

# MONITOR & MITIGATE

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Safety

### Environmental Effects: Changes In Demand For First Responders Due To COVID-19

COVID-19 presents innumerable challenges to the first responder community. There are three ways it may affect your organization:

*Environmental Effects* – Changes in the operational environment, available resources, work conditions, or the level or type of demand for services.

*Direct Effects* – Threats to your personnel from illness related to COVID-19, including absenteeism, emotional trauma, and reductions in productivity.

*Indirect Effects* – Impacts on your operations due to the combination of environmental and direct effects. These include changes to how services are delivered, training slowdowns, or increased healthcare costs.

You can mitigate the impact of this pandemic on your community. Your actions, and the actions of community members, will make the difference.

**Environmental Effects** – These effects involve changes in your operational environment due to the pandemic. Potential environmental effects can include:

1. Changes in the volume of services you are asked to provide.
2. A change in the complexity of your traditional duties.
3. New roles or tasks due to community needs during the pandemic.
4. Reduced resources available to your organization or community.

**Fire and EMS** Fire and EMS provide services to persons in need of COVID-related medical assistance. They must also respond to emergencies where PPE use may be difficult or impossible, placing them at increased risk of infection and illness at work. Organizations report a variety of environmental effects:

1. Increased Demand: During the initial peak of the pandemic, NYC EMS reported 30,620 calls for life threatening medical emergencies March 23-30, a 67.5% increase in comparison to a similar time period in 2019. ([www1.nyc.gov](http://www1.nyc.gov))
2. Reduced But More Complex Demand: Montgomery County and Cascade Medical in WA reported reduced calls (30-50%) after stay-at-home orders in March-April 2020, but more complex cases. ([Careless, 2020](#))
3. Changes in Demand: Due to reduced travel in Florida, a fire started involving 3,991 parked rental cars in a field near RSW Airport. ([WTSP, 2020](#))

#### RESOURCE REFERRALS

For project news and updates:

- Visit [www.start.umd.edu/COVIDFirstResponders](http://www.start.umd.edu/COVIDFirstResponders)
- Subscribe to START's newsletter at [www.start.umd.edu/newsletters](http://www.start.umd.edu/newsletters)
- Follow us on social media with #COVIDFirstResponders

#### IN THIS BRIEF

- Defining Environmental Effects
- Examples of Environmental Effects
- Ways You Can Respond

#### RELEVANT FOR



#### SO WHAT?

You have scarce resources and limited time to plan as the pandemic unfolds. Adapting to the changing environment will help you effectively manage your budget and people.

#### 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.

## NEW RESEARCH

Read this research on EMS demand from the National EMS Reporting System. They found reductions in EMS activations with notable increases in EMS attended deaths compared to previous years.

### 1. *Effect of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on the U.S. EMS*

## IN THE NEWS

Learn more about COVID-related increases and changed demand for services:

1. *Pre-Hospital Care by NYC EMS in March 2020.*
2. *Demand for Service in Montgomery County, MD*

**Police** - Police organizations throughout the country are experiencing changes in the quantity and type of services demanded.

1. *Decreased Demand:* From March 23-30, 2020 the NYPD reported a 30% decrease in possible crimes and 71% decrease in vehicle accidents compared to a similar time period in 2019. ([www1.nyc.gov](http://www1.nyc.gov))
2. *Changed Demand:* In a survey of law enforcement agencies conducted in 2020, the IACP and the CEBCP at George Mason University reported an increase in domestic incidents (42%) and an increase in calls for mental distress (47%) ([Lum et al., 2020](#)).

Domestic incidents are driven by economic struggles, children staying home from school, social distancing requirements, and other added stressors to people's lives. ([Kaukinen, 2020](#)). Some police organizations are also tasked with enforcing public health statutes such as occupancy, social distancing, and mask-wearing, tasks outside of their regular duties.

**Budgets & Staffing** — Reductions in tax revenue hamper first responder agencies in providing pre-pandemic levels of service. The IAFC reports an estimated \$340 billion loss in 2020, with \$380 billion in 2021 ([IAFC.org](#)).

San Diego has proposed cutting recruiting efforts, investigations, and helicopter search and rescue ([Garrick, 2020](#)). In Palo Alto, fire and EMS may be forced to cut budgets by 10 to 25% in response to COVID-related shortfalls ([Sheyner, 2020](#)).

**What Can You Do?** Assess how your demand for services has changed since the pandemic and redeploy personnel to respond to changes in quantity and type of service more effectively.

Plan for the shift of experienced personnel away from administrative work to service delivery, increasing your available staff if needed.



There are a variety of ways that you can contribute to this effort and help protect your brothers and sisters in the first responder community:

1. Participate in an online study with the START and Second Sight Team.
2. Contribute your data to the IAFC First Responders Personnel Impact Survey.
3. Respond to the National Police Foundation Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement Agencies.

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