

Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

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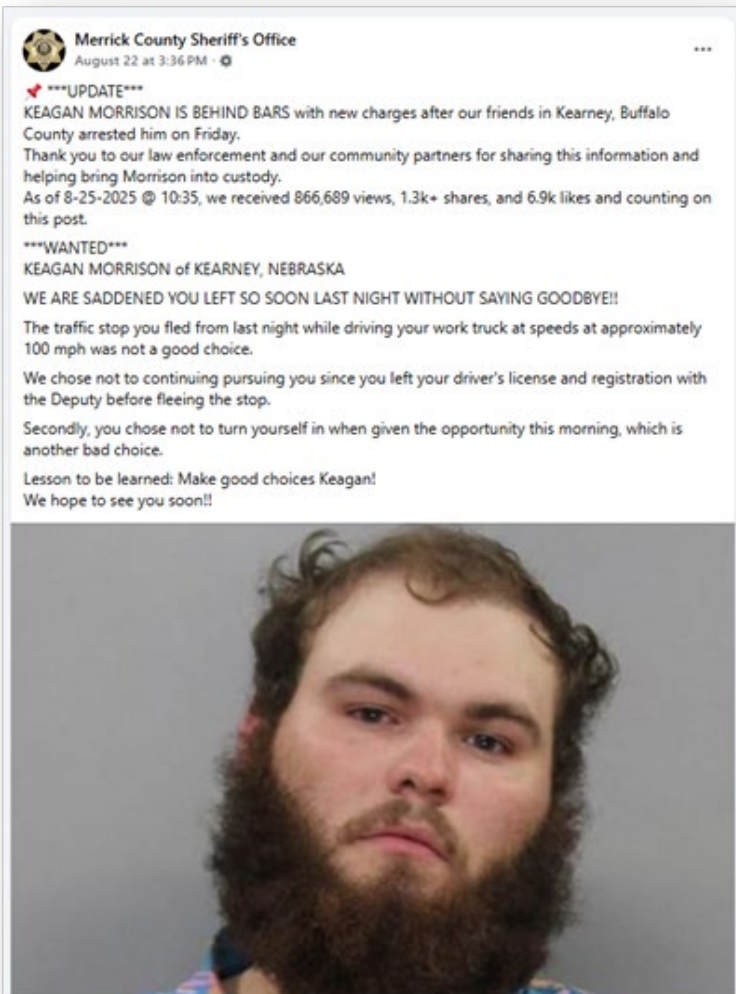
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Smart Decision on a Vehicle Pursuit

This month's Safety Short highlights excellent judgment by a NIRMA member employee during a recent vehicle pursuit incident.

A Merrick County sheriff's deputy stopped a driver for speeding at nearly 100 MPH. After handing over his license and registration, the driver suddenly fled the stop. The deputy faced a critical choice: engage in a dangerous high-speed pursuit over a relatively minor offense or safely apprehend the suspect later using the information already in hand.



The deputy made the right call; he did not pursue. Instead, the Sheriff's Office used humor and strategy, posting about the incident on Facebook and encouraging the suspect to turn himself in. The post went viral, reaching nearly a million views, and the suspect was soon arrested in Buffalo County. This was an excellent example of good decision-making in balancing the risk of pursuit versus the need to immediately apprehend.

Vehicle pursuits remain one of the most dangerous law enforcement activities causing more unintended deaths each year than any other police action. On average, one person dies every day in pursuit-related incidents, with a record 455 deaths in 2020.

Considerations when crafting your pursuit policy:

- Pursuits are a leading cause of serious injury, death, and liability for NIRMA member counties.
- The Nebraska Supreme Court interprets NRS 13-911 to mean

that agencies are “strictly liable for injuries to an innocent third party during a vehicle pursuit, regardless of whether the law enforcement officer’s actions were otherwise proper or even necessary.”

- Every pursuit carries high risk and limited deputy control.
- Strong policy, training, and supervision are essential for safety and legal protection.
- A restrictive pursuit policy saves lives. NIRMA’s model pursuit policy follows [PERF recommendations](#) and recommends limiting pursuits to **violent crimes where failure to immediately apprehend the suspect presents an imminent threat of serious bodily harm or death to others based on the suspect’s criminal actions (not the danger created from the suspect’s driving as they flee from deputies).**

Stay professional. Stay accountable. Protect the badge.

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

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Bridging the Gap Between Safety and Common Sense

Bridge inspections come with a variety of risks, and it's important to stay alert and prepared every time you're out in the field. Common hazards include slips, trips, and falls—especially when navigating muddy embankments, thick brush, or uneven terrain under and around bridges. Falls from height are also a serious concern.

Never conduct a bridge inspection alone, particularly when working on:

- High-elevation or long-span structures
- Canal bridges over deep water
- Bridges with steep or unstable banks

Always **notify your office** of your inspection location and expected duration. This ensures someone knows where you are in case of an emergency.

Before heading out:

- Make sure your vehicle is stocked with a properly sized first aid kit.
- Wear appropriate **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**, which may include:
 - Hardhat
 - Safety glasses
 - High-visibility vest
 - Safety harness and lanyard (for fall protection)
 - Gloves
 - Slip-resistant boots
 - Long pants and long-sleeved shirts
 - Life jacket (when working near or over water)
 - Rattlesnake gaiters (recommended in rural areas)

Ladder safety is critical. Inspect ladders before use and only use Type I rated ladders. Ensure the ground is stable to prevent slipping or sinking.

Traffic control measures must be in place when inspecting bridges near roadways. Drivers often overlook signage and cones, so use extra caution and follow MUTCD guidance for temporary traffic control setups.

Environmental hazards are also a concern:

- Long sleeves and pants help protect against ticks, poisonous plants (like poison ivy and oak), and scratches from brush.

- Always perform a tick check at the end of the day. Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses are present in Nebraska.
- Be alert for venomous spiders such as black widows and brown recluses, which are known to inhabit bridge structures.
- Rattlesnakes are native to the area—close encounters have occurred, so protective gear is strongly advised.

Winter inspections pose unique risks. Many counties inspect bridges after a hard freeze when vegetation has died back, and snakes are less active. If walking on ice to access bridge undersides, proceed with extreme caution. Falling through ice can lead to hypothermia or worse—even if drowning isn't the immediate threat.

These are just a few of the safety considerations to keep in mind. For more detailed procedures and requirements, refer to your **Bridge Inspection Manual** provided during certification training.

We regularly update our training sessions to reflect regulatory changes and member feedback. We also offer flexibility to tailor sessions to your county's specific needs. So, if you are ready to get a training scheduled, you can contact me at NIRMA to learn more or to set up a session for your team. I can be reached via email at kcpawling@nirma.info or 402-310-4417.

Stay safe out there.

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

Winter Weather Preparedness: Preventing Property Damage and Slip & Fall Claims

As winter approaches, NIRMA reminds all members of the importance of **timely snow removal** and **proactive freezing weather precautions**. Severe cold and snow events can lead to costly property damage, transportation disruptions, power outages, and liability claims. Taking preventive action now can help protect your property, staff, and the public—and strengthen your defense in the event of a tort claim.

Frozen Pipe Prevention & Building Protection

Frozen pipes are a leading cause of winter property damage, often occurring in unoccupied buildings or going unnoticed until significant damage has occurred. To reduce the risk of water damage claims:

- **Maintain heat** in all buildings; keep thermostats above **60°F**.
- If heat is not maintained, **drain equipment** and **shut off the water supply**.
- Monitor **crawl spaces and basements** for cold spots.
- **Insulate exposed pipes** and seal cracks around doors and windows.
- **Turn off and drain outdoor faucets**; disconnect hoses.
- Ensure **access to water main shut-off valves**.
- Use **low-temperature alarms** to monitor vulnerable areas.
- Install **leak detection systems** that can automatically shut off water.
- Regularly **inspect buildings** for leaks and cold zones.
- Ensure **backup generators** are fueled and operational.
- **Inspect rooftop scupper drains** to ensure they are clear and free of debris.
- Watch for **ice dams and snow buildup** on roofs and gutters.

Coverage Reminder: NIRMA's coverage document includes a **Failure to Maintain Heat exclusion** for losses resulting from freezing when heat is not maintained or plumbing is not properly drained. Buildings with **wet pipe sprinkler systems** must maintain temperatures above **40°F** per **NFPA 25** standards to ensure fire protection and avoid water damage.

Timely Snow Removal & Slip and Fall Prevention

Snow and ice accumulation can create hazardous conditions and increase liability exposure. Timely and well-documented snow removal is essential:

- Begin snow removal at **entrances most used by staff and the public**.
- Maintain a **snow removal log** noting:
 - Start and completion times
 - Areas cleared
 - Ice melt application (location, time, and quantity)
- Perform **follow-up inspections** and document them.
- Focus on **problem areas** that don't receive sunlight or where melting snow refreezes.
- Push snow away from walkways to prevent runoff and refreezing.
- Keep **curb cuts and wheelchair ramps** clear—these are often buried by plows.

- Maintain **parking lots** as carefully as walkways; apply **salt or gravel** if full removal isn't possible.

In Case of a Slip and Fall:

- Conduct a **timely investigation**.
- Speak with the injured person and any witnesses.
- Collect **contact information**.
- Take **photographs** to document the condition at the time of the fall.
- Promptly retrieve and preserve **video footage** if available—this is invaluable for claims defense.

Final Thoughts

Taking proactive measures before and during winter weather events helps prevent costly claims, repairs, and operational downtime. Proper documentation and timely response are key to defending our members in the event of a tort claim.

For questions or assistance with documentation or claims, please contact me at **chad@nirma.info** or **1.800.642.6671**.