



Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

October 2025

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Volume 13, Number 10



We look forward to seeing you in Kearney October 23 -24!

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention and Safety Manager

Round 19 ASSIST Deadline is Less Than One Month Away

This is a friendly reminder that the deadline to submit a new NIRMA ASSIST Grant application, as well as reimbursement requests for the previous round, is fast approaching. Historically, the deadline has been November 1st at 5:00 PM Central Time, received at the NIRMA office (not postmarked). Since November 1st falls on a weekend this year, the deadline is extended to the next working day: Monday, November 3rd.

As of this writing, NIRMA has received 22 applications totaling over \$160,000. Based on past trends, most applications are expected to arrive in late October. Please be kind to your local loss prevention professionals and submit your applications early, it would be greatly appreciated. If you're considering applying, we strongly encourage you to do so. There is no penalty for being the last to submit and remember: you can't receive any funding if you don't submit an application.

The current ASSIST program funding level is \$150,000. These funds support loss prevention and safety grants, annual awards for outstanding loss prevention efforts and loss history, and Safety/Training scholarships for training not provided directly by NIRMA.

ASSIST applications may be submitted for:

- Loss prevention and safety-related items already purchased during the current ASSIST period (November 2, 2024 – November 1, 2025).
- Items not yet purchased, provided they are bought and a reimbursement request is submitted between November 1, 2025, and November 1, 2026.

Since its inception in 2008, the ASSIST program has returned over \$1.8 million to NIRMA members to support risk management and loss prevention. This program plays a vital role in keeping member employees safe, reducing liability, and reinforcing a culture of proactive risk management.

NIRMA takes great pride in our members' commitment to risk management, loss prevention, and safety. We continue to work tirelessly to provide you with the resources and support you need to maintain and enhance these efforts.

Please contact me if you have any questions about inspections, checklists, or training. As always, I can be reached at chad@nirma.info and 800.642.6671.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

By Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

The Value of Accident Review Committees

In today's law enforcement and corrections environments, agencies face increasing liability from workplace injuries and motor vehicle crashes. These incidents not only impact employee health and agency resources but also carry significant risk of litigation and public scrutiny. An effective tool to address these risks is the Accident Review Committee (ARC). An ARC is a group of agency personnel tasked with reviewing incidents, identifying preventable causes, and strengthening safety practices.

Why an Accident Review Committee Matters

Workplace injuries and vehicle crashes represent two of the most frequent—and most costly—loss exposures for sheriff's offices and jails. In fact, motor vehicle collisions are the number one source of loss in the NIRMA pool and have cost members \$6.2 million over the last five years. Even a single preventable incident can result in medical expenses, workers' compensation claims, vehicle repairs, lost work time, and, in serious cases, litigation. By systematically reviewing each incident, an ARC helps agencies distinguish between unavoidable accidents and those that could have been prevented through better training, supervision, equipment, or adherence to policy. This process transforms each incident into a learning opportunity rather than a missed warning sign.

Structure and Process

Establishing an ARC does not require complex bureaucracy. A typical committee meets monthly or quarterly and includes representatives from administration, operations, and training. Their role is not disciplinary, but **analytical and advisory**. The ARC should review:

- **All workplace injuries** – whether minor or serious, to determine root causes and whether policies and safety protocols were followed.
- **All motor vehicle crashes** – regardless of severity, since even minor collisions often reveal gaps in driver awareness or policy adherence.

After review, the ARC classifies each incident as **preventable** or **non-preventable**. A concise report is then forwarded to the Sheriff, listing all preventable incidents and recommending prevention strategies such as refresher training, policy revision, or equipment upgrades.

Role of the Sheriff

The Sheriff retains final authority to determine what corrective actions are appropriate for preventable incidents. Responses may range from counseling and retraining to formal discipline, depending on severity and circumstances. This clear division of responsibility ensures the ARC focuses on fact-finding and prevention, while the Sheriff maintains accountability and leadership.

Benefits to the Agency

The advantages of implementing an ARC are clear:

- **Improved safety culture** – Employees recognize that every incident is taken seriously and examined for lessons learned.
- **Reduced liability** – Preventable patterns are addressed before they escalate into major claims or lawsuits.
- **Transparency and consistency** – Decisions about incidents follow a structured process, reducing perceptions of favoritism or arbitrariness.
- **Operational readiness** – Fewer injuries and crashes mean more staff and vehicles remain available for mission-critical duties.

Conclusion

An Accident Review Committee is a proactive investment in officer safety, organizational accountability, and liability reduction. By carefully reviewing all workplace injuries and crashes, identifying preventable causes, and forwarding recommendations to the Sheriff for appropriate corrective action, agencies can turn costly setbacks into opportunities for improvement. In an era where public trust and financial stewardship are more important than ever, ARCs provide a practical, proven approach to managing risk and safeguarding both employees and the communities they serve. To request a copy of NIRMA's model ARC policy email Todd Duncan at 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

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.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

One Operator, One Plow, One Mission: Surviving Winter Safely

As winter weather approaches the horizon in Nebraska, the safety of snowplow operators becomes a critical concern for county road departments and risk managers. These workers face unique hazards—extreme cold, low visibility, fatigue, and isolation—all while performing essential services, generally alone, keeping roads passable and county residents safe and accessible to emergency services. Proactive safety measures are vital to prevent injuries, equipment damage, and costly liability claims.

1. Pre-Shift Planning and Communication

Before heading out, operators should receive and understand route plans, weather updates, and emergency contact protocols. Equipping each plow with GPS tracking and two-way radios ensures supervisors can monitor progress and respond quickly if an operator becomes stranded or incapacitated. Establishing regular check-in intervals helps support situational awareness and reinforces accountability.

2. Know your GPS limits

An important concern I have with GPS in Nebraska is that many rural areas in our member counties have no signal for your GPS systems. While some service providers say that their systems always stay online, I know firsthand that this is not completely true. Learn where these “dead spots” are in your operators’ areas. Know how long the machine location is offline while they are working in these areas. Monitor them closely and make sure that the GPS starts reporting when the operator makes it back to normal service areas.

3. Vehicle Readiness and Emergency Supplies

Snowplows must be thoroughly inspected before each shift. Key checks include tire condition, hydraulic systems, lighting, and defrosters. Operators should carry a winter emergency kit having high-visibility gear, blankets, food, water, a first-aid kit, and traction aids. Backup batteries or portable chargers for communication devices are also essential.

4. Cold Stress and Fatigue Management

Extended exposure to cold and long hours behind the wheel can lead to hypothermia, frostbite, and fatigue-related errors. Encourage operators to dress in moisture-wicking layers and insulated outerwear. Implement shift limits and mandatory rest breaks to reduce physical and mental strain. If possible, rotate routes or pair operators to reduce isolation and improve morale.

5. Visibility and Roadway Hazards

Winter storms reduce visibility and conceal hazards like stalled vehicles, downed power lines, or icy patches. Operators should use flashing beacons and auxiliary lighting to remain visible to other motorists. Training in hazard recognition and defensive driving in winter conditions is essential, especially for newer operators.

6. Post-Shift Debrief and Incident Reporting

After each shift, operators should debrief with supervisors to report road conditions, equipment issues, or near-miss incidents. This feedback loop helps refine safety protocols and ensures prompt maintenance. Encourage a culture of transparency and support, where operators feel comfortable reporting concerns without fear of retaliation.

Conclusion

Lone snowplow operators are frontline defenders during winter weather, staying at work or going in when other county employees go home. By investing in planning, equipment, training, and communication, counties can significantly reduce risk and protect these vital workers. Safety isn't just a policy, it's a commitment to the people who keep our roads safe, even in the harshest conditions.

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