

Make a Difference...Be Safe

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According to the National Safety Council, June is Safety Month. The theme of this year's Safety Month is "Make A Difference." That's ironic considering you folks reading this, whether career or volunteer, or Fire or EMS; make a difference everyday in your community.

As I write this, 48 firefighters have died in the line of duty thus far in 2008 according to the United States Fire Administration. If this trend continues about 120 will die before the end of the year, a tragic and unacceptable number. In addition, an untold number Firefighters and EMS providers have been injured...while making a difference.

Sometimes, we all need to look at things from a different perspective. I think this may be an opportune time to do just that and consider National Safety Month as a time to make a difference to yourself, all of your loved ones and everyone who depends on you, by changing some habits.

The National Safety Council has divided the month into 4 separately themed weeks which is an excellent idea. I'm certain that if you thought long and hard, you could come up with four areas which could make you safer in what you do. For instance, in week one, what if you buckled that seat belt every time you responded to an incident...hey, if you could do that, I'll bet you could do it every time you got into a vehicle from now on. After you've done it for a week you may see that it's no big deal... it's easy...it didn't interfere with your mission, and now that you're in the habit, you'll keep right on doing it.

The second week is a great time to begin taking better care of you. How about some fruit instead of that ice cream and taking a walk instead of watching that TV show. If it's been a while since your last physical, how about picking up the phone and making an appointment? It's tragic that every year, the leading cause of line of duty death is heart attacks. Adding further to that tragedy is that in the majority of these cases, a simple physical would have uncovered the issue which could have been corrected before such a terrible event occurred.

Okay, week three and guess what? This is the 2008 Fire/EMS Safety, Health and Survival Week as well! This very important program, sponsored by the International Association of Fire Chiefs,

has the theme, “Committed to Long Term Results.” The recommended activities and materials incorporate three key areas:

- 1) Initiate an Emergency Vehicle Policy (You started that in week 1 with Seat Belts)
- 2) Fully implement the Wellness-Fitness Initiative (Hey, that was week 2)
- 3) Fully implement NFPA 1500 (OK, now you’ve got some work to do)

More information may be found at www.iafc.org/safetyweek I guess that sets up some work for all of you during week three of the month.

As you move into week four, its time to think about protecting yourself when working incidents on highways. Over the last few years, the streets have become as deadly to first responders as burning buildings and contagious disease. The good news is that the U.S. Fire Administration is going to help this week. They have recently published a report, “Traffic Incident Management Systems.” The report includes valuable information designed to help make incident scenes in traffic areas safer with information such as proper placement of equipment, effective distances for placement of warning signs, flagger training and placement, highway scene safety survival basics, and much more. You may download a free copy of the report from https://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/tims_0408.pdf

There now, you’ve got some work to do during Safety Month. But the results could mean so many more first responders still around and making a difference for many safety months to come.

Oh, and since all of this worked so well in June, it will also work in July and August and into 2009 and 2010 and so on. Safety, just as fire prevention, doesn’t last for just a week or a month. It is a plan for life. So go ahead and make a difference you can live with.