

WINTER WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADER

The arrival of the winter season presents the opportunity to prepare and plan for the unique challenges and risks law enforcement officers may face. Such challenges may range from falls due to slippery conditions, rescue situations involving frozen bodies of water, conflicting regulations concerning trespassing, inclement weather impacts, and more. Preparation of these events may also offer an opportunity to collaborate with other local stakeholders to identify risks while ensuring they are mutually prepared to work together during winter weather circumstances.

Bodies of Water Prone to Freezing

A risk assessment utilizing the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) approach may help law enforcement agencies prepare for incidents that involve a frozen body of water.

Scanning:

- Review the [NJCE Bulletin - Winter Ice Activities and Best Practices](#). Although some provisions of this document may not be explicitly directed towards law enforcement, there are considerations in this bulletin that the law enforcement leader should carefully review. For example, item numbers 1 & 2 address signage prohibiting trespassing on bodies of water and state that the agency attorney should be consulted prior to the installation of any signage. In some communities, the police leader may not be included or unaware of decisions about this type of signage. The installation of such signage can significantly impact law enforcement officers. Officers may be unsure about what action to take with “kids skating,” or officers from the same agency may handle situations involving persons on frozen bodies of water differently because their agency has provided little or no direction. Additionally, great harm can occur when officers take action and later learn that there is no municipal ordinance supporting the prohibition of skating, even though signs have been posted prohibiting this activity.
- Identify lakes, rivers, and ponds and ensure such locations are identified with a common name or other identifier and that all first responders easily understand such identification.
- Review past drowning incidents, lifesaving activities, or “close-calls” at such locations.
- How deep and wide is the body of water, and is the water tidal?
- Is there a dam, and is it operational? Who has the capability and authority to operate it if it is operational?

Analyzing:

- What are the major causes of rescues related to frozen bodies of water? Ice skating? Walking on ice?
- Who owns the property? Is entering onto the frozen property permitted?
- Have officers been issued any equipment that may be useful during an ice rescue? If so, have they been trained? When was the last time the equipment was inspected? Do officers know how to request or access such equipment, especially during an emergency?
- Develop a plan of action – policies, training programs, and equipment inspection.
- Officer wellness initiatives often focus on having the appropriate support systems after a tragedy. However, equipping officers with the proper equipment and training them on using it appropriately in an emergency is sometimes overlooked. Such preparation can be a critical officer wellness function. The overwhelming feeling of helplessness that an officer may face while a young child is trapped and drowning will undoubtedly impact

any officer. Such impacts will be exasperated when it's realized that the police agency took no time to identify the vulnerability and prepare their officers for such a response.

Response:

- Purchase the appropriate equipment
- Work with other emergency service organizations to develop a pre-plan. Include staging areas, access points, command post locations, media assembly, and more.
- Conduct training sessions

Assessment:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the policy, equipment, and training program
- Implement changes that may be necessary
- Plan for long-term equipment sustainability and training needs.

Temporary Skating Rinks

Very few communities erect temporary ice rinks, but those that do should identify the unique hazards that may accompany such winter entertainment venues.

- Review the [NJCE Bulletin - Temporary Ice Skating Best Practices](#). Often local law enforcement may be tasked with enforcing park rules or regulations which are typically supported by municipal ordinance. However, temporary entertainment events may bring unique rules and regulations that do not have the same legal standing as other municipal ordinances. Agency leaders should discuss any laws or entertainment event conduct codes with their municipal attorney to see if any specific actions are necessary so that officers are supported in their actions.
- Other law enforcement considerations concerning temporary ice skating rinks include:
 - Ensuring that all personnel are aware of its existence, exact street address, and hours of operation.
 - Obtain emergency contact information for the facility management.
 - Conduct a general review of the area prior to the event to include checking the condition of street signage, highway lighting, traffic signals, and more. Ensure personnel are advised to report any change in conditions of such equipment.
 - Work with other first responders to develop a pre-plan in responding to an emergency (fire, medical assist, active shooter, etc.)

Winter Storm Considerations

Review the [NJCE Bulletin - Best Practices for Snow Emergencies](#). Public Works Supervisors and other non-police government officials may have likely read this MSI Bulletin. Although the information in this bulletin is not specific to law enforcement, there are some essential considerations for law enforcement:

- The bulletin details numerous suggestions for pre-planning and preparation. It may be helpful for police leaders to understand specific actions other municipal government stakeholders may be taking in preparation for a winter weather event.
- Have a plan for the police facility and walkways. Pre-planning with Public Works Supervisors is essential in keeping the police facility parking areas and sidewalks clear from ice during inclement weather. This can sometimes be overlooked because many businesses close during a storm, and snow and ice removal are sometimes delayed until the precipitation stops. Failing to clear police department areas of snow and ice regularly increases the risk of injury to officers, other employees, and visitors.

- Develop a consistent and well-known method for officers to report both deteriorating road conditions as well as snow and ice concerns for municipal parking areas and sidewalks. Ensure that officers are informed of this process.

Police Slipping on Ice – Shift Briefing Considerations:

Review the [NJCE Bulletin - Many Slip and Fall Risks During Winter Months](#). Many officers are injured by falls related to ice and snow every year. A roll call discussion of the risks associated with falls related to ice and snow can be helpful in preventing injuries. The bottom portion of page 2 of the bulletin details numerous considerations that can be included in a roll call safety discussion in preventing ice-related falls. These considerations include appropriate duty footwear, procedures for spotting and reporting ice conditions, mitigation efforts at entrances, and utilizing 3-point contact strategies when confronted with ice conditions.

Any questions please contact:

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