

Half Time with Courage to be Safe  
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The good news is that the Line of Duty Death numbers for 2009 are the lowest since 1993. The bad news is that we still lost 93 brother and sister firefighters in the United States last year. We did see a decrease in some of the key area that many fire service organizations have been targeting and that is a good start. While we should be thrilled that we are starting to see a reduction in this number, we must never forget we still have a long way to go.

Just two weeks into this New Year, I attended my first line of duty death funeral for 2010. Leroy Kemp lost his life in the line of duty while responding to a call in the Southern Tier of NY. Leroy was a firefighter's firefighter. He was Chairmen of the Board of fire Commissioners, a Past Chief, a County Fire Investigator and a pillar of his local emergency services. He had raised a family of emergency services professionals and will be deeply missed by his friends and family. The message delivered at the services from the clergy, Leroy's family and his son Milton, the current Chief of the department, was that we must all find the inner strength to continue to do what we do and make the fire service even stronger. I am confident we will all heed that message and do just that in both Leroy's and our other deceased brothers' and sisters' honor.

In 2004 the National Fallen Firefighter Foundation began the "Courage to be Safe Program". The goal of the program is to reduce the annual number of line of duty deaths by 50%. To achieve that goal we were looking for a 25% reduction by 2009. So while we feel great that the numbers were down in 2009, we have fallen short of our goal. The million dollar question is "What do we do now?" Do we throw our hands up and say it can't be done? Do we fail to acknowledge the fact we are headed in the right direction because we didn't make our goal? Do we throw out the entire program because it didn't get us where we hoped? The answer to all these questions should be a resounding - NO!

It is time for us to do what any good football or basketball team does right now when they find themselves down at the half. We look for what has worked, and uncover why we fell short. We build on what is working and figure out how to improve our weakness. In the words of so many people at Leroy's funeral "We find that inner strength to go on" and "make a difference". Just like those sports teams, we don't know what the second half will bring. So let's get out there on the field and see what happens.

We can hang our heads and crawl out of the locker room after this less than ideal first half, or we can rally the troops and take the field with renewed enthusiasm and commitment to finish the job we have started. I urge you to revisit the 16 life safety initiatives and pick one or two that you can champion to make a difference in your organization. Resources may be found at [www.everyonegoeshome.com](http://www.everyonegoeshome.com). We

owe it to ourselves, our families and our communities “To have the courage to be safe, so that everybody goes home”. Half time is over my friends, it’s time to roll up our sleeves and get back to work so the scoreboard looks more favorable at the end of the second half.