



Put Yourself in Our Boots **Safety Video**

Snapshot

Think your workplace is safe? Turn off the lights, trigger the alarm and put yourself in the boots of emergency services personnel (ESP), who could be at your premises after hours, in unfamiliar surroundings with poor lighting and stressful circumstances. Your workplace is their workplace . . . *is it safe?*

Background

On September 29, 2000, Constable John Petropoulos of the Calgary Police Service attended an alarm (break and enter complaint) at a warehouse. While investigating the mezzanine level, John stepped through a false ceiling, fell nine feet and succumbed to brain injuries. There was no safety railing in place to warn him – or anyone else – of the danger. The alarm turned out to be false. He was 32 years old.

One death or one injury of an emergency services personnel due to hazards at a workplace is one too many.

Between 2005 to 2007, in Alberta alone, there have been 523 fall-related claims of ESP (of which 179 were lost time claims). Over 55% of those fall-related lost time claims were police and paramedic.¹

There is little statistical evidence that has been gathered specifically regarding injuries sustained by ESP as a result of unsafe workplaces. This is due to the fact that the data on injuries and fatalities sustained by ESP are not categorized in that fashion. Additionally, “near misses” regarding these types of injuries/incidents are not reported. In order to give a more comprehensive view on the evidence we have included two “near miss” accounts from Sgt. Darren Leggatt of the Calgary Police Service:

1. In the late summer of 2001 in the early morning hours before dawn, I responded to an alarm call in an industrial area of the Calgary’s southeast. As a police dog handler, I arrived at the scene to discover a large textiles store and warehouse had been broken into. Patrol officers had the building contained and had indicated there was no movement inside and no subsequent activations of the alarm. To ensure the business was unoccupied and the suspects had left; and building was safe for the investigating police officers to enter and gather evidence, I entered the premise with my police dog to conduct a search. I was able to locate the vast majority of the light switches in order to light this rather large facility. The business had offices located on a second floor which were accessible by a regular single flight of stairs. As my dog crested the stair well, I could see that he had turned right - as I crested the stairs I noticed an area to left that was easily accessible to people. As my dog searched onward, I stepped to my left at the top of the stairs to clear this open area, and slipped through a thin sheet of plywood covering a false ceiling to a small storage / office area below. I fell about 8 feet onto a number of boxes and an old desk in the space below – luckily there was no permanent damage to the property or myself. I was able to finish the search without incident, but was left wondering why such an unsafe area was left unprotected at the top of a stairwell – that only employees would have known about.
2. In the winter of 2005, I was called to assist patrol officers with locating a suspect responsible for stealing a number of vehicles. I used my police service dog to track the suspect to a large industrial compound that contained thousands of stacked wooden pallets. While in the compound conducting a search for the suspect, it became very evident to me that each stack of pallets was stacked precariously and very unstable. Having concern for the safety of my dog, myself and the other officers, I discontinued the search inside the compound. Although we did manage to locate the suspect hiding in the compound and safely apprehend him, we needed to rely on other methods as the compound was too dangerous itself to search. Although this event occurred very early in the morning, the compound was accessible to anyone, seemingly at anytime.

¹ Taken from data supplied by the Alberta Worker’s Compensation Board

Below is a “near miss” story from Cst Glenn Laird, Calgary Police Service Tactical Unit:

3. We were doing a search warrant on an old diesel processing plant that also stored nuclear waste. We thought that it could possibly be unsafe prior to entry, and when we did go in, the building wasn't being used the way it was supposed to be. We arrested several people immediately upon entering the yard but had no knowledge of how many people were still at large in the warehouse and compound. There was a small pond in the yard that contained liquid nuclear waste as well. The K9 handlers assisting our unit on this call had to be extremely cognizant that their dogs did not go in the water in this pond while clearing the yard. Once inside the warehouse, we realized everything was in absolute disarray and in total darkness. It took an hour and a half for the 3 Tactical Teams to clear the building and surrounding industrial yards so that it was safe for the investigators to come in and do the search warrant.

There was spilled chemical waste throughout the whole plant which was approximately 30,000 sq feet. Some of the nuclear waste was stored in the proper room but it wasn't stored properly or safely (a nuclear inspector had to be called in to thoroughly clear this room). Basically, the place had been turned into a criminal wasteland and we had to deal with it on the spot. In cases like this, there are a lot of unknowns but we were as prepared as possible going into this call with personal protective equipment such as gas masks and air monitors. As well we were clearing catwalks up to 5 stories high that had years of chemical and fuel build-up on the ramps and floor. This made our footing slippery and treacherous while moving through the area. We're used to going into environments that are dangerous because of the people - but this was a case when the physical environment itself was of major concern

In 2007 a record \$1.72 million in fines in Alberta were imposed for unsafe workplace practices resulting in injuries or deaths of employees. Astonishingly, in the first 4 months of 2008, over \$1.8 million in fines have already been imposed (Calgary Herald, April 19, 2008, A12). Additionally, according to the Calgary Herald (April 18, 2008, A1) workplace fatalities in Alberta are up 24% to 154 fatalities. In fact since Cst. John Petopoulos' death in 2000, there have been a total of 1008 workplace related fatalities in Alberta alone.

Of interesting note, the National Building Code of Canada has removed the requirement to protect first responders from the building code when they published the 2005 edition. This means there is no longer a requirement to make necessary changes to floor performance that would protect firefighters during a fire.

ESP are trained to respond in stressful circumstances. Hazards encountered in workplaces these ESP enter pose serious risk of one of them becoming injured or killed. The loss of life has far reaching impacts – to family and friends for the loss of a loved one and to society and the public from a public safety and financial perspective.

Purpose

The purpose of this video is to raise public awareness around issues of workplace safety, influence a shift in thinking towards safety as a non negotiable requirement in our work worlds and create a culture that places safety first and foremost in our minds and our actions. There are thousands of unnecessary risks being imposed on ESP daily, because hazards they encounter in work areas in the course of working to protect and serve the public are not clearly identified and controlled. ESP may need to share your workplace and when they do they may not be aware of the hazards and risks associate with the work at your building. We all have a responsibility to ensure the safety and health of those people in our work areas, whether they are our friends, co-workers, or ESP attending to an emergency. We have a responsibility to assess our work sites for hazards and to eliminate those hazards to make our work place a safe one.

Project Overview

This project is the creation of a safety video, entitled Put Yourself In Our Boots, that will inform key individuals in business and industry about the importance of ensuring their workplaces are safe for emergency responders. As the workplace for emergency services personnel is every place; this video will demonstrate the contrast between how a workplace appears during regular hours and how it may appear during an after hours emergency; putting the viewer in the boots of emergency services personnel. It will provide statistical and anecdotal evidence on this necessity and solutions to ensure a workplace is safe.

The Video

Using the story of Constable John Petopoulos, viewers will hear first-person accounts of what happened the night John fell and the impact unsafe workplaces have on our emergency services. The viewer will be taken through a series

of building and industrial yard scenarios that could be dangerous to ESP. This video will demonstrate the contrast between how a workplace appears during regular hours and how it may appear during an after hours emergency; putting the viewer in the boots of emergency services personnel.

The video will use actual police officers, firefighters, EMS, security personnel, and a building safety inspector and renovator. It will provide anecdotal and statistical evidence on the importance of this initiative as well as cost effective simple ways to ensure workplaces do not possess unnecessary hazards to ESP.

Audio visual materials that engage the viewer and have a personal element to the content have a stronger influence on people's perceptions than a statistical "instructional" video. The aim for this video is to make it engaging by using emotional stories, informative statistics, and offering cost-effective solutions to improve workplace safety. Using actual ESP & a recognizable host will provide a degree of authenticity and interest.

A production goal for the Safety Video is to have the well-known renovator/TV personality (host of the HGTV show Holmes on Homes), Mike Holmes involved in the project. We have been exchanging emails with the Director of Communications for the Holmes Group. So far we have received positive feedback about the project and are hoping that we can work with the Holmes Group to ensure his involvement.

The safety video will be made available on DVD as well as a downloadable version online. Additionally, it will be added to the JPMF resource DVD that includes their other safety PSAs. Please see attached for video proposal/overview and video script outline (work in progress with the writer/director)

Target Audience & Market/Use

This video will educate not just those responsible for ensuring a safe workplace - but all employees. When everyone is aware of their role and responsibility to create a safe worksite and the human and financial costs associated with workplace injury or death, there is a better chance of effecting change in individuals perceptions and practices.

The video is designed to be used by/educate building inspectors, safety inspectors, construction workers, safety coordinators, managers, building owners, workplace health and safety educators and inspectors, and employees and professors/teachers/instructors for building construction and workplace health and safety.

The **Put Yourself in Our Boots** safety video would be a resource for use in safety meetings, public presentations, community events booths, relevant high school and post-secondary instructional classes.

Key Messages

- 1) If you expect a person – an employee, a visitor, ESP – to be on your site, you are responsible to make it safe!
 - Check to make sure safety railings are securely in place
 - Make sure grates and open holes are securely covered
 - Clean up broken glass and other sharp objects and debris (do your housekeeping)
 - Make sure dangerous/hazardous chemicals and items are properly labeled and safely stored
 - Ensure hallways and emergency exits are well signed and not obstructed
 - Check regularly to see that security alarm systems, emergency response equipment such as fire extinguishers and alarms are functioning properly
 - Consider leaving inside lighting on at night

- 2) Think about your workplace from the perspective of ESP who would be attending after hours, in unfamiliar conditions, and in high stress/crisis situations. Don't just protect your property, make your worksite a safe place for everyone. ESP protect your life...protect theirs!

- 3) *Make the change; make the site safe, save a life.*

Length of Video: 7 to 10 minutes

Evaluation

Tracking organizations that use this video with a survey following viewing and then following up in one year to see how the video influenced them in making changes in their workplace will provide part of the data necessary to prove the effectiveness of this tool. Additionally, online streaming of this video may be considered as we can track the number of views, and provide a pop-up survey to be completed. Those that provide us with their email address can be re-

contacted in 6 months to see what changes they have implemented in their workplace. On-line streaming of the video may create a larger audience base and ease of access.

Key Stakeholders

- Emergency Services Personnel – Police, Fire, EMS
- Security and alarm companies
- Municipal, provincial and federal government
- Health & Safety organizations
- Injury Prevention groups

Potential Project Partners (funding and in-kind contributors)

- Workplace Health and Safety - Work Safe Alberta
- Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research
- Workers Compensation Board
- Calgary Police Service
- Calgary Fire Department
- Calgary Emergency Medical Services
- Calgary Police Association
- Calgary Health Region
- Alberta Federation of Police Associations
- Edmonton Police Service
- Alberta Association of Police Chiefs
- Alberta Construction Safety Association
- Construction Owners Association of Alberta
- Give Us Room to Work committee
- Various corporations

Potential Distribution Partners

- Workplace Health and Safety - Work Safe Alberta
- Building management and Building owners associations
- Health & safety organizations
- Injury prevention organizations
- Emergency services and associations
- Educational film, Safety video distributors

Projected Expense: \$64,600

- Project Coordination: \$16,600 (first 16 weeks (\$5,000) funded through Work Safe Alberta who may commit another \$5,000 later in the year)
- Video Production and Post-production: \$44,000
- Marketing and Distribution: \$4000

Potential Sources of Funding

- John Petropoulos Memorial Fund fundraising initiatives
- Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research grant
- Work Safe Alberta grant
- Corporate Sponsors
- Rural Alberta's Development Fund
- Other e.g. Calgary Police Association, Calgary Federation of Police Associations, Construction Owners Association of Alberta

Contact Information

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Put Yourself In Our Boots Safety Video Feedback

"Looks like an awesome project...fully support your initiative. Awesome work!!"
Lance Stephenson, STARS Task Force Leader

"I read the overview and thought it was quite good. A video like the one planned is long overdue." Rick Gardner,
Calgary Sheriff Dept.

"When you have your video ready AWCBC would be pleased to inform their members and provide information on how they might obtain the video. Good luck with the initiative." Bill Mitchell, Association For Workers Compensation Boards of Canada

"It's a great project with considerable application for health and safety training. Good work getting it together..." Karen MacDonald, Government of Alberta, Human Resources & Development

"Thanks for the opportunity to review your latest initiative. I found it to be EXTREMELY well done and very effective. I think ESP personnel once again owe you a great big thanks for the work you are doing in regard to this. Excellent job!!"
Chief Rick Hanson, Calgary Police Service