NIRMA
Serving County Government

SAFETY SHORTS

General Safety • Highway Departments • Law Enforcement & Corrections

November 2026

GENERAL SAFETY

By: Chad Engle, Loss Prevention Manager and Safety Specialist

Money for Minutes!

This is your first reminder that your county or agency's safety committee meeting minutes must be submitted by **Monday, February 1, 2027, by 5:00 p.m. Central Time** to be eligible for a **Money for Minutes** award. Ordinarily the deadline is the last day of January, but this year the 31st falls on a Sunday, so we've extended the deadline to the following day.

To qualify for the drawing, safety committees must meet the following requirements:

- Conduct at least one safety committee meeting during each quarter.
- Discuss all incidents, events, injuries, and accidents, and develop recommendations to help prevent similar occurrences.
- Timely submit meeting minutes, including any recommendations, to NIRMA for review.

New this year: NIRMA has increased the number of awards to **TWENTY**! That means **twenty qualifying member safety committees** will each receive a **$500 award**. These funds are intended to support the committee's ongoing loss prevention and risk management efforts.

Award recipients will be announced in early February 2027. Good luck to all qualifying committees! Your commitment to reducing risk, preventing losses, and protecting employees is greatly appreciated and does not go unnoticed.

Winter Preparedness Inspections:
Preventing Water Damage Before It Happens

Did you miss the October 13 webinar on Winterization and Water Mitigation hosted by NIRMA's partners, CRL & Marsh? One of the key messages from that presentation was simple: **water damage is one of the most common, costly, and preventable property losses organizations face.**

When a pipe freezes and bursts, the resulting damage often extends far beyond the cost of repairs. Operations may be disrupted, employees displaced, records damaged, and public services interrupted. Fortunately, many of these losses can be prevented through routine inspections and timely maintenance.

NIRMA's Best Safety Practices for Members, specifically **Practice #8 – Perform Regular Documented Inspections of All Workplace Sites**, directly supports loss prevention efforts by helping members identify and correct property hazards before they become claims.

Now, while temperatures are still mild, is the time to inspect your facilities and address conditions that could lead to frozen pipes, roof leaks, and water intrusion during the winter months. Below are simple checklists for roof inspections and property freeze prevention.

Roof Inspection Checklist

Drainage Systems

- ✓ Ensure water can freely exit the roof.
- ✓ Verify roof drains and scuppers are free of debris and draining properly.
- ✓ Clean and secure gutters and downspouts.
- ✓ Confirm downspouts direct water away from buildings, entrances, and sidewalks.

Roof Membrane

- ✓ Repair punctures, tears, splits, and other damaged areas.
- ✓ Check for ponding water. Water should typically dissipate within 48 hours following a rain event.
- ✓ Ensure fasteners are secure and roofing materials are properly attached.

Edges, Parapets, and Flashing

- ✓ Inspect edge metal, coping, and flashing for damage or loose sections.
- ✓ Repair deficiencies that could allow wind-driven rain or snow intrusion.

Rooftop Equipment and Penetrations

- ✓ Ensure all roof penetrations, vents, HVAC units, and related equipment are properly sealed and secured.
- ✓ Address deteriorated sealants before winter weather arrives.

Interior Roof Inspection

- ✓ Look for signs of past water intrusion such as stains, discoloration, mold, or damaged ceiling materials.
- ✓ Identify areas where daylight is visible through the roof structure and investigate the source.

Property Freeze Prevention Checklist

- ✓ Test emergency generators and verify fuel supplies.
- ✓ Inspect buildings for openings that allow cold air infiltration.
- ✓ Service furnaces, boilers, and heating systems before winter.
- ✓ Maintain adequate air circulation throughout facilities.
- ✓ Drain exterior hose bibs and disconnect hoses.
- ✓ Winterize underground sprinkler and irrigation systems.
- ✓ Maintain indoor temperatures at a minimum of 40°F, even in unoccupied buildings.
- ✓ Monitor interior temperatures and plumbing systems during periods of extreme cold.
- ✓ Consider installing pipe heat trace or supplemental freeze protection in historically vulnerable areas.

An Ounce of Prevention

Nebraska will almost certainly experience periods of severe cold weather this winter. The question is whether facilities are prepared when they do.

A few hours spent inspecting, maintaining, and winterizing your buildings today can prevent weeks or even months of disruption later. Taking proactive steps now can help protect your buildings, preserve operations, and avoid the significant costs associated with water damage and freezing losses.

Remember, the time invested in preventing a loss is almost always far less than the time and expense required to recover from one.

ROAD/HIGHWAY DEPARTMENTS

By: KC Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

Your Side, Your Responsibility

Nothing on the motor grader should be past the center of the roadway except the portion of the moldboard necessary to perform the work.

Keeping the Motor Grader Where It Belongs

Operating a motor grader on a gravel road isn't like driving a pickup. You're operating a long, wide machine with an articulated frame, a moldboard that can extend well beyond the tires, and significant blind areas. But there's one basic rule that shouldn't get lost while you're concentrating on the crown, windrow, or shoulder:

Keep the motor grader on your side of the road.

And that means the entire machine.

Being "In the Middle" May Mean You're Already Too Far Over

One of the easiest habits to fall into when maintaining a gravel road is running the grader down the middle. From the operator's seat, everything may seem fine. You can see the road ahead, you're working the crown, and the motor grader may seem like it is placed properly.

The problem is that a motor grader is not a narrow machine. If your cab or operator position is near the center of the roadway, portions of the motor grader may already be occupying the other half of the road.

Don't judge your position based only on where you're sitting or where the front wheels are. Think about the full footprint of the motor grader, including the rear tandems, articulation, frame, tires, and attachments.

Picture What's Coming Over the Hill

Imagine you're grading toward the crest of a hill. You know you're there. You know you're operating a motor grader. You know you're working near the center. The driver coming over that hill doesn't.

That driver expects their half of the road to be available. If one of your front tires, rear tandems, or a significant portion of the motor grader is across center, the motorist may suddenly have only three choices: brake, head for the ditch, or hit the grader.

The same danger develops on curves, in dust, around vegetation, or anywhere sight distance is limited. The issue may not be that the motorist is doing something wrong. The issue is that the motorist may have nowhere to go once they realize the motor grader is occupying their side of the road.

“I Can See Them Coming” Isn’t Enough

Experienced operators sometimes develop confidence in being able to see traffic and move over when necessary. The problem is that both machines may be moving toward one another.

Your motors grader doesn’t react like a pickup. Moving a long, articulated machine back to the right, while controlling the moldboard and maintaining awareness of the shoulder and ditch, takes time and distance. Add a hill, curve, dust cloud, sun glare, distracted driver, or vehicle traveling faster than expected, and your safety margin can disappear quickly.

The safest place for the motor grader is already on the correct half of the roadway before you meet traffic, not moving there after you see traffic.

The Moldboard Is Different From the Machine

There will be operations where the moldboard needs to work at or slightly across the roadway center to properly maintain the crown and move material. That does not mean the grader needs to follow it.

Moldboard across the center: may be necessary for the work.

Tires, tandems, frame, cab, or grader body across center: you are occupying the opposing side.

Give Yourself Somewhere to Go

Staying on your side gives you something extremely valuable when something unexpected happens: room to react.

A vehicle comes around the corner too fast. A farm truck takes up more of the road than expected. Someone tries to pass when they shouldn’t. A driver doesn’t slow down.

Keeping the grader on the correct side gives both you and the motorist more space to solve the problem. Operating near or across the center takes that space away.

Nebraska’s Keep-Right Rule Matters Too

This isn’t just about good operating practice. Nebraska’s basic rules of the road require vehicles on roadways of sufficient width to operate on the right half of the roadway, subject to specific exceptions. Routine grading work should not be treated as permission to occupy the opposing side of an open road.

For the operator, the practical lesson is simple: treat the center of the roadway like you expect every other driver to treat it. You wouldn’t want an oncoming semi, tractor, combine, or pickup occupying part of your side of the road just because the driver could see you coming. A motorist shouldn’t encounter a motor grader doing it either.

Before Your Next Pass

As you're grading, periodically ask yourself: Where is my entire machine in relation to the center of this road?

Don't think only about your front tires, the cab, or the blade. Think about the grader from bumper to bumper. If you're approaching a hill or curve, anticipate the traffic you can't see yet. If you're working the crown, position the grader so the moldboard does the reaching, not the machine.

If conditions don't allow you to perform the work while safely accommodating traffic, proper temporary traffic control, flagging, or a road closure needs to become part of the operation.

Operator Checklist

- ✓ Is the entire motor grader, except the necessary portion of the moldboard, on the right half of the road?
- ✓ Am I positioned safely before reaching a hill, curve, dust cloud, or other limited-sight area?
- ✓ Are the grader's headlights, warning lights, slow-moving vehicle emblem, and moldboard-end flags visible and clean?
- ✓ Do I have enough room to respond if an oncoming driver does something unexpected?
- ✓ Do the conditions require signs, flaggers, or a road closure before I continue?

Keep the grader on your side. If something needs to reach across center to do the work, let it be the moldboard, not the grader.

You may have thousands of hours behind the controls. You may know your grader and your roads better than anyone. But you can't control what's coming around the next curve or over the next hill. You can control where your machine is.

When you meet an oncoming vehicle, it isn't the time to figure out how to get back onto your side. You should already be there.

Reference: Neb. Rev. Stat. § 60-6,131

LAW ENFORCEMENT/CORRECTIONS

By: Todd Duncan, Law Enforcement and Safety Specialist

Civil Disputes and Child Custody Calls: Maintain Neutrality, Protect Safety, and Know Your Authority

Civil disputes can quickly place deputies between parties who expect law enforcement to decide ownership, possession, residency, or parental rights. In these situations, deputies should take enforcement action only when necessary to address a law violation or immediate safety threat. Otherwise, they should maintain neutrality, focus on preserving the peace, and avoid using law enforcement authority to resolve disputes that must be settled through the courts.

The Issue

Property disputes, landlord-tenant disagreements, repossessions, evictions, civil standbys, and child custody conflicts frequently involve competing claims of legal authority. Deputies may be shown court documents, asked to remove a person or property, or pressured to enforce one party's interpretation of ownership or custody.

The Sheriff's Office must remain neutral when no crime or imminent disturbance is present. Deputies may preserve the peace, mediate impartially, investigate possible offenses, and refer the parties to the courts, attorneys, or other appropriate resources.

Child custody disputes require additional attention because the child's welfare is the primary concern and some conduct may constitute a criminal violation. When no court order exists, natural or adoptive parents generally have equal custody rights, and deputies must not intervene on behalf of either parent.

Why It Is Important

Improper intervention may result in a deputy:

- Taking sides in a private dispute or assisting with an unauthorized repossession, eviction, removal of property, or enforcement of visitation rights.
- Removing a person from a residence or hotel room without proper legal authority.
- Acting on an outdated, invalid, misunderstood, or out-of-state custody order.
- Physically removing a child when the circumstances do not authorize immediate intervention.
- Failing to recognize criminal conduct or a situation in which a child is seriously endangered.

The greatest risk often arises when a deputy takes enforcement action before clearly establishing the legal basis for doing so. Conversely, treating every conflict as "a civil matter" may result in a failure to investigate a criminal offense or protect an endangered child.

Recommendations for Mitigating Risk

1. **Slow the call down and define the deputy's role**. Hear both sides, determine whether a crime or immediate safety threat exists, and explain that maintaining order does not include deciding disputed ownership, tenancy, custody, or visitation rights.
2. **Verify before acting**. Read available court orders and attempt to confirm their authenticity and current status. Consult the County Attorney's Office when the civil or criminal nature of the matter is unclear, when an out-of-state custody order is involved, or before taking physical custody of a child unless immediate protection is necessary.
3. **Use the least intrusive lawful response**. Focus on de-escalation, protection of the child, preservation of the peace, appropriate referrals, and enforcement of clearly established criminal violations. Record the encounter using available body-worn or in-car cameras and complete a report sufficient to document the parties' claims, documents reviewed, safety assessment, consultations, decisions, and actions taken.

Don't have a policy covering civil standbys or child custody disputes? NIRMA has you covered. Contact Todd Duncan at tduncan@nirma.info for free copies of these model policies.

Stay professional. Stay accountable. Protect the badge.

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