

Risk Solutions

Code Enforcement Officer Safety: A Paramount Concern

By Melaina Francis, Risk Manager

When considering agency exposures those of code enforcement officers should not be overlooked. Threats, attacks, and even deaths have occurred while code enforcement officers were performing their duties. California JPIA members providing code enforcement services have reported occupational injuries impacting employees in the form of assaults. Over the last ten years, these injuries ranged from physical attacks by transients to being threatened with a knife by a resident.

According to the California Association of Code Enforcement Officers (CACEO) threats and assaults on code enforcement personnel is on the rise. “When citizens act aggressively toward a code enforcement officer, words alone may not offer any protection. Sometimes either retreating or using personal protective equipment is required to prevent injury from the attack. There may not be an option to retreat, which has been clearly documented by the battering and murders committed against code enforcement officers and other government regulators over the past 15 plus years.” The graph below is a representation of the types of incidents that have occurred in California.

Data sourced from California Association of Code Enforcement Officers – Officer Safety Committee 2016 Incident Report

A recent tragedy involved a code enforcement officer shooting: Code enforcement officer Jill Robinson, 52, was shot and killed Thursday, Aug. 9, 2018. A 65-year-old man was taken into custody as a suspect.

“Attacks on code enforcement officers have included the use of firearms, explosives, all manners of bludgeons, knives, motor vehicles, beatings and even human bites on the officer’s person. A 2001 CACEO survey of association members reported that over 63% of those who responded to the survey had been assaulted or threatened.”

With that said, there is action public agencies can take to protect their employees working in the field that encounter hostile, aggressive, unstable individuals that may try to do them harm.

According to the California Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1973, every employer has a legal obligation to provide and maintain a safe and healthful workplace for employees. As of 1991, a written, effective Injury and Illness Prevention Program is required and should include

the evaluation and prevention of workplace violence. The Department of Industrial Relations developed an Injury and Illness Prevention [model](#) program for workplace security.

Agencies should conduct and document a job hazard analysis that includes a hazard assessment for personnel protective equipment to determine what types of equipment to issue employees such as emergency radios, protective ballistic vests, pepper-spray, tasers, and expandable batons. All of which may be necessary protective equipment that requires specialized training, written policies and procedures, and reporting and documentation when incidents arise. The Colorado Association of CACEO has developed [Safety Standards and Guidelines](#), which is an excellent tool to assist members with conducting a job hazard analysis. Obtaining and evaluating crime statistics and gang activity data in the member's jurisdiction is recommended as part of the job hazard assessment.

As discussed earlier, if de-escalation tactics should fail, and an aggressor turns violent and the officer cannot flee, he or she has the right to defend themselves. How will they do this successfully to minimize injuries to themselves and others? Besides verbal de-escalation techniques, employees should have an agency issued radio or phone and know the established protocol to call for assistance when there is an indication that the situation is escalating. Agencies should consider providing their community service officer/code enforcement officers self-defense training and other training tools.

CACEO is the only State recognized authority under [Assembly Bill 2228](#) to provide training for code enforcement officers to obtain the designation of Certified Code Enforcement Officer (CCEO). CACEO has developed an officer survival guide consisting of best practices that can be downloaded from their website. <https://www.caceo.us/page/OfficerSafety>



It has been reported that some officers attend self-defense training at their own expense, which should not occur as this is the responsibility of their employer. Ensuring that employees receive proper training and the essential equipment to work safely is of utmost importance.

A possible safety vest [resource](#) for members is available through the DOJ Bureau of Justice Assistance that offers a bulletproof vest partnership that include code enforcement officers on the list of job categories eligible for the reimbursement program.

The California JPIA offers a Pepper Spray policy template to assist members. The policy template is available in the "Policy Templates" section of the Authority's Resources and Documents library on [cjpia.org](#). Additionally, OC Pepper Spray Training: A Useful Tool for Field /Enforcement Personnel is available for California JPIA members. If you have any questions, please contact your

<https://cjpia.org/newsletters/november-2018-issue-81/?fbclid=IwAR3ssL3s1hSZ5n9Unb0NBDAeh8TIjRvwpAQyNLdBYm865xqj46-9ByOyyDc#eleven>