



Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

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May Is National Skin Cancer and Melanoma Awareness Month

It's Good for Your Health to Know about the Dark Side of the Sun

Skin cancer — including melanoma as well as basal and squamous cell carcinomas — is the most common of all cancer types.

The American Cancer Society estimates that in the United States this year there will be about 100,350 new cases of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, and 6,850 deaths from it. The rates of melanoma have been rising for the past few decades.

Melanoma is more common in men overall, but before age 50 the rates are higher in women than in men.

The number of cases of the more frequent skin cancers, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma, has been increasing for many years. According to one estimate, about 3.5 million cases of them are diagnosed annually (80% are basal cell).

For more information: <https://www.stonybrookmedicine.edu/patientcare/surgery/blog/skin-cancer-melanoma-awareness-month>

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Drive to Survive: Staying Safe Behind the Wheel in Law Enforcement

Routine driving remains one of the most dangerous activities for law enforcement officers. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, **vehicle-related incidents have consistently been a leading cause of duty-related deaths, accounting for nearly 40% of officer fatalities over the past decade.** In 2024, nearly the same number of officers (49) died from traffic-related incidents as shootings (52). And while high-speed pursuits often capture public attention, the greater risk lies in routine, day-to-day driving such as patrolling, responding to calls, or transporting individuals.

A major contributor to these incidents is distracted driving. As technology evolves, an increasing number of electronic devices such as mobile data terminals, sophisticated radios, smartphones, license plate readers, in-car camera displays, and speed detection systems are being installed in patrol vehicle cockpits. These devices not only create manual, visual, and cognitive distractions, but they can also obscure drivers' view if mounting/placement is not

carefully considered. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that officers are up to **five times more likely** to be involved in a crash while using mobile data terminals.

Defensive driving is equally important during emergency vehicle operations. Those who attended the NIRMA Self Defense for County Officials conference in Kearney last year likely recall the powerful presentation by Kimberly Schlau, whose two young daughters were killed after an Illinois state trooper lost control of his vehicle while responding to a traffic crash and crossed the median slamming into their car. Jessica Uhl, 18, and her sister Kelli Uhl, 13, were pronounced dead at the scene. The investigation revealed the trooper was traveling over 120 mph while talking on the phone with his girlfriend and using his mobile data terminal. Further investigation found that emergency personnel were already on the scene of the call that the trooper was responding to.

NRS 60-6,114 grants certain privileges to emergency vehicle operators, such as proceeding through red lights, exceeding speed limits, and disregarding certain traffic rules; however, **these privileges do not relieve officers from the duty to drive with due regard for the safety of all persons**. Officers responding to emergencies remain accountable for reckless or negligent behavior, reinforcing the importance of balancing urgency with public safety.

A recent incident involving a NIRMA member highlights the legal exposure counties face when officers violate traffic laws during emergency responses. In this case, a deputy responding with lights and siren proceeded through a red light and struck a motorist who had entered the intersection on a green light. Despite NIRMA's efforts to negotiate a favorable settlement, the jury ultimately ruled in favor of the motorist, resulting in a significant financial loss to the pool. The case serves as a reminder that even during emergencies, officers must exercise due caution and remain accountable under the law.

To mitigate these risks, agencies must emphasize defensive driving practices during routine and emergency vehicle operation:

- **Limit In-Vehicle Distractions:** Adopt policies that prohibit or strictly limit the use of cell phones, mobile data terminals, and other electronic devices while the vehicle is in motion. Many agencies now enforce "stop to type" policies, requiring officers to pull over when interacting with onboard technology.
- **Use of Seatbelts:** Although compliance has improved, failure to wear seatbelts continues to be a factor in officer fatalities. Rigorous enforcement of seatbelt policies saves lives.
- **Adopt the "Drive to Arrive" Mentality:** Officers must prioritize safe arrival over speed, even during emergency responses. Training should reinforce that arriving late is better than not arriving at all.
- **Maintain Situational Awareness:** Constant scanning, maintaining safe following distances, and anticipating the actions of other drivers are fundamental. Officers should drive with the assumption that civilian drivers may not always react predictably to emergency vehicles.
- **Continuous Training:** Agencies are encouraged to provide all personnel with defensive driving training at least annually, including a review of NRS 60-6,114. Various training resources are available through NIRMA such as instructor-led defensive driving classes and [NIRMA Online University](#) courses designed specifically for law enforcement.

The financial, operational, and human costs of routine driving incidents are high. Proactive risk management, built on defensive driving principles, is essential to safeguard officers and the public and to shield agencies from costly litigation. By making defensive driving a cultural priority, agencies not only protect their personnel but also reinforce public trust and operational readiness.

For questions or more information on training opportunities, contact NIRMA's Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist Todd Duncan at (402) 742-9220 or tduncan@nirma.info.

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

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

Legal Questions? NIRMA Can Help

As a valued NIRMA member official, supervisor, or manager, you have access to a suite of resources designed to support your leadership within your county or agency. NIRMA understands the complexities and challenges that can arise in your roles, and we are committed to providing you with the tools you need to navigate them effectively. This article highlights two key services – the HR Help Line and Legal Link – that offer invaluable legal guidance, completely free of charge to our members.

Supervisors and managers often face intricate situations when it comes to leading their teams. From understanding the nuances of disciplinary procedures to ensuring legally sound hiring and termination processes, the potential for missteps can be significant. To assist our members in this area NIRMA developed the HR Help Line by partnering with the Woods Aitken law firm in Omaha. The HR Help Line provides direct access to experienced attorneys specializing in employment law, including Pam Bourne and Ashley Connell, who are familiar to many NIRMA member officials from their presentations at NIRMA's educational programs. This service is exclusively for our member officials, supervisors, and managers. It is an additional tool intended to complement the opinions and guidance of your county attorney.

This confidential service empowers you to address Human Resource related challenges with greater clarity and confidence. Whether you have questions about:

- **Discipline:** Understanding progressive discipline, documenting performance issues, and navigating potential legal ramifications.
- **Hiring:** Ensuring compliance with anti-discrimination laws, crafting legally sound job descriptions, and conducting effective interviews.
- **Firing:** Following proper termination procedures, understanding employee rights, and minimizing the risk of legal challenges.

The HR Help Line, in combination with NIRMA's Guide to Creating a Personnel System for Nebraska Counties, can be a crucial lifeline, providing timely and accurate legal advice to help you make informed decisions and mitigate potential legal risks in your supervisory capacity. Do not navigate these complex issues alone – leverage this valuable resource to protect both you and your county. You can reach NIRMA's HR Help Line toll free at 866.896.6423 or 402.898.7423 or email

Recognizing that the scope of county government encompasses a wide array of legal considerations, NIRMA also provides our member officials, supervisors, and managers with access to free legal consultations on non-employment related matters with civil legal implications through Legal Link.

The attorneys answering member inquiries through Legal Link can provide guidance on a variety of topics that commonly give rise to claims and potential liability, including:

- Public Records Requests
- Law Enforcement and Corrections

- First Amendment Audits
- Contracts and Agreements
- County Roads
- Planning and Zoning
- Tort Claim Handling
- Premises Liability
- Public Meetings

Legal Link is designed to provide you, as a member official, supervisor, and manager, with the legal clarity needed to effectively perform your duties and contribute to the smooth operation of your office and county. By offering this accessible legal expertise, NIRMA aims to empower you to address challenges proactively and ensure compliance with applicable laws. You can reach NIRMA's Legal Link at 402.742.9240 or by email at legallink@nirma.info.

As always, I can be reached at 800.642.6671 or chad@nirma.info.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Are You Meeting the Standard?

Now that I've been in the role of NIRMA Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist for 3 ½ years, I am honestly surprised at the number of road department employees I speak to that still aren't wearing any high visibility apparel while they are out on the roads.

Most road employees express concerns about the number of distracted drivers they notice while out on the roads, yet they themselves are not doing anything to mitigate the risk of injury while doing their work out there amongst those distracted drivers. Worse yet, I see supervisors or managers that allow their employees to work on the roadways without a safety vest.

The 2023 edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), reinforces and updates requirements for high-visibility safety apparel, particularly safety vests, for individuals working on or near roadways. These standards are critical for protecting workers in construction zones, roadway maintenance areas, and other traffic-exposed environments.

Under the 2023 MUTCD, all workers who are exposed to vehicular traffic—whether from public roadways or construction vehicles—must wear high-visibility safety apparel that meets the *Performance Class 2 or Class 3* standards set by the ANSI/ISEA 107-2015 standard. These classes specify design, color, and reflectivity requirements that ensure workers are visible during both daytime and nighttime operations. Class 2 garments are typically used in environments with moderate risk (daytime), while Class 3 garments provide enhanced visibility and are required in high-speed or complex work zones (night-time).

One significant update in the 2023 MUTCD is the clarification that safety apparel must be worn **at all times** by workers exposed to traffic, not just during active construction periods. This includes surveyors, flaggers, inspectors, and utility workers. Additionally, garments must be maintained in good condition, with retroreflective material that remains functional. Faded, torn, or dirty vests that reduce visibility do not meet compliance standards and should be replaced immediately.

The MUTCD also emphasizes employer responsibility, stating that it is the duty of the agency or employer to provide appropriate high-visibility apparel and ensure it is used properly. This is particularly important in work zones where worker presence must be immediately apparent to drivers to reduce the risk of accidents.

The ANSI/ISEA 107-2015 standard also introduces garment types—Type O (off-road), Type R (roadway), and Type P (public safety)—to better match apparel with specific job environments. Key features include minimum areas for fluorescent background fabric and reflective tape, as well as guidelines on placement, durability, and design to ensure visibility in both daylight and low-light conditions.

By aligning with the latest ANSI/ISEA 107 standard and reinforcing consistent use of high-visibility safety vests, per the 2023 MUTCD, counties are prioritizing the safety of employees operating in or near traffic. Compliance not only helps reduce fatalities and injuries but also fosters a culture of safety awareness and responsibility on the county roadways.

This article only provides a quick summary of the requirements. I would encourage all county road departments to review the standards and check your safety vests to make sure you meet those requirements. The collar tag on your safety vests contains all the information you need to enable you to make the correct choices for your safety apparel.

If you have any questions or need any further guidance, I can be reached at 402-310-4417 or kcpawling@nirma.info.