



Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

June 2025

-

Volume 13, Number 6

June is National Men's Health Month

June is National Men's Health Month, a time to remind men of the health issues they face and what they can do to take charge of their health.

Men are significantly less likely than women to see a doctor or report symptoms to a health care provider. Only 60 percent of men go to the doctor for a yearly, routine check up, and 40 percent won't go until something is seriously wrong.

"Despite these statistics, 20 percent of men report seeing a doctor so their significant other or a loved one will stop nagging them," said Helen Bernie, DO, MPH. The overall mortality rate is 41 percent higher for men than women, and it's higher for men for 8 out of 10 leading causes of death—including heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes.

For more information: <https://medicine.iu.edu/blogs/spirit-of-medicine/mens-health-month>

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

Don't Let an Accident Spoil Your Summer Fun!

Summer in Nebraska is synonymous with sunshine, outdoor adventures, and well-deserved vacations. From fishing and camping to backyard barbecues and road trips, it's a season of exciting memories waiting to be made. However, amidst all the excitement, it's easy to overlook potential hazards that can quickly turn a joyous occasion into a painful setback.

At NIRMA, risk management and loss prevention are our top priority. Please remember to keep risk management and your own safety at the top of the list when taking part in summer activities. We want to empower our member counties and agencies to enjoy all the best parts of summer without the unfortunate interruption of preventable accidents and injuries. A moment of inattention or a lapse in safety precautions can lead to consequences ranging from minor injuries to serious, life-altering incidents.

Think about it: A trip to the emergency room for a heat-related illness, a fall during a recreational activity, or a preventable vehicle accident can not only ruin your summer plans but also seriously impact your life.

This summer, let's commit to a proactive approach to safety. By taking a few simple precautions and encouraging awareness, we can collectively reduce the risk of accidents and ensure that everyone enjoys a safe and healthy season.

Here are some key areas to focus on for a safer summer:

- Sun and Heat Safety:
 - Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel thirsty, especially when working or playing outdoors.
 - Seek Shade: Limit direct sun exposure during peak hours (10 AM - 4 PM).
 - Protect Your Skin: Use broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher and reapply frequently. Wear wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses.
 - Dress Appropriately: Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
 - Recognize Heat Illness: Be aware of the signs of heat exhaustion and heatstroke (dizziness, nausea, headache, heavy sweating, confusion) and seek medical attention immediately if symptoms appear.
- Water Safety:
 - Supervise Children: Never leave children unattended near water, even for a moment.
 - Swim Safely: Only swim in designated areas and obey all posted signs and lifeguard instructions.
 - Boating Safety: Wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets while on boats, and avoid alcohol consumption while operating a vessel.
 - Learn to Swim: Encourage swimming lessons for all ages.
- Outdoor Activity Safety:
 - Footwear: Wear appropriate footwear for the activity to prevent slips, trips, and falls.
 - Insect Protection: Use insect repellent to guard against bites from mosquitoes and ticks. Check for ticks after spending time outdoors.
 - Tool and Equipment Use: Use tools and equipment safely and only for their intended purpose. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Hiking/Biking: Stay on marked trails, be aware of your surroundings, and carry water.
- Road and Travel Safety:
 - Vehicle Maintenance: Ensure your vehicle is in good working order before long trips (tires, fluids, brakes).
 - Driver Awareness: Avoid distracted driving, obey speed limits, and never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - Share the Road: Be mindful of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcycles.
 - Plan Your Route: Know your destination and plan for rest stops to avoid driver fatigue.

Let's work together to make this summer a season of joy, relaxation, and lasting positive memories. By prioritizing safety, we can ensure that fun remains the focus, and accidents don't get in the way of a well-deserved summer experience.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer!

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Utility Permits - Managing the Risk and Liability

You may wonder why I am writing about utility permits for my Safety Shorts article. This topic has as much to do with worker safety as it does with managing the liabilities associated with poorly placed utilities. I'm covering many of the same points as my recent article in the NIRMA **Interchange** magazine. The reason is that I want to reach as many "boots on the ground" county employees as possible. I want everyone to understand that a county should have a well-structured utility permit for not only managing the placement of utilities but also managing the safety of our employees.

I know many times a county roads crew goes out to do a project, and they experience a conflict with a utility line. Often, they did not know the line was at the location, or even more frequently, the utility was located incorrectly, or not at all. I don't have to tell you all the hazards associated with these experiences, because you live them while working out on the roads.

What I do want to tell you is that you should encourage county managers to adopt and use a utility permit so we can better mitigate the hazards we encounter while digging. And, the utility permit should not end at managing the placement of communication lines, it should be used for all utilities, such as gas and electric lines.

Here are the 3 W's of utility permits.

The WHAT:

Nebraska Revised Statute **§39-1361** gives counties the authority to use a permit process to manage utilities that desire to occupy their road right-of-way:

No person, firm, or corporation shall construct or install any new pole line, any underground conduit, or any buried cable or erect any new guy wires upon any portion of the state highway right-of-way without obtaining a written consent or permit from the department. The department shall grant such written consent or permits to do any of the things mentioned in this section if the installation of such a thing does not interfere with, or cause unreasonable hazards to, the use of the right-of-way for highway purposes.

I will also point out that **§39-1362** imposes penalties on a utility for failure to obtain a permit from the county for any of the activities listed in §39-1361. Each county should establish and implement a sound permitting process so that it could impose these statutory penalties on a utility company, if necessary.

The WHEN:

Anytime it is desired to place a utility line in the right-of-way, a permit should be submitted to the county. This includes any farmer that wants to run a water line, electric line for pivots or even a gas line across the right-of-way. Homeowners should be subject to exactly the same requirement as utility companies.

The WHY:

If we do not lay out the parameters for permission in writing, the county road department will risk having conflicts in the future when trying to complete maintenance or reconstruction of the roadways.

NIRMA offers a model utility permit that is a suitable place to start when developing or revising your permits. Some of the key parameters in the model permit are:

1. A requirement that the utility applicant provides the county with a certificate of insurance that meets certain monetary requirements.
2. A requirement that the utility applicant contact the diggers' hotline BEFORE any breaking of ground. Also, a requirement that any damage to existing utilities will be the sole responsibility of the permit applicant.
3. A requirement that areas disturbed by construction/installation will be restored to preconstruction conditions by the applicant. This could include compaction, surfacing materials, or seeding of disturbed areas.
4. Pipe and connection requirements, and the location of connections in relation to the driving surface.
5. Specific requirements for paved surfaces (Dry boring).
6. The applicant must identify the installation method and requirements for each method. For example: Boring, Plowing or Open Trench, with or without encasement.
7. Depth and lateral placement requirements, and specifically the need to identify placements around the structures in the road, for example culverts and bridges. Do you want the lines placed in the shoulder of the roadway to facilitate future ditch cleaning?
8. Applicants are responsible for the damage to the right-of-way while the utility remains in the right-of-way.
9. Provisions for the management of road closures during installation.
10. Reserving for the county the right to inspect the contractor's worksite and temporary traffic control practices.
11. Specifies that temporary traffic control practices must meet the requirements of the latest edition of the MUTCD.
12. Lists the resulting corrective actions if the parameters in the permit are not followed.
13. Requires that a set of plans be included with the permit application.
14. Specifies a period in which the roadway surface can be disturbed. For example, no plowing or trenching the road from November to March, because the road cannot "heal" before winter weather.
15. Specifies that future road work could require relocation at the utility owner's expense.

There are other items that can be included in a permit process, but the key parameters listed above give an idea of what a good and *EFFECTIVE* utility permit can look like. Also, *ANY* permit without provision for inspection of the installation by the county and provisions to ensure the accountability of the contractors completing the installation will not be effective.

NIRMA's model utility permit can be found on our website, or I can send you a copy of the permit if requested. Look at it even if your county has a permit in place already. You may have questions about why it has some of the items listed that it does, and I would enjoy discussing those questions with you. We may both learn something in the process.

I look forward to hearing from you. I can be reached at 402-310-4417 or kcpawling@nirma.info.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Critical Incident Response and Investigation

A law enforcement officer-involved critical incident (herein referred to as critical incident) typically refers to any event in which a person is seriously injured or killed as a result of an officer's use of force. These events are highly scrutinized by the public due to their legal, ethical, and social implications. Understanding the different aspects and protocols surrounding such incidents is essential for law enforcement agencies, officers, and the public alike.

Phases of Initial Response

The immediate response to a critical incident should follow structured protocols aimed at preserving life, securing the scene, and ensuring evidence integrity. The first priority is medical aid for all involved, including officers and suspects. Simultaneously, the scene must be secured to prevent contamination of evidence. Initial responding officers must preserve the integrity of physical evidence, restrict access, identify witnesses, and maintain a scene log. Supervisory personnel typically assume initial command, activating investigative and command protocols. Notifications to internal command staff, criminal investigators, and the county attorney are essential early steps. It is also important and generally required under the county's coverage agreement that agencies notify NIRMA as soon as practicable following any officer-involved critical incident.

Internal and Criminal Investigations

Critical incidents require two distinct investigative tracks: administrative (internal) and criminal. The criminal investigation, often conducted by an independent agency or specialized unit, focuses on whether the officer's actions constitute a violation of the law. This is intended to ensure objectivity and maintain public trust. Parallel to this, the internal investigation assesses whether agency policies and procedures were followed and determines the officer's fitness for continued duty. These investigations may proceed concurrently but must be carefully managed to avoid cross-contamination of evidence or undue influence.

Officer Interviews

Officer interviews are central to both investigations but must be handled with procedural fairness and legal caution. Officers are typically given a short period—often 24 to 72 hours—before providing a formal statement. This time allows for emotional decompression and consultation with legal counsel, which can improve the accuracy and completeness of the account. Statements given in the administrative investigation (typically under Garrity protections) are compelled and therefore cannot be used against the officer in criminal proceedings, as doing so would violate the officer's constitutional protection against self-incrimination.

Legal Representation

Due to the potential for criminal prosecution and career consequences, legal representation may be warranted. Officers involved in critical incidents should consider retaining qualified legal counsel immediately. Legal counsel can help to ensure the officer's rights are protected, guide them through

interviews, and advise on media interaction and agency procedures. In many jurisdictions, unions or fraternal organizations provide legal support in these high-risk scenarios. The question is often asked, “does NIRMA provide legal support to officers following an officer-involved shooting?” The answer is, NIRMA members’ coverage for the cost of legal services typically does not come into play unless and until a claim or lawsuit is filed. Often, a tort claim or lawsuit does not arrive until months or even years after a critical incident. NIRMA member sheriffs may contact their County Attorney and/or NIRMA Legal Link for preliminary collaboration on legal risk mitigation-related questions following a critical incident, but it is important that individual officers have plans for how they can obtain the legal representation they may require immediately following a critical incident in which they are directly involved.

Policy and Training Considerations

As with all high-risk critical tasks in law enforcement, sound policies and regular training are essential to effectively responding to critical incidents. A comprehensive model critical incident policy is available through NIRMA. It is equally important that officers, particularly supervisors, receive initial and ongoing training on critical incident response. Training should include, at a minimum, the issues covered in this article.

Conclusion

Critical incidents require a professional, transparent, and fair approach. A structured initial response, thorough and impartial investigations, proper handling of officer interviews, and legal advocacy all serve to protect the rights of individuals while maintaining the integrity and accountability of law enforcement agencies.

Additional Resources

- NIRMA Model Critical Incident Policy
- [IACP Resource Guide, Investigation of Officer Involved Shootings and other Serious Incidents](#)
- [LLRMI Article, I Just Got In A Shooting, What Happens Next?](#)
- [State of Nebraska Critical Incident Stress Management \(CISM\) Program](#)

NIRMA Member Officials, Supervisors, and Managers:

Have a human resource question or issue? Contact NIRMA’s Human Resources Helpline at (866) 896-6423.

Have a non-HR legal question or issue? Contact NIRMA’s Legal Link at (402) 742-9240 or by email at legallink@nirma.info