

THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAFFIC SAFETY SUMMIT

SPECIAL REPORT:

PARTNERSHIPS ADVANCING PROTECTION



**NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS
MEMORIAL FUND**

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The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) held a first-of-its-kind, day-long summit, [The National Law Enforcement Traffic Safety Summit](#), to address the pervasive issue of law enforcement deaths and injuries stemming from traffic-related incidents. This summit, sponsored by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, and through our partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), brought together experts from across the country and from a diverse roster of professional organizations. The focus was on the key issues involved in roadway safety for our nation's law enforcement officers. This significant event was held in the Verizon theater of the National Law Enforcement Museum in Washington, DC, and was also offered virtually.

This Summit came on the heels of, and was informed by, NLEOMF's proprietary *Mid-Year Law Enforcement Officers Fatalities Report*, coupled with unsettling data from the 2021 *End of Year Law Enforcement Officers Fatalities Report*. The Summit served as a call to action following one of the deadliest years in law enforcement traffic-related deaths in recent history. For the first time on a national platform, representatives from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Sheriffs' Association, the National Policing Institute's National Law Enforcement Roadway Safety Program (NLERSP), the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA), the Centers for Disease Control's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (CDC-NIOSH), the Emergency Responder Safety Institute (ERSI) and Below-100 came together under the same roof to address the dangers police officers face when working on our roadways and behind the wheel. Adding to this powerful ensemble was attorney, risk management expert, and California Highway Patrol Officer, Gordon Graham.

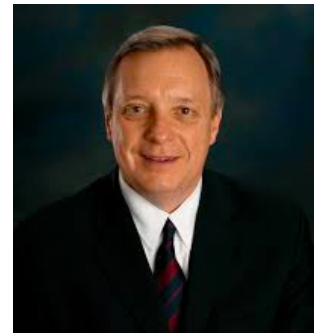
This highly respected group of industry experts represented a strong coalition of authorities in law enforcement traffic safety, who joined for this day-long examination of the problems and the solutions to the seemingly increasing dangers our first responders face on America's highways and roadways.

This important Summit was kicked off by direct messages from United States Senators Dick Durbin (IL) and Tammy Duckworth (IL), both of whom supported a new infrastructure bill ("Move Over Law"), designed to increase safety for all first responders and highway workers.

"The Law Enforcement Traffic Safety Summit was a very powerful experience. The content provided really hit home, and I will be disseminating what I learned to my constituents ASAP."

—Aaron Slater, CEO,
ReLEntless Defender

Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Springfield, is the 47th U.S. Senator from the State of Illinois, the state's senior senator, and the convener of Illinois' bipartisan congressional delegation. Durbin also serves as the Senate Majority Whip, the second highest ranking position among the Senate Democrats. Senator Durbin has been elected to this leadership post by his Democratic colleagues every two years since 2005. Durbin serves as Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and sits on the Appropriations and Agriculture Committees. Elected to the U.S. Senate on November 5, 1996, and re-elected in 2002, 2008, 2014, and 2020, Durbin fills the seat left vacant by the retirement of his long-time friend and mentor, U.S. Senator Paul Simon. Senator Durbin makes approximately 50 round trips a year between Washington and Illinois.



“It’s a dangerous situation for first responders responding to any issue on the side of the road, whether it’s on an interstate or a rural two lane.”

—**Senator Dick Durbin**

U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth is an Iraq War Veteran, Purple Heart recipient and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was among the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Duckworth served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2014. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2016 after representing Illinois's Eighth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives for two terms.



“It is important to do everything we can to keep our law enforcement officers safe on our nation’s roadways.”

—**Senator Tammy Duckworth**

The messages from the two senators were followed by former Chief of the Orlando Police Department and current United States Representative, Congresswoman Val Demings of Florida's 10th District. Representative Demings, who appeared in-person, addressed the need to do all we can to make it safer for those who serve, saying, "We stand here because many did not make it back home."

Congresswoman Demings spoke about her experiences as a chief executive on a police department and encouraged the participants to action stating, "We must do everything in our power to protect those who protect us!" Adding that the Federal Government has a role to play in doing so.

She also remarked on the importance of officers wearing their seat belts and wearing high visibility reflective vests. Congresswoman Demings wrapped up her informed remarks by saying, "Safety must be a mindset."

All three of the members of Congress who spoke mention new technologies and alerts systems that have shown promise in raising driver awareness and reducing roadway incursions.

Congresswoman Valdez B. Demings was born in Jacksonville, Florida to James and Elouise Butler. The first in her family to graduate college, she worked as a social worker, then joined the Orlando Police Department. After a 27-year career she was selected to serve as Chief for the Orlando Police Department—the first woman to hold that position. During her tenure as Chief, Demings reduced violent crime by 40% and founded new community engagement programs including "Operation Positive Direction," a youth mentoring program. In 2016 she won election to Congress in Florida's 10th District, and today serves on the House Intelligence, Judiciary, and Homeland Security Committees. In addition, Rep. Demings is a House Regional and Assistant Whip, Vice Chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, Co-Chair of Candidate Recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and served on the Elections Security Taskforce. Congresswoman Demings is married to Jerry Demings, who serves as the Orange County Mayor. The couple has 3 sons and 5 grandchildren.



U.S. Congresswoman
Val Demings
*Representing Florida's 10th
Congressional District*

"We stand here because many did not make it back home."

—Congresswoman Val Demings

SESSION #1: WHAT IS KILLING OFFICERS ON OUR ROADWAYS: A REVIEW OF THE DATA

Nick Breul, a Senior Project Manager from the NLEOMF, who works on a cooperative grant with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), presented on sobering law enforcement fatality statistics. Breul focused his lecture on the five-year study of fatal crashes that he completed, highlighting the 100% increase in struck-by crashes in 2021.

Apart from discussing the breakdown of data drawn from the National Law Enforcement Memorial Funds Year-End Law Enforcement Officers Fatality Reports related to the 242 deaths in traffic-related incidents that occurred from 2017-2021, Nick also provided some startling statistics regarding seat belt use in fatal vehicle crashes.



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- According to the research conducted, 47% of officers involved in vehicle crashes were not wearing their seat belt.
- The dangers of deploying Tire Deflation Devices (TDD), citing that 14 officers who were killed in deployment related events over the five-year period studied. Nick added that a few of those officers deploying the TDDs were killed by fellow officers involved in the pursuit.

This presentation set the stage by establishing the many dangers officers face and reminded the audience, that his data does not count, the injuries, the property damage only crashes or the near misses.

[Nick Breul Presentation](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://destinationzero.org/winners-finalists/>

<https://nleomf.org/officer-safety-and-wellness/vehicle-roadside-safety/>

Nick Breul is a Senior Project Manager here at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) and is the former Director of its Officer Safety, Wellness and Research Division, where his team did in-depth analysis of line of duty deaths, especially traffic related causes. Previously, he served on the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) of Washington, D.C. for 26 years, serving as a detective, a patrol sergeant, homicide supervisor, and he retired as a lieutenant, managing the department's Traffic Safety Branch. There he oversaw the Major Crash Investigative Unit, as well as all of the traffic focused enforcement and public safety education initiatives.



Nick Breul
Senior Project Manager,
National Law Enforcement
Officers Memorial Fund

SESSION #2: TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (TIMS) AND THE STRUCK-BY REPORTING TOOL

Todd Leiss of the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Training Coordinator for ERSI. Todd's presentation brought to light national data on first responders and towing and recovery personnel who have been killed in roadside crashes and struck-by crashes. Todd showed several videos, one of which depicted an officer on a two-lane roadway conducting a traffic stop and approaching the vehicle on the driver's side (left side) placing himself at great risk, but also interrupting traffic as cars had to swerve into oncoming traffic to avoid hitting him. This highlighted one of the many key safety elements that would be mentioned by nearly all the presenters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Todd urged the participants "To Be the Voice." To speak up about safety and avoid the common pitfalls of just doing things one way because; "That's the way we have always done it."
- "Traffic is our enemy" and that while on the roadway officers must, "Expect the unexpected." Todd listed the various forms of "D-Drivers" who pose a great risk to officers and other first responders. Drunk, drugged, distracted and Drowsy among some of those he listed.

Todd concluded his informative presentation by showing the national map that tracks struck-by crashes on the ERSI website and by showing the new Struck-by Reporting Portal.

[Todd Leiss Presentation Part 1](#)

[Todd Leiss Presentation Part 2](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.respondersafety.com/>

Todd Leiss is the Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Coordinator in the Traffic Engineering and Operations Department for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC). Prior to becoming the PTC TIM Coordinator, Mr. Leiss worked as an Operations Center Duty Officer for more than 15 years in the PTC Traffic Operations Center. Prior to his tenure at the PTC he worked as an emergency dispatcher at the Derry Township Police Department and at Lebanon County 911. Todd is a former volunteer firefighter, emergency medical technician and hazardous material team member and is currently Wreckmaster 6/7A certified. Todd is a 2018 graduate of the I-95 Corridor Coalition Senior Leadership Operations Academy, a 2019 graduate of the I-95 Corridor Coalition Freight Academy and was named the 2018 ITS-Pennsylvania Person of the Year, the 2019 Cumberland Valley Volunteer Fireman's Past President Joseph Bukowski Responder Safety Award, He was also the 2022 Pennsylvania Turnpike's "Turnpiker", Employee of the Year. Todd currently leads the statewide traffic incident management program, Pennsylvania Traffic Incident Management Enhancement (PennTIME) and serves as the Assistant Director of Training for the Emergency Responder Safety Institute/Respondersafety.com.

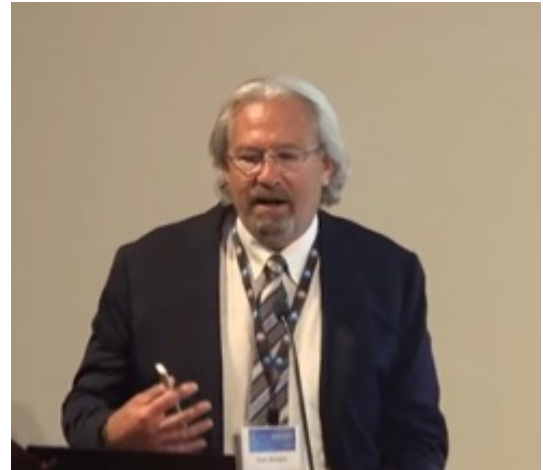


Todd Leiss
*Traffic Incident Management
Coordinator, Pennsylvania
Turnpike Commission*

SESSION #3: BELOW-100, ITS HISTORY AND THE FIVE TENETS

Retired Michigan State Police Inspector, Tom Dirlam and lead Below-100 instructor. Below-100 is a training program for law enforcement officers to provide them information and a safety mindset, designed to instill a culture of safety in law enforcement. Tom's impassioned presentation touched on several elements of police culture that need to change and reminded the audience that if it is "predicable it is preventable."

He showed several shocking and poignant video clips that accentuated the need for "instilling a culture of safety" in law enforcement. He presented the audience with examples of how excessive speed, not wearing your seat belt, and being complacent can lead to disaster.



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- "Courageous conversations" when they see a fellow officer doing something that increases their risk.
- The Five Tenets of Below-100; "Wear your vest, Wear your seat belt, Watch your speed, WIN-What's Important Now, and Complacency kills."

All those critical safety measures were discussed at length throughout the day by nearly all the presenters and panelists.

[Tom Dirlam Presentation](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.below100.org/>

Tom Dirlam retired after 31 years with the Michigan State Police as the Assistant Deputy Director of the Administrative Services Bureau. He was first assigned to the Owosso Post and then spent 22 years in the Forensic Science Division, including two years as a liaison to the Detroit Police Department and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. After two years at Headquarters in the Support Services Bureau as the Assistant Deputy Director, he was reassigned to First District Headquarters (Lansing) as the Assistant District Commander. In August of 2015 he transferred back to Headquarters to the Field Services Bureau and in February of 2016 to the Administrative Services Bureau. He is a graduate of the 225th Session of the FBI National Academy and the 117th Class of the Northwestern University Traffic Institute School of Police Staff and Command. He has been a Below 100 instructor since 2013, a National Core Instructor since 2014 and in August 2016 he was appointed to the Below 100 Board of Directors to serve as Treasurer.



Tom Dirlam
*Retired Inspector,
Michigan State Police,
Below-100 Core Instructor*

SESSION #4: PANEL DISCUSSION - SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY

Session #4 was a panel discussion involving four highly regarded experts in law enforcement traffic safety. This panel discussion was moderated by Tim Burrows of the GHSA. Tim, a former member of the Toronto, Canada Police Service, elicited safety strategies and leadership approaches to officer safety from a three-member panel. Retired Oro, Arizona Chief of Police Daniel Sharp representing IACP, retired Snohomish County Sheriff's Office Undersheriff, Robert Beidler, representing NLERSP and retired Sheriff of Choctaw County, Oklahoma, John Whetsel, representing the NSA, all shared their combined 125 years of experience on leadership and successful solutions to reducing traffic-related incidents.

Tim led the panel as each member spoke about their approaches and experiences as they worked to keep their officers safe.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Chief Sharp was first to comment stating that, "leaders must set the example and have a responsibility to take care of those doing the job."
- Undersheriff Beidler shared his dedication to safety after attending the FBI's National Academy and plainly stated, "We have to better."
- Sheriff Whetsel recounted how he dedicated himself to safety and instituted mandatory seat belt and vest policies, while also requiring an annual vehicle recertification.

The panel members spoke about the strategies they employed to make their officers safer.

- Chief Sharp praised the virtues of Below-100.
- Undersheriff Beidler spoke about being "relentless" as you constantly push for safety.
- All spoke of exercising leadership and setting the example as "you communicated officer safety to your troops."
- Undersheriff Beidler also spoke about the use of Telematics in his police cars and how that monitoring system was successful in reducing crashes, saving lives, and money.
- The fact is that it is more dangerous to give an officer a car rather than a gun, especially if you do not regularly train with on its use.
- Chief Sharp brought up the issue of distracted driving and the need to minimize distractions in the patrol car, including personal cell phones.
- Sheriff Whetsel offered some final thoughts on enhanced penalties to reduce the criminal behavior that often leads to law enforcement traffic-related injuries and fatalities.

Tim closed the panel discussion by reminding the participants that safety, must be a mindset and stated, "What we are doing is not working." We must do better.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.policinginstitute.org/national-law-enforcement-roadway-safety-program/>

Tim Burrows was a sworn police officer for 25 years with experience in front line operations, primary response, detective operations, traffic enforcement, investigations, and supervision. Most of his career was spent in traffic operations as a motor officer with roles in enforcement, collision investigation, communications, and supervising safety program delivery. In 2019, Tim was appointed as the National Law Enforcement Liaison Program Manager for the Governors Highway Safety Association where he serves as an advisor to a national network of state law enforcement liaisons providing technical assistance, training and guidance and is a representative at national meetings promoting traffic safety. His role as the National Law Enforcement Liaison Manager allows him to support the nation's 200 plus Law Enforcement Liaisons as they advance the life saving strategies and priorities created within their state highway safety plans. He is a former resident of Central Florida and now resides in Georgia with his wife and three teenaged children.



Tim Burrows
*National Law Enforcement
Liaison Program Manager
Governors Highway Safety
Association*

Daniel G. Sharp served as Chief of Police for the Town of Oro Valley from January 2000 for 20 years. Prior to his appointment, Chief Sharp spent over 21 years with the Tucson Police Department. Chief Sharp has served as an adjunct faculty member for Law Enforcement Programs at Pima Community College and as an adjunct lecturer at the University of Arizona. He was routinely requested to lecture on public policy related to Community Policing and Ethics. Chief Sharp is a graduate of the 190th Session of the FBI National Academy. In 2014, he was awarded the J. Stannard Baker Award for 'outstanding lifetime contributions to highway safety' and he is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (appointed by the President of the IACP as Chair of the Highway Safety Committee). Sharp currently serves on the Executive Leadership Group for the Federal Highway Administration and the Law Enforcement Executives Advisory Committee for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) National Board. During his tenure at Oro Valley, Sharp chaired the Pima County Wireless Integrated Network (PCWIN) Executive Management Committee, which was responsible for the architecture, procurement, logistics and governance of the countywide radio system. He was a founding member of Pima Regional SWAT and EOD and served on its Board of Directors. Also, he was appointed to the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission by three different Governors and served as Chair for two years. He served on the Arizona Automobile Theft Authority for nearly twenty years.



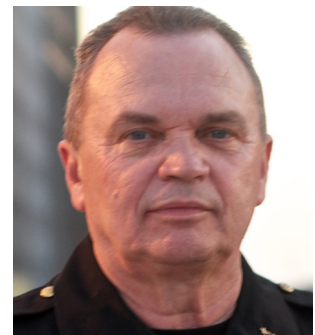
Daniel Sharp
*Retired Chief of Police
and IACP Highway Safety
Committee Chairman*

Rob Beidler is a 1990 graduate of Western Washington University with a degree in Business and Human Resource Management. In 1991 he began his Law Enforcement career in Snohomish County. With the Sheriff's Office he held various positions in Patrol, SWAT, Motors, and Special Operations. He was promoted into Command Staff in 2008. There, he served as the Chief of Operations, Admin Services Chief and Corrections Chief. He retired as the Undersheriff in 2019. Rob currently works for Snohomish County Public Utility. There, he is the Senior Manager in charge of Safety, Security, and Emergency Management. In 2017 the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office was nationally recognized for their efforts in safety. They received the National Governor's Highway Safety Special Achievement Award and the National Officer Safety and Wellness Award. Rob has traveled extensively teaching Executives and Industry Leaders the value of developing a safety culture. That teaching experience is centered around the safety of those that work with you and the safety of those you serve. He and his organization are deeply invested in safety and nurturing a safety culture. Their belief is that with a sound safety platform, committed leadership, training programs, technology, and partnerships you can drastically improve the odds of getting your people home to their families every day.



Rob Beidler
*Retired Undersheriff and
Traffic Safety Expert for the
National Policing Institute's
National Law Enforcement
Roadway Safety Program
(NLERSP)*

Capping off a 50-year law enforcement career, **John Whetsel** retired on March 1, 2017, in his 21st year and sixth term as Oklahoma County Sheriff. John is a nationally recognized law enforcement consultant, traffic safety advocate, trainer, and speaker. Whetsel began his law enforcement career in 1967 as a night records clerk with the Midwest City, OK Police Dept. During his career he served as Jones, OK Chief of Police before joining Choctaw, OK Police in 1973 where he served as Police Chief for 21 years before being elected Sheriff. Sheriff Whetsel continues his work in traffic safety and chairs the National Sheriffs' Association Traffic Safety Committee, serves on the NSA Government Affairs Committee and is a member of the MADD National Law Enforcement Advisory Board and the Lyft national Safety Advisory Committee. He serves on the Federal Highways Administration Traffic Incident Management Executive Leadership Group and has served on working groups for the National Sheriffs' Association, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Governors' Highway Safety Association, and International Association of Chiefs of Police. Sheriff Whetsel is the recipient of many honors, including the Governor's Highway Safety Assn Trail Blazer Award, the Michael J Garner Oklahoma Traffic Advocate Award, and the J. Stannard Baker Excellence in Traffic Safety Award presented by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Sheriffs' Assn.



John Whetsel
*Retired Sheriff and Chairman
of the National Sheriff's
Associations' Traffic Safety
Committee*

SESSION #5: GORDON GRAHAM ON HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT CAN IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY

Session #5 featured an individual known throughout the national law enforcement community for his energetic and eye-opening presentations on safety and risk management. Gordon Graham, who has been working in risk management for over forty years, took the audience through a journey to understanding “Real” risk management.

Gordon spoke on several topics that illustrated risk management and our failure to properly prepare for those things that we know pose a threat.



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Law enforcement continually ignores what he referred to as “The Gray Rhinos” charging right at you. He aptly pointed out that law enforcement agencies do not train on risk management and most organizations make changes following an incident, but do not fully explore all the root causes that created that incident.
- Gordon stated, “The level of risk has not changed folks. Acclimation to risk has!”
- He further stated, “identifiable risks are preventable.” Meaning there is nothing new out there that hurts police officers.
- We know what the risks are, but we fail to take the adequate steps to truly change the culture of policing to address them.
- Gordon spoke about seat belts, and why officers don’t wear them. “Arrogance, ignorance and complacency.”
- Even though there may be legal exceptions to officers not wearing their seat belt, they are not “exempt from the laws of physics.”

Gordon charged the audience to look for problems lying in wait and address them. “If you ignore them, they will result in a problem you could have prevented.”

He then went on to summarize the top ten problems that are impacting law enforcement traffic safety:

- Fatigue
- Distraction
- Complacency
- Hubris
- Risk homeostasis
- TDD (Tire Deflation Devices),
- Speeding
- Not using right-side approaches
- Roadway incursions
- Not wearing seat belts

“There are three basic principles of risk management: There are no new ways to get into trouble, our profession deserves better than minimum standards, and if it is predicable, it is preventable.”

—Gordon Graham

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.police1.com/officer-safety/>

Gordon Graham has been actively involved in public safety since 1973. He has taken his background as a street cop, supervisor, and manager and has couple this with his experience as a lawyer and his education and training as a risk manager and is the Co-Founder of Lexipol – a company designed to standardize policy, procedure, and training within public safety agencies around America. Gordon was the first recipient of the Governor’s Award for Excellence in Law Enforcement in 1995 and is the 2008 recipient of the lifetime achievement award in California Law Enforcement. In 2005 he was awarded the Presidential Award for Excellence from the IAFC for his lifetime work in improving firefighter safety and performance. In 2015 he received the lifetime dedication award from the International Public Safety Leadership and Ethics Institute. In 2018 he received the James Oberstar Sentinel for Safety Award for his lifetime work in improving aviation safety internationally. In 2019 he received the Howard W. Rayon Distinguished Service Award.



Gordon Graham
*Risk Manager, Attorney,
and Law Enforcement Policy
Expert, Graham Research
Consultants*

SESSION #6: CRASH INVESTIGATIONS BY THE CDC-NIOSH AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Lieutenant Commander Melanie Fowler of the United States Public Health Service and the CDC-NIOSH presented on what it is that her research group FACE (Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program) does in terms of examining occupational fatalities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Simply stated we, “study workplace injuries and prepare reports and write recommendations, after finding out what the contributing circumstances are of these injuries and write prevention recommendations, to prevent it from happening in the future.”
- On average 15 workers die in the United States from traumatic injuries suffered in the workplace.
- CDC-NIOSH has conducted five complete investigations into law enforcement fatalities, and she briefly covered three of the cases that involved officers being struck by vehicles while on the side of the road.

Her findings re-emphasized the need for officers to continually face traffic and treat “Traffic as the enemy.”

- Reported findings demonstrate the need to have clear Incident Command Structure on many traffic crash scenes and she reinforced the need for officers to wear high visibility reflective vests when working on traffic.
- These investigations with recommendation are “non-punitive” and do not place blame. They merely provide a professional and detailed review of the incident and how to prevent the same incident occurring in the future.
- The necessity to study these cases and shared some of the infographics that provide guidance to law enforcement on how to improve safety on the road.

[LCDR Melanie Fowler Presentation](#)

As part of the final session was a brief presentation by Josh Shultz from Carfax for Police. Josh showcased the numerous research and traffic crash tools they have that can make managing a crash easier on scene and finding vehicles easier.

- Carfax’s free tools that can aid law enforcement in conducting investigations and assisting drivers in quickly exchanging information. This allows officers to clear the crash scene faster and get the cars off the road.

[CARFAX for Police Presentation](#)

The final portion of the summit consisted of demonstrations for the audience of three lighting tools that help light a crash scene or make an officer more visible.

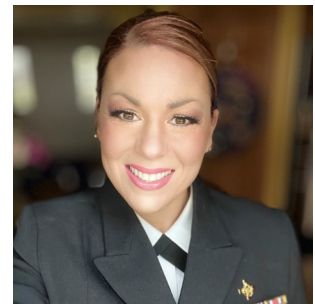
- Guardian Angel shoulder light that officers can wear
- Beacon-4-Life electronic roadway light
- Power Flare roadway safety lighting system

Those members of the audience who attended in person were provided bags which contained samples from Beacon-4-Life and several items from other roadway safety product vendors. These bags also included copies of the NLEOMF Mid-Year 2022 Law Enforcement Officers Preliminary Fatality Report, and infographics from several of our participating organizations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/default.html>

LCDR **Melanie Lee Fowler** MS, CSP, is an Environmental Health Officer in the United States Public Health Service and a Safety and Occupational Health Specialist with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research, Surveillance and Field Investigations Branch, Field Investigations Team in Morgantown West Virginia, for the NIOSH Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program. Melanie has been with NIOSH since 2007. Melanie has been a commissioned officer in the USPHS since November 2011. Melanie has a Bachelor of Science degree in Information Systems Management and a Master of Science in Safety Management from West Virginia University and earned her Certified Safety Professional certificate in 2020.



Lieutenant Commander
Melanie Lee Fowler
*FACE Investigator,
U.S. Public Health Service,
CDC-NIOSH*

SAFETY DEVICE VENDORS AND RESOURCES

https://www.guardianangeldevices.com/?utm_campaign=TNT%20-%20Search%20-%20TM%20-%20Guardian%20Angel%20Devices&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=guardian%20angel%20lights&utm_device=c&msclkid=1641cbab9238181a9849a95ef3b614ab&utm_content=TM%20Guardian%20Angel%20Lights

<https://beacon-4-life.com/>

<https://barrierbydesign.com/>

<http://www.powerflare.com/products/>

<https://www.whelen.com/>

<https://www.haasalert.com/law-enforcement>

<https://www.carfaxforpolice.com/>

SUMMARY AND SOLUTIONS

This summit brought to light the key issues surrounding law enforcement traffic safety and presented some strategies, recommendations and solutions to help mitigate those issues. One core element that came from every speaker and panelist was that law enforcement's current culture must change. We must develop a "safety first" mindset.

The presenters and panelists all discussed important issues around law enforcement traffic safety, and each had their own take on related issues, however there was wide agreement on several concerns.

SEAT BELT USE

Unquestionably, the issue of law enforcement officers not wearing their seat belts was perhaps the most discussed issue amongst all the presenters.

- Gordon Graham addressed the problem as to why "cops" don't wear their seat belts
- Nick Breul tied to that is the issue of perceived tactical safety. Officers are concerned that they will get trapped by the seat belt, or it will be caught on their equipment laden torsos as they try to exit their patrol car.
- Tom Dirlam pointed out, there has not been a single law enforcement fatality attributed to an officer being trapped or snagged by their seat belt. It saves lives, prevents injury, and is required by law. It must be worn.

The solution to this problem is to "*relentlessly*" reinforce existing seatbelt wear policies, implement policies in the absence of one, and lead by example. Constant reminders from messaging, to training, to posters and infographics can work to change officers' minds. Having "*courageous conversations*" with your peers or your subordinates must happen to enact this change and it must

be backed by policy. Many agencies have put up seat belt reminder stickers on their cars, and signs on the exit gate of their station, to remind officers to wear their seat belt. If law enforcement were to simply focus on this safety issue alone, it will save lives.

COMPLACENCY

The problem of officers approaching things as routine has led to many injuries and deaths. The phrase “*Complacency Kills!*” is a direct warning about what can happen when officers are matter of fact about the many dangers involved in policing.

- Congresswoman Val Demings, Nick Breul, Todd Leiss, Tom Dirlam, and Gordon Graham listed it as one of the top ten things negatively affecting law enforcement safety.

The solution to this is to adopt the tenets of Below-100, remembering “What is important now and that “*complacency kills!*” Demonstrating that and reinforcing it in your training and messaging with concrete, real life examples of how an officer was killed due to complacency will serve to create a different mindset. Gordon Graham spoke about risk homeostasis and acclimation reciting how after the twentieth time placing flares on a major highway with traffic whizzing by, he lost his sense of apprehension and caution which could have ended with deadly consequences.

Create a culture of safety. Not a culture of paranoia, but one of sound safety principles. Principles around tactical safety and driving safety. Officers should be trained to expect the unexpected and treat moving traffic as a persistent threat when they are on the roadway.

TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT

The issuance of a firearm to an officer is not as dangerous or nearly as problematic as the issuance of a patrol car to an officer. There is so much more that can go wrong, and does go wrong, yet most agencies do not regularly train on Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC), and they certainly do not do it as routinely as they do with firearms.

- This needs to change. The crashes and incidents that are going to occur involving police vehicles and their operation are predictable. Train around those issues and work to reduce crashes. If you do not have you own driver’s training course, then do what many other police agencies have done. Use a military base, closed airport, or local speedway. Create a driver’s training program that routinely reinforces good driving habits and sound decision making.
- Part of any crash reduction program and training program should involve monitoring and reducing speed and avoiding distractions. The use of Telematics as expressed by Undersheriff Beidler, to monitor an officer’s driving behavior, was shown to be successful in reducing crashes. Just as the use of in-car camera alerts for officers driving at excessive speeds. Whether it is “big brother or tree boxing,” it does not matter. Supervisors and peers need to instill safe habits in their officers and train to that standard.

“The Traffic Safety Summit did a great job identifying ways we can keep our officers safe from roadside incidents. There was a lot of great content delivered and it went by fast. Time well spent!”

—**Timothy Quinn,**
Chief Financial Officer,
Police Unity Tour

- Tom Dirlam said, “There is too much tolerance for negligent driving in our profession.” It falls to the leadership, the first line supervisors and peers to drive safely, and “Arrive Alive.” Law enforcement executives and trainers should read the CDC-NIOSH investigative reports on fatal law enforcement crashes and then examine their own policies and procedures.

RIGHT-SIDE APPROACHES

This is a simple change and should be taught as part of the training piece.

- As Gordon Graham put it, “It is safer. It provides the officer cover and concealment and puts them away from passing traffic.” One of his most significant issues is the reality that officers continue to make left-side approaches on traffic stops.

STRUCK-BY CRASHES AND ROADWAY INCURSIONS

One of the central focusses of this summit was the alarming increase in officers being struck by vehicles while on the side of the road. A significant percentage of the fatalities in such incidents were when officers were on the scene of an existing crash.

- To prevent these predictable circumstances, there are several things that can be done
- First, officers must recognize the continuing threat posed by moving traffic and be sure that they can be seen
- They must have a conspicuously marked car with reflective rear striping and adequate emergency lighting.
- They must be visible themselves.

In one photographic demonstration, Todd Leiss showed an officer on a rain-soaked crash scene wearing his raincoat, which had a reversable orange side, black side out. He was invisible to the drivers on the road. Officers must wear high visibility reflective vests when working on the roadside.

These scenes can be made even safer by learning and applying the principles of Traffic Incident Management (TIM), for which a certificate can be obtained online for free from ERSI’s website.

Lieutenant Commander Fowler listed one of the important factors in the struck-by crash she investigated was officers turning their back to traffic and she reiterated what Todd Leiss had said earlier. Traffic is the enemy.

Nick Breul demonstrated three electronic lighting devices that could be used by officers to visually mark off crash scene and can make an officer more visible to the motoring public as they handle a crash or assist a motorist.

BODY ARMOR

Nick Breul, Tom Dirlam, John Whetsel, and Gordon Graham all mentioned body armor and its life saving potential and discussed the reasons some officers don’t wear it. Many of the leaders on the panel made it mandatory, and Tom Dirlam showed a device that can cool down an officer’s body armor while in the patrol vehicle.

- No excuses, officers must wear their body armor and law enforcement executives must set the example and when in uniform, wear their body armor.

FATIGUE

Todd Leiss, Tom Dirlam, and Gordon Graham identified this a major problem. Tired officers are the same as an impaired driver. Their reflexes, balance, and their decision making is affected. Gordon Graham referred to fatigue as “Law Enforcement’s dirty little secret.” Sleep deprivation in law enforcement is pervasive.

Many agencies have recognized this and put “restorative sleep” programs into policy to allow tired officers the opportunity to get a brief restorative nap. Other agencies put limits on hours an officer can work and endeavor to create shifts that do not have officers working with insufficient time off.

TIRE DEFLATION DEVICES (TDD’S)

The use of tire deflation devices is concerning as the data has shown. 14 officers in the last five years have been struck and killed while attempting to neutralize a vehicle by deflating its tires using these “Stop Sticks.” It is extraordinarily dangerous and the NLEOMF is aware of one agency that has discontinued their use due to the inherent dangers posed.

These devices put officers at increased risk and have caused officers deploying them to be struck by fellow officers. Their use should be reviewed and the training on how, when, and why they may be deployed must be examined and monitored. TDDs can create a predictable problem.

SAFETY DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGY

The Summit showcased a small number of relatively new emerging technology devices and products that are designed to make roadside operations safer.

- Josh Shultz demonstrated how information can be exchanged more quickly by using the Carfax for Police’s free system.
- Nick Breul demonstrated the variety of personal and scene warning devices which can be employed to make officers and crash scenes more visible. The list of the participating vendors and sponsors is located on page 12 of this report.

“The takeaways I got from the Traffic Safety Summit were priceless, and the delivery was very compelling. I was glad to have the opportunity to watch it virtually. Thank you to NLEOMF for a job well done!”

—Willie Williams,
National President, National Black Police Association

Watch the full length video presentation:

<https://nleomf.org/officer-safety-and-wellness/2022-traffic-safety-summit-livestream/>

FEEDBACK

In the days following the Summit, NLEOMF sent out a post-event survey and the responses to that survey were overwhelmingly positive. Comments included:

“All information and presentations were worthwhile. I will incorporate with the field training at our agency. The message that officers need to slow down and consider What’s Important Now, thinking about if their driving action is justified by the goal they’re trying to accomplish at the time. This program did an excellent job of bringing out that point.”

“Todd Leiss’ presentation on Traffic Incident Management, Gordon Graham’s suggestions on how to do a realistic assessment of risk. I am not in law enforcement, so I learned a lot from Nick’s presentation on law enforcement crash data and the below 100 tenets. The chiefs’ panel on safety strategies was helpful in providing some useful tips for how chief officers can set the tone for safety. Learning about the new technologies available was useful.”

“We need more training exactly like this, probably in more condensed segments for practicality but overall, this was excellent material”.

“This is a great program; I look forward to more like it in the future and would find it very useful as an “on the road” type program that could be held at various points throughout the country so more officers could have in-person access to presentations and demonstrations.”

“I attended virtually, and I applaud your decision to make the conference available in a virtual format as I know that there were many persons like me who would not have been able to attend in person. This was also my first time attending one of these conferences and I learned a lot. I hope that you continue to make this available virtually.”



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