



Safety Shorts

General Safety, Highway, & Law Enforcement

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NATIONAL COURTESY MONTH – September

It takes little effort to extend kindness. The entire month of September gives ample opportunity to practice being kind. It's National Courtesy Month!

The word courteous comes from the Middle English word 'kindness,' which means 'noble deeds' or 'courtesy'. One of the greatest novelists in the English Language, Henry James, once said: "Three things in human life are important: The first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; the third is to be kind." A single kind word keeps one warm for three winters – Chinese Proverb.

For More information: <https://jensperspectiveblog.com/2022/08/27/national-courtesy-month-september/>



We look forward to seeing you in Kearney October 24 -25!

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

By K C Pawling, Road Safety and Loss Prevention Specialist

County Road Back to School Challenges

Well, if you're a parent you may be recovering from the back-to-school push to get everything in place needed for your child's return to the classroom. While some of you could be recovering from that, others could have a new stress, the stress of your child becoming a new driver.

County road departments may be receiving calls from concerned parents of a new student driver, making you aware of everything that can be perceived as a hazard to their newly permitted student driver. While these calls are not generally fun in nature, they can be great reminders of what you as a department should be doing moving into the new season, whether it is a new school season or the season of fall.

Along with the new drivers, school buses are back out on the roads. Bus drivers may be learning all new routes for the year, and they may not be familiar with the areas they are assigned to operate the school buses. So, the following are a few things we can do in county road departments to make sure our drivers, new or seasoned, can travel safely to and from school.

- Have a short safety meeting in the road department to remind employees to operate their equipment with a greater focus on safety relating to school drivers. Remind them to use the advance warning signs when blading or doing any work on the county roads.
- Contact the school districts in your county and get maps of all the school bus routes that have been established for this year. They may or may not be the same as they were last year. Just don't assume they are.
- Drive those bus routes checking them for sign deficiencies. Make sure all the road signs are in good condition and installed correctly. Take note and CORRECT any sign that is obstructed by trees, shrubbery OR installed incorrectly.
- When you identify and remove any shrubbery, be sure to adequately spray it to prevent regrowth. Fall is a great time to spray the shrubbery while it is preparing to go dormant for the winter season.
- Double check child pickup locations for whether they need school bus stop-ahead signs. Are there any hills or other obstructions blocking the visibility of the location? Remember line of sight height is 3.5 feet from the road surface.
- Have conversations with the bus drivers themselves. This is not only good public relations, but it also develops a relationship so they may be willing to communicate any dangerous conditions they find with the road department.
- If you find any corn growing in the county road right-of-way, contact the landowner and notify them to remove it immediately. Make sure you take the opportunity to have a conversation with the farmer responsible for planting in the right-of-way. Help them understand that this is a practice that is not only a potential liability for the county, but for them also. If the landowner does not follow through, remove the corn and talk to your county attorney about collecting the costs.
- Finally, with the new bus routes in hand, adjust your snow removal routes as needed. Contact your local postmaster and identify any changes in postal routes too. As most of us know, the mail and bus routes are a priority for snow removal routes.

The new school season can be very exciting for the kids new to driving and stressful for the parents of those children. Let's do our part as a road department to keep them as safe as possible while they are experiencing life.

And while *YOU* are experiencing life, if there is anything I can help you with, do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at 402-310-4417 or kcpawling@nirma.info.

GENERAL SAFETY

By Chad Engle, Loss Prevention Manager and Safety Specialist

Membership Eligibility and Responsibility

Recently, the loss prevention staff completed the final deliveries of the new NIRMA Safety Committee Resource Handbooks, so all members should now have their paper copies in hand. In addition to the paper copies, the Safety Committee Resource Handbook is available for download from the Interact portal. The Interact portal is password protected so you will need to have your contact person or safety committee chair log in on the NIRMA website to access the handbook. The Safety Committee Resource Handbook is your guide for the operations and procedures of your county or agency safety committee. As you know, NIRMA has ten Best Safety Practices for Members, and #2 is: "Establish a safety committee and conduct (no less frequent than) quarterly meetings."

In addition to the recommendations made in NIRMA's Best Safety Practices for Members, NIRMA makes recommendations by way of regular onsite assessments and inspections. We assess our members' safety committees, road sign programs, highway department shop safety programs, jail policies and procedures and law enforcement policies and procedures, among other areas of operations. Assessing our membership is one way that NIRMA fulfills its responsibility to protect all our members and their funds in the member fund balance.

When a county or county-related public agency chooses to join the Nebraska Intergovernmental *Risk Management* Association, they have done so knowing that they have a duty to protect themselves from preventable losses, thereby protecting too the other members of the program from the financial harm associated with loss. Every recommendation made by NIRMA to a member is intended to reduce the risk of unnecessary loss to that member and protect the program's overall financial security. These recommendations are not made to "check a box" or provide the appearance of risk management, risk management is taken very seriously as outlined in NIRMA's Mission Statement:

"NIRMA, in partnership with its member Nebraska counties and other select public agencies, leads the way in providing innovative and cost-effective insurance coverages, sound risk management strategies, and comprehensive loss prevention and safety services."

There is a saying here at NIRMA in connection with assessments, that we do not require anything except that our members abide by the membership agreement they have signed and pay their premium contributions. Everything else is a recommendation. We say this because our members chose to be here, and we presume that they are on-board and are taking the steps required to actively manage the risk in their counties and agencies.

NIRMA becomes concerned when repeated re-inspection and re-assessment results make it clear that a member is not taking steps to actively manage their risks. Failing to manage risk results in increased losses, increased costs, legal liabilities and an overall negative impact on the member fund balance.

To maintain their membership a county or agency must meet the NIRMA Membership Eligibility Criteria. Criteria number 3 is strongly linked to active risk management and states that a member must present a good risk profile based on the regular activities and functions of the agency, have acceptable claims experience, and is accepting of the risk management and loss control approaches employed by NIRMA.

When a member county or agency continuously disregards risk management recommendations made via their assessments and inspections, they not only put themselves at risk, but also the other members of the program. By doing so a member may reach a point where they no longer meet the eligibility criteria. NIRMA values each member, but we also have a duty to protect the overall membership and well-being of the program and to do this our members need to recognize and support active loss control and risk management.

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

Training Safely

In last month's Safety Short, we discussed the important role training plays in enhancing safety and reducing risk. In this installment, we will address the importance of conducting training safely. One of the most effective means of teaching is using hands-on or practical training. But with this type of training comes an increase in the potential for injury or death. Tragically, there are many examples across the country, including in Nebraska, where law enforcement and corrections officers have been seriously injured or killed during training exercises. In fact, some of the more frequent and costly workers' compensation claims we see at NIRMA involve injuries sustained during training, particularly training such as defensive tactics, use of force scenarios, or activities involving intense physical exertion, *i.e.* annual fitness testing for specialized teams. The following are just a few examples:

- March 1999- A Nebraska State Patrol Trooper was accidentally shot and killed by a fellow officer during a defensive tactics training exercise.
- 2021- A Nebraska deputy sheriff suffered a devastating, career-ending cardiovascular event while participating in annual physical fitness testing. In addition to the physical injury suffered by the employee, the incident resulted in a \$1 million workers' compensation claim to the NIRMA II pool.
- August 2022- A Washington D.C. officer was accidentally shot and killed during a training exercise at a library. The trainer, a retired police lieutenant, who fired the shot was indicted.
- November 2022- A Texas police officer was critically wounded when she was shot in the face during an active shooter training exercise at a school.
- April 2024- An Ohio corrections lieutenant died after he was shot during a training exercise at a corrections training academy. The officer who fired the shot has been charged criminally.

These are just a few examples of catastrophic law enforcement and corrections training injuries. However, non-life-threatening injuries are far more common and can have serious consequences both physically for the employee and financially for the NIRMA pools. Whether it is a sprained ankle suffered while running or a shoulder injury sustained during defensive tactics, these types of training injuries can jeopardize an employee's health, negatively impact their career, and result in large financial losses.

The good news is, nearly all training injuries are preventable. The risk of injury or death during training can be greatly reduced if not eliminated by taking the necessary precautions. The following are some practical steps agencies can take to reduce training risks, particularly when conducting hands on or force-on-force training:

Lesson Plans

Require instructors to submit training lesson plans prior to training. Lesson plans are particularly important for hands on or force-on-force training and should include training goals, potential risks or hazards involved, safety rules, and steps that will be

taken to eliminate or minimize risk while ensuring participant safety. Lesson plans should be reviewed by a supervisor or command officer for approval prior to training.

Safety Officers

Designate one or more training safety officers to oversee safety before, during, and after the training. Ideally, the training safety officer is separate from the instructor(s) so they can focus entirely on safety. Responsibilities include pre-training site inspection; ensuring the proper signs and barriers are in place to control access into training area; identifying and addressing any hazards; continuously monitoring training activities and enforcing safety rules; stopping training immediately when dangerous conditions arise; ensuring first aid equipment is onsite; ensuring signed waivers have been obtained from citizens or volunteers acting as role players; ensuring the proper notifications have been made; and conducting scripted safety briefings.

Scripted Safety Briefings

Safety briefings should be conducted with everyone involved prior to the training, including role players or citizen volunteers (no surprises). It is highly recommended that instructors and safety officers use a safety briefing script for consistency and completeness that includes the following:

- Trainer and safety officer introduction
- Learning objectives
- Safety rules:
 - PPE requirements (eye/ear protection, body armor, hi-vis vests, etc.)
 - Prohibited activities including off-script behavior, horseplay, unnecessary roughness, or improvisation
 - Training site boundaries
 - Known hazards and rules to avoid them
 - Signal word or hand sign to stop training due to unsafe conditions (anyone should be able to stop training for a safety issue)
 - Designated radio channels
 - Location of emergency and first aid equipment
- Weapons restrictions when applicable
 - No functional weapons or ammo allowed in training area (plastic training weapons are well worth the cost)
 - Weapons safety checks (anytime a student enters the training area)
 - Weapons configured to fire simulated marking rounds, a/k/a Simunitions, should be clearly marked with colored tape or by other means
 - Functional firearms using blanks to simulate gunfire prohibited
 - Pre-existing conditions- Instructors or safety officers should identify and discuss privately any pre-existing issues that may preclude an employee from safely participating in the training.

Defensive Tactics (DT) Training Precautions

Consideration should be given to physical size, abilities, and limitations when pairing up employees during force-on-force or DT training. Proper warmups, stretching, and attire/footwear can also help minimize the risk of injury. This is one area where

instructors and safety officers need to closely watch for and promptly address off-script behavior, horseplay, unnecessary roughness, or improvisation.

Training Notifications

Instructors should notify the following individuals or groups when conducting practical or scenario-based training outside of agency facilities or property:

- Communications center
- On duty supervisor
- Surrounding people or groups that may be impacted

After Action Reviews

Trainers, safety officers, and participants, if applicable, should conduct documented after action reviews of training exercises or drills to identify any concerns as well as adjustments that may be needed to ensure that future training is as safe as reasonably practicable. These are no fault reviews that seek to answer five key questions: 1) what was supposed to happen, 2) what was the reality, 3) what went well, 4) what did not go well, and 5) what should be changed for next time.

Annual Physicals

Law enforcement officers experience cardiovascular disease at significantly higher rates than the general public. It is therefore highly recommended that agencies offer annual health screenings to its officers, particularly cardiovascular screening. These screenings are especially important for members of specialized teams, i.e. SWAT or search and rescue, that are required to participate in annual fitness testing or training that involves intense physical exertion.

Conclusion

There is really no substitute for high-quality hands-on training, particularly in the areas of emergency vehicle operations, pursuits, and use of force. However, this type of training almost always involves higher risk. By acknowledging these risks and consistently applying the above recommendations, agencies can create a more effective and secure training environment. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and feedback will help identify potential hazards and refine practices.

Please contact Todd at 531-510-7446 or tduncan@nirma.info if you have any questions or to request training.