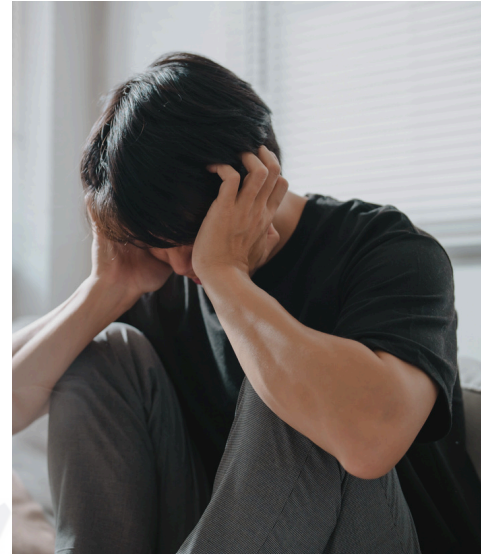




Promoting Officer Mental Health

Over the past three years, the Comp Alliance has kicked off National Police Week with safety tips on recognizing officer mental health. For a fourth straight year, we will begin our week-long appreciation of our member police departments with mental health awareness and improvement. We believe this to be a vitally important topic for police officers, with the hazardous environment of their work and the potentially harmful effects on mental health. We'll also discuss some safety tips for improving officer wellbeing.



Traditional occupational safety and health risk management programs primarily concentrate on ensuring that work is safe, and workers are protected from workplace hazards that arise. Some hazards are working around high-hazard

environments, handling hazardous chemicals, poor housekeeping, unsafe lifting, and unguarded or unshielded equipment. Police officers need to understand the controls in place to prevent injuries such as wearing proper PPE, following protocols, and the safe operation of a motor vehicle. They also need to comprehend the possibility, in fact, likelihood, that stress in the workplace can greatly affect their mental health. Police work includes many hazards, some unforeseen, that create unpredictable outcomes, causing acute and chronic stress on the body, anxiety, depression, fatigue, burnout, digestive problems, headaches, memory lapses, concentration impairment, and possibly substance abuse.

The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (LEMHWA) was signed into law in January 2018, recognizing that law enforcement agencies deserve support in their ongoing efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees. Good mental and psychological health is as essential as good physical health for law enforcement officers to effectively keep their communities safe from crime and violence.[1]

To promote police officer mental health, consider these resources and share applicable information with your department staff:

- ✓ **Municipal Employee Assistance Programs:** Such programs are vital and should be promoted by police agencies. Because every officer is different and not everyone will go to their police agency if they can't sleep or if stress is adversely impacting their lives, ➔

[1] U.S. Department of Justice - <https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwareources>

multiple options should be made available to police officers. Also, consider peer support groups or officer-led programs where discussions on trauma-related stress can be held in confidence within the department, with trusted coworkers taking the lead.

- ✓ **Supervisor Training:** Field Training Officers (FTO) who can recognize adverse stress reactions and signs of chronic stress can identify trauma or stress-related challenges in their subordinates. Administrators can follow up to provide troubled officers with resources and support, including a change in shift assignment, time off to resolve an acute stressor, sleep concerns, or more formal support such as professional counseling.
- ✓ **Stress-Related Meetings:** Positive police management includes routine discussions with police staff on the importance of mental health improvements. Talking about stress management during employee reviews, meetings, and briefings gives trained supervisors an opportunity to encourage an honest discussion of any stress problems officers may be experiencing. Such a discussion opens the door for an officer who struggles to reach out for support. It also allows supervisors to identify a potential stress problem before any adverse stress reactions can affect the officer's safety.
- ✓ **Create Motivation Programs:** Develop ideas where officers are encouraged and motivated to attend stress-reducing programs while off-duty, including yoga, exercise events, and sporting activities, which can build comradery. Include family and spousal support organizations where officer families and spouses can come together either to provide insight into the stressors officers commonly experience or into spouses' experiences. Offering counseling to spouses following a traumatic event might also be effective. When police families cope well with stress, it is more likely that officers will remain focused while on duty.
- ✓ **Stress-Reduction Exercises:** Promote stress reduction at work and home through these practices:
 - Healthy Diet
 - Adequate Sleep
 - Routine Exercise
 - Mindfulness (rest, stretching, reading, puzzles, meditation)

This week we honor the work of our police departments and recognize the incredibly important and difficult jobs that you all have. We appreciate all you do and hope these short safety bulletins will be a reminder of our appreciation and help improve the safety of each department.

Resources on Mental Health:

[NYS Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice](#)

[International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)

[May is National Mental Health Month](#)