Sizing Up Firefighter Suicide

Presented by Billy Goldfeder, Frank Leto and Sean Riley

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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800-273-8255
https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org
About Lexipol

• We help fire departments reduce liability, enhance firefighter safety and effectively manage their policy content
• 150+ state-specific policies and daily training
• Automatic policy updates
• Easy-to-use, web-based platform and mobile app
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www.lexipol.com/fire
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COMPREHENSIVE, DEFENSIBLE POLICY AND DAILY TRAINING

Presenters

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Safe Call Now
Missing WA Firefighter Found Dead from Self-inflicted Gunshot Wound

CHRISTINE PRATT ON OCT 25, 2016

SOURCE: MCCLATCHY

Female firefighter’s suicide is a ‘fire bell in the night’

Houston Firefighter’s Death Ruled a Suicide

Firefighter was killed in a crash on Katy Freeway

02/07/2017

KERI BLAKINGER, Houston Chronicle
Family hope firefighter son's death encourages suicide awareness

OC fire captain’s death highlights troubling firefighter suicide rate

Law and order

Death of west St. Louis County firefighter at firehouse investigated as suicide

By Jesse Bogan St. Louis Post-Dispatch  Sep 26, 2016  ● (1)
Emotional Meters

- Everyone's "emotional meters" (stressors) are set at varied levels
- We’re born with these levels
- We may not even know they need adjusting
Audience Poll

Do you know a firefighter who has contemplated suicide, attempted suicide or taken their own life?
What We Know & Don’t Know

No formal tracking mechanism for first responder suicide

Firefighting ranks 6th on the CDC’s list of occupations by suicide

“It is safe to assume that firefighter suicide rates may, in fact, be higher than what have been reported.” (Behavioral Health Training for Fire Rescue Personnel)
What We Know & Don’t Know

North Carolina study: Firefighters 3X more likely to die from suicide than LODD

More recent Philadelphia study: “Suicide rate among FFs appears comparable to, and perhaps lower than, general population estimates.”
What We Know & Don’t Know

One group reports 130 firefighter/EMT suicides in 2016, up from 81 in 2012 (Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance)

Number of firefighters lost to suicide has increased every year for the past 5 years (The Final Call: Why Firefighters Commit Suicide)

By the 7 to 10-year mark of their careers, firefighters have higher-than-average incidence of sleep issues, substance abuse, and PTSD
Even ONE firefighter suicide is too many
Contributing Factors

- PTSD
- Increase in call volumes, esp. EMS
- Lack of connection
- Shift work/lack of high-quality sleep
- Presence of a firearm in the house

Source: Strategies for Preventing Suicides in the Fire Service
Contributing Factors

- Combination of critical incident response and lower-level job stressors
- Continued pressure from administration, bullying from peers or others
- Former military deployments
"We don't get to take time off just because this was a really crappy call."

"It's easier to commit suicide."

"People think that as firefighters/paramedics, we can fix anything."

"We spend so much time on how to save ourselves and how to rescue people, but we don't give any training time to PTSD or mental health."
Warning Signs

- Anger, anxiety, aggressiveness
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Erratic/Impulsive behavior
- Substance abuse (alcohol, Rx, illegal drugs)
- Recent arrest (DUI, domestic violence, etc.)
- Isolation
Warning Signs

- Divorce or martial issues
- Financial trouble
- Loss of interest in being a firefighter
- Weight gain/loss
- Talking about wanting to die, feeling trapped, being a burden, feeling hopeless
- Suicide attempt
Warning Signs

There may appear to be NO warning signs.

Warning signs can also double as contributing factors.
My department provides the needed resources to support firefighters in mental health crisis.
What Can We Do?

- Watch for warning signs in self and others:
  - Behavior
  - Attitudes
  - Achievement
  - Attendance
What Can We Do?

- Learn to have “courageous conversations” with peers
- Reject shame-based system of comparing self to others
- Support those who have been diagnosed with mental issues
- Reach out to retirees—highest risk group
What Can We Do?

All the above plus…

- Actively monitor crewmembers for signs of trouble; intervene when needed
- Initiate discussions with crew (individual and group) following calls
- Get third-party help – don’t rely on your ability to talk someone out of the problem
- Create a supportive environment among crews
What Can We Do?
All the above plus...

- Provide department resources for mental health
- Develop a peer support program
- Support overall health and wellness for firefighters
- Ensure help lines, fact sheets, etc. are posted prominently
What Can We Do?

- Ensure no firefighter is ever shunned or retaliated against for reporting health problems
- Provide training to company officers
- Act as a chief, not a friend or a psychologist
- Develop third-party resources and contact them swiftly
- Lead department through suicide
Audience Poll

What is the biggest barrier to developing mental health awareness and support programs in your department?
Resources

Safe Call Now

The Code Green Campaign

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Stress First Aid

IAFF Behavioral Health Program

TED talk: Bridge Between Suicide and Life

FDNY behavioral health monthly meetings
Safe Call Now’s Ultimate Excursion

Safe Call Now’s Julie Wimmer is walking 2,650 miles from the California border to the Canadian border to raise money and awareness for first responder mental health issues and suicide prevention.

Learn more and contribute: https://www.safecallnow.org/crowdrise-fundraiser.html
For More Information

www.lexipol.com/firefighter-suicide-prevention

• Presentation slides
• Recording of webinar
• Additional resources
• Training bulletins
• CISD policy

Questions?
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