

MONITOR & MITIGATE

The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Safety



Personnel Shortages Due to COVID-19

Personnel Shortages: What's Happening in Your Department

First responder organizations have faced serious personnel shortages as a result of COVID-19 and must determine how best to ensure that shifts are covered and communities receive essential services.

- Post-exposure quarantine requirements prevent even healthy personnel from working for weeks at a time
- Many departments rely on volunteers
- Many departments also rely on those who are themselves (or have family members who are) at higher risk of severe illness
- Shortages increase demands on those who remain able to work

Overtime: Tips and Considerations

Voluntary Overtime may be sufficient for your department, especially if effective measures to reduce exposure are also in place.

- Broadening eligibility for overtime can quickly expand your pool of available personnel
- **COVID-19 hazard pay** may also encourage personnel to take more shifts

Mandatory Overtime may be needed, especially during local peaks in case numbers or if there are multiple exposures and/or infections within your department.

- Unexpected mandatory overtime may negatively impact morale and increase burn-out
- Give first responders notice and some voice in overtime wherever possible, even when it is mandatory
- Some departments had success in allowing first responders to request being temporarily removed from a mandatory overtime list (Int. 8950)
- Keep track of how much overtime your first responders are working, to ensure that additional mandatory shifts do not lead to excessive and potentially harmful levels of overwork

“**People sign up to work overtime voluntarily. That's one thing. But to be told, you have to stay because we don't have the numbers to cover, that's something else.**”

Lieutenant in a large municipal fire/EMS department (Int. 0402)

IN THIS BRIEF

- ▶ COVID-19 has led to low staffing levels
- ▶ How departments are dealing with personnel losses
- ▶ Other ways departments can handle limited personnel

RELEVANT FOR



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is to measure the impact of COVID-19 on first responders, identify and share best practices organizations can put in place to protect themselves in the short term, and identify strategies to make first responder organizations more resilient to pandemics in the future.

This brief is based on findings from initial interviews with 29 first responders representing 29 distinct departments across 16 states.



Resource Referrals

For project news and updates:

- Visit start.umd.edu/COVIDFirstResponders & secondstight-ts.com/covid19-topic-dashboard
- Subscribe to START's newsletter at start.umd.edu/newsletters
- Follow us on social media with #COVIDFirstResponders

Finding Additional Personnel: Many Approaches to Backfilling

Departments have come up with a variety of approaches to ensure the continued delivery of essential services in their communities.



Contact other departments in the area: Departments have successfully coordinated to share personnel when short-staffed. However, broadening the scope of first responder contacts increases the risk of larger-scale quarantines in the event of an exposure



Look at your own department's non-emergency units and administrative staff: Some may have the knowledge and experience needed; one law enforcement agency “disbanded some of our specialty units, like medical detectives...and sent them back out to road patrol” (Int. 5781)



Hiring and new recruits: Agencies have undertaken emergency hiring actions or accelerated the training timeline for new recruits, bringing them in immediately upon certification



Call up volunteers: In departments with volunteers, offering paid positions or shifts to volunteers can help backfill; even if they do not have the same training or certifications, volunteers can “step in and do what they can” (Int. 2275)



Brown-out or close a single location: Having a comprehensive contingency plan in place to do so allows your department to redistribute personnel and minimize the negative impact on service delivery

“ We had people that we were drawing from anywhere we could find them...people that were administrative, that used to be in suppression, they were retrained and made sure that they were current on their certifications and then we could even use them as necessary.

Deputy chief of a Midwest fire department (Int. 7184)

Quick Tips: Ways to Deal with Personnel Loss

- ▶ Limit non-emergency services, like community transports, car seat checks, and other activities to decrease first responders' potential exposure
 - ▶ Some departments, especially smaller EMS departments, found that it was possible to negotiate temporary reductions in minimum staffing
 - ▶ Create contingency plans for the future – departments with pre-existing plans for personnel shortages and good relationships with other departments had an easier time maintaining minimum staffing levels at the height of the pandemic



HOW TO HELP FIRST RESPONDERS

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