:
 - Warning signs of suicide such as suicidal threats or comments, withdrawal, verbalizing hopelessness, drastic behavior changes, etc.
 - Situational risk factors such as previous placements on suicide watch; prior suicide attempts; substance abuse; high publicity cases with serious charges including homicide, rape, or child victim crimes; recent significant prison sentence; and harsh, condemning, rejecting attitudes from staff members.
 - High risk periods such as the first seven days in custody (44% of suicides), upcoming or recent court hearing, admission into segregation or disciplinary separation, anniversary dates, decreased staff supervision, or bad news of any kind.
- **Communication and Documentation:** Foster open communication among arresting officers and staff, as well as between jail staff members both on and between shifts, to ensure all relevant information about an inmate's mental health is shared. Maintain detailed documentation of observations, actions taken, and decisions made to demonstrate adherence to protocols.
- **Screening and Assessment:** Upon intake, conduct thorough, well-documented mental health screenings to identify at-risk individuals. Collaborate with mental health professionals to assess and monitor inmates with identified vulnerabilities in a timely manner.
- **Enhanced Monitoring:** Implement observation protocols for at-risk inmates including:
 - Avoiding isolation and house with a cellmate(s) if possible. This reduces isolation/privacy, and cellmates provide a rescue opportunity.
 - Assigning to higher visibility cells with minimal or no tie off points.
 - Conducting frequent (continuous or every 10-15 minutes) documented welfare checks and video monitoring for at-risk individuals.
- **Supportive Environment:** Minimize isolation by encouraging appropriate social interaction and providing access to mental health resources. Offer programs that promote resilience and coping skills.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Equip staff with crisis intervention training to de-escalate situations involving distressed inmates. Provide all staff with easy access to emergency cutdown tools. Ensure clear protocols are in place for responding to emergencies, including calling 911 immediately and administering first aid/CPR as soon as the scene is safe/secure.

Conclusion

Preventing inmate suicide requires vigilance, teamwork, and a proactive approach. By understanding the risks and implementing these strategies, corrections officers can save lives, mitigate liability, and foster a safer environment for both inmates and staff. Your role in recognizing and addressing these challenges is vital to the mission of maintaining safety and dignity within the Nebraska jail system.



WEBINAR NEW ONLINE MEMBER SAFETY RESOURCES THROUGH NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL – NEBRASKA CHAPTER

**TUES. JANUARY 28
9:00-10:00 a.m. CENTRAL**

Another value-added benefit provided by:



Instructor:

Susan Booth is Senior Vice President, Mission Growth at the National Safety Council – Nebraska Chapter.

The National Safety Council is a nonprofit organization formed more than a century ago with local state chapters nationwide. The Nebraska Chapter, established in 1924, has a mission focused on reducing injuries and saving the lives of Nebraskans through education, safety training and resources.

In this webinar, Susan will provide a live walk-through of free online resources newly available and relevant to NIRMA members through its Partners in Safety program with NSCN, including streaming videos, an e-newsletter, and much more, all with the click of a few buttons.



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