

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUICIDE PREVENTION & AWARENESS

SAFETY STAND DOWN



First Responders are asked to face horrors few can imagine, from mass casualty events, to the intimate pain of a child dying in their arms. It can take its toll on even the strongest individuals. Sometimes, the stress boils over. Sometimes, it can kill.

Last year, more First Responders died from suicide than from on-duty events. Firefighters are ten times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population, according to a study published in the Journal of Emergency Medical Services. In many cases, post-traumatic stress injury is the cause, and all too often, our brothers and sisters suffer in silence.

September is National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month. To help bring this pain out of the shadows, we are calling on all employees to participate in a **Behavioral Health Suicide Prevention and Awareness Safety Stand Down**.

The purpose of this drill is to promote conversation amongst your crew regarding a topic that has become all too familiar with not only our department but with fire departments across the nation, suicide.

This discussion can be facilitated by a Company Officer, a Chief Officer or the person most comfortable.

By the end of this discussion, all members should be familiar with:

- Signs and symptoms (things to watch for)
- Available resources

TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT: <https://tinyurl.com/LACOFDSafetyStandDown>
OR VIEW BY SCANNING QR CODE WITH YOUR CELLPHONE CAMERA



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUICIDE PREVENTION & AWARENESS

SAFETY STAND DOWN



A statement that is often heard whenever we experience a suicide of one of our brothers or sisters is “Somebody needs to do something about this. It is happening too often!”

- **Do you feel that we can actually prevent someone from taking their life? How?**
- **Do you believe that someone can cause someone take their own life? Explain...**
- **Why do you think someone decides to take their own life?**
- **Have you or someone on your crew ever been directly affected by suicide?**
- **How did you feel after you heard that this person took their own life?**
- **Give some examples of what you do to unload. What recharges you and gives you that balance that you need to continue to live a happy and healthy life?**

If there are things discussed that need or should be addressed in a different format and/or should be brought to the attention of peer counselor or mental health professional, please see the attached poster for contact information.

Healing Our Own:

We need to recognize those at risk. Providing our fellow First Responders with support is now more important than ever.

Risk factors include:

- Sleep deprivation
- Heavy alcohol or drug use
- Witnessing a traumatic event
- Major physical illness or injury
- Loss of a close relationship
- Isolation or lack of social support (e.g. retirement)
- Knowing others who have died by suicide

Additional warning signs include:

- Sudden Withdrawal from social contact
- Persistent feelings of hopelessness
- Increasingly reckless behavior
- Mood swings/Change in behavior
- Having a suicide plan (time, place, method)

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUICIDE PREVENTION & AWARENESS

SAFETY STAND DOWN



What we can do to help and to change the stigma associated with the fire service culture:

1. **Do an Internal Size-up/ Take Care of Yourself** – Spare a moment to be honest about your own feelings and struggles. It's important for firefighters to look out for themselves as much as it is to look out for others. Monitor and manage your mental health, just as you would your physical health. DO NOT BE AFRAID to ask for help and seek treatment. Thoughts of suicide can occur in anyone, it is not a fault or weakness, but rather a need to treat a mental health issue.
2. **Be Direct** – Take a proactive approach when you see a fellow firefighter struggling; make an effort to engage him/her and don't shy away from initiating a difficult conversation. If someone seems at risk or shows warning signs, ask "Are you thinking of suicide?" and "Do you have a plan?" Recognizing a potential suicide is critical to preventing it.
3. **Talk Openly and Listen Actively** – Supportive peers goes a long way to protecting each other's mental health.
4. **Show Compassion** – Psychological risk is an undeniable part of the job. Be patient and supportive; do not judge or stigmatize a fellow firefighter who is experiencing a mental health challenge. Listen and if it appears they are in a crisis, do not leave them alone.
5. **Be Proactive** – If someone you know has a suicide plan, do not leave him/her alone. Remove all firearms or other means that could cause harm. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

Review the poster for available resources.

Let's commit to change this tragedy. The suicide rates across the nation are rising dramatically, including in our own Los Angeles County Fire Department. Let's get better about taking care of our own.

At some point today, please take a moment to remember those who have lost their battle with mental health issues.