

Preliminary Report Shows Decrease in Line of Duty Deaths

BY CRAIG FLOYD, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL FUND

Based on an analysis of preliminary data, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) and Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) found that 140 officers have died in the line of duty so far this year. That is 23 percent lower than the 2007 figure of 181, and represents one of the lowest years for officer fatalities since the mid-1960s.

This year's reduction includes a steep, 40 percent drop in the number of officers who were shot and killed, from 68 in 2007 to 41 in 2008.

The last time firearms-related fatalities were this low was 1956, when there were 35 such deaths. The 2008 figure is 74 percent lower than the total for 1973, when a near-record high 156 law enforcement officers were shot and killed.

Craig Floyd, chairman of NLEOMF, said the high number of officer deaths during 2007 was a wake-up call for law enforcement. "Law enforcement executives, officers, associations, and trainers clearly heeded the call, with a renewed emphasis on officer safety training, equipment, and procedures," Floyd said. "The reduction in firearms-related deaths is especially stunning, given the tremendous firepower possessed by so many criminals today.

"The fact that law enforcement has been able to drive down the crime rate, and do so with increased efficiency and safety, is a testament to the hard work and professionalism of our officers," he added.

COPS is pleased to see the reduction in officer deaths for 2008 and hope this is a trend we will see year after year. "But we also know that for each of the surviving families and co-

The number of officers killed in the line of duty fell sharply during 2008 when compared with 2007, making this past year one of the safest years for U.S. law enforcement in decades. Officers killed by gunfire reached a 50-year low.

workers, their one officer is one too many," said COPS National President Jennifer Thacker.

"These families, co-workers and agencies are struggling to cope with life without their officer and will need support from COPS before, during, and long after National Police Week. COPS will continue its efforts to provide life rebuilding support and resources for 2008 surviving families and affected co-workers, as well as past year survivors to help them rebuild their shattered lives.

"We will embrace these families and affected co-workers and assure them there is no fee to join COPS, for the price paid is already too high," she said.

For the 11th year in a row, more law enforcement officers died in traffic-related incidents than from gunfire or any other single cause of death.

There were 71 traffic-related deaths in all. Mirroring the nationwide drop in traffic fatalities among the general public this year, the number of officers killed in traffic accidents was down 14 percent from 2007.

Last year, a record high 83 officers died on our roadways. Of this year's traffic-related fatalities, 44 officers died in automobile crashes, 10 died in motorcycle crashes, and 17 were struck and killed by other vehicles.

Among other causes of death, 17 officers succumbed to job-related physical illnesses, three died in aircraft accidents, two were fatally stabbed, two died in bomb-related incidents, and one each was beaten to death, drowned, accidentally electrocuted, and

died in a train accident.

Fifteen of the officers killed this year were women, equalling the all-time high set in 2002, and 2008 marked the first time that more than 10 percent of the officers who died in a year were female.

Among all officers killed in 2008, the average age was 40 and the officers had served an average of 12 years in law enforcement.

Craig Floyd cited a number of reasons for the sharp decline in officer fatalities this year including better training and equipment, plus a realization among officers that "every assignment is potentially life-threatening, no matter how routine or benign it might seem."

Floyd added that the increased use of less-lethal weaponry, including Taser stun guns allow officers to apprehend resisting violent offenders with less chance of assault or injury.

The statistics released by NLEOMF and COPS are preliminary and do not represent a final or complete list of individual officers who will be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in 2009. The report, "Law Enforcement Officer Deaths, Preliminary 2008 Report," is available for viewing at http://www.nleomf.org/TheMemorial/Facts/2008_endyear_report.pdf. ❖

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Sometimes we forget just how dangerous law enforcement can be. Every officer deserves our thanks.