



Put Yourself in Our Boots **Safety Video Overview**

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.

From 2002 to 2006 there were a total of 27,414 injuries reported to emergency responders and 195 fatalities. 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

“Responders accept that their job is hazardous,” states a 2004 study by RAND (Institute for Civil Justice & Infrastructure, safety & Environment in the United States), “but this acceptance does not diminish the **importance of taking steps to protect them from the hazards inherent in their activities.**”² In Canada and the USA, there are approximately **2.3 million³ emergency responders** that are working in one of the highest risk occupations. In fact according to the RAND study, “The emergency response community represents a significant population of workers exposed to a particularly intense and variable hazard environment in the course of their work...**the fatality rate for both police and career firefighters is approximately three times as great as the average for all occupations**”⁴.

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. Sgt Leggatt was also the K-9 officer who went into the warehouse with Cst Petropoulos – and performed CPR on him.

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

¹ Data supplied by the Alberta Worker's Compensation Board

² Houser, Ari N., Brian A. Jackson, James T. Bartis, D.J. Peterson. *Emergency Responder Injuries and Fatalities: An Analysis of Surveillance Data* RAND: Institute for Civil Justice & Infrastructure, Safety, & Environment. USA, 2004. p.1

³ Number compiled through statistics from various organization websites, Statistics Canada & the RAND Institute

⁴ Ibid: p. xv

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.

Below is a “near miss” story from Constable 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

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, however they cannot effectively do their job if there are additional preventable hazards due to unsafe workspaces. Hazards encountered in workplaces that 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.

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

Purpose

The purpose of the safety 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 associated 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 includes 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 workplace of an emergency responder is virtually anywhere, whether it be a home, an office, or on the roadway. According to the RAND institute, there are three significant sources of injuries and fatalities for fire, police, and paramedic. Therefore, in order to affect a positive shift in thinking, we have also developed three Public Service Announcements (PSAs) intended for television and online broadcast. Each of these PSAs will be similar in look but each will be from a different perspective – firefighter, police, and paramedic, each presenting one of the many hazards that ESP encounter.

Referencing the RAND institute studies earlier mentioned, **most police fatalities and injuries are attributed to vehicle-related incidents, assaults, and falls**. The **source of fatalities and injuries to firefighters are heart attacks, vehicle-related incidents and being trapped/lost in a burning building**. As for **paramedics, the most significant source of fatalities and injuries are vehicle-related incidents**. However, when looking at lost-time injuries for paramedics through the AWCBC, **paramedics also experience a high number of injuries due to slips, falls & strains**.

The Video & PSAs

Using the story of Constable John Petropoulos, 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 will provide a degree of authenticity and interest.

A production goal is to have the well-known renovator/TV personality, Mike Holmes (host of the HGTV show Holmes on Homes), involved in the project. We have initiated contact with the Director of Communications for The Holmes Group and are hoping that we will be able to move forward with this goal.

The concept for the three PSA's is to utilize a similar look across the three versions which will present three very visually dramatic scenarios of an emergency responder in action encountering a preventable unsafe workplace. Each one will be 30 seconds in length and will be from the perspective of EMS, fire, and police. These are intended to hit a larger audience and direct them to the JPMF website for additional information with regards to the safety video and workplace safety. It is also a means to influence a shift in how people perceive safety at and outside their workplaces, taking into account emergency services. As a result of the research stated above, we chose to use the following scenes for the PSAs:

Police PSA – Utilizing the scenario from John's death, the police PSA will show how it is not always a human perpetrator that puts an officer or other emergency responder at risk; sometimes it's an unsafe workplace/building.

Firefighter PSA – The firefighter PSA is from the perspective of a firefighter entering a fire call at a workspace. This scenario shows the additional risks put on a firefighter when a company does not keep their hallways clear and doorways free from obstructions, clutter, etc.. Firefighters have limited oxygen and time to do their job in a building.

Paramedic PSA – The PSA for EMS takes a bit of a different angle on workplace safety. When paramedics respond to serious injuries at a workplace, many times they need to transport the injured person(s) to the hospital. As such, their job does not end at your workplace...and when you leave your place of work, as a motorist your responsibility for the safety of emergency responders doesn't end. This PSA will raise awareness with motorists about the need to **pay attention when driving – and pull over** if they see an ambulance (or any emergency vehicle) behind them with the lights activated.

From 2002 to 2006, approximately 2400 injuries and 16 fatalities to Canadian emergency responders can be attributed to vehicle-related incidents.⁵

The safety video and PSAs 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 the other safety PSAs.

Phase 1: Research & Funding

The initial phase for the safety video project included research, communications and funding. This phase was funded by Work Safe Alberta (\$5,000). After the strategic plan was developed we proceeded with tracking down statistics and other related research materials. We put out a call for "near miss" stories for anecdotal evidence of the need for this project.

In communicating with various organizations regarding the project, the response has been mixed with regards to participating in the project, however all have expressed that it is a very worthwhile endeavour. For the most part, many of the organizations approached have provided positive feedback and some of those have committed themselves to us as project partners.

⁵ Statistics Canada

Phase 2: Pre-Production

We are now in the second phase of pre-production, having received the second installment of funding from Work Safe Alberta (\$5000) and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research (\$12,000). We will continue to seek project feedback, funding, and project partners. We have also realized that a resource kit may also be needed to go along with the video. This would either be in the form of a booklet, CD, on the JPMF ultimate disk and/ or on the JPMF website.

Initially we decided to use funds (\$2000) from R. Nicholls to create a short (30 sec to 1 min) promotional video for this project that would include simple footage and interviews for the video and will be used to raise funds for the project. However, we have expanded this to be a series of three PSAs (as mentioned above) that are each from the perspective of one of the three main emergency services (fire, police, EMS).

Phase 3: Production

Due to production & funding delays, the production date has been moved to April 2009

Phase 4: Post-production: May 2009

Phase 5: Marketing and Distribution: May – December 2009

Phase 6: Evaluation & Reporting: May 2009 – January 2010

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 will be a resource for use in safety meetings, public presentations, community events booths, and relevant high school and post-secondary classes. It will be available to any and all individuals. Finally, Officer Safety training and Recruit classes would also utilize the video to inform the officers of additional unknown hazards they may encounter on a call at a workplace.

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: approximately 7 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
- Community Injury Control Fund
- 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

Total Projected Expense: \$100,000

- Project Coordination: \$28,000 (2 years)
- Video Pre-production, Production and Post-production: \$63,000
- Marketing and Distribution: \$9000

Confirmed Funding

- Work Safe Alberta - \$10,000
- R. Nichols Distributors - \$2,000
- Calgary Police Association - \$5,000
- Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research CICF grant - \$12,000
- Community Initiatives Program Alberta Lotteries grant - \$39,000
- CUPE Local 3421 Calgary Paramedics - \$1000
- Calgary Police Service - \$5,000
- Alberta College of Paramedics - \$5,000
- Calgary EMS Foundation - \$5,000

Total Confirmed Funding as at June 25th, 2009: \$84,000

Contact Information

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Put Yourself In Our Boots Feedback

Looks like an awesome project...fully support your initiative. Awesome work!!

- Lance Stephenson, STARS Task Force Leader

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