



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



PARKING ENFORCEMENT AGENCY BEST PRACTICES

This bulletin is for parking enforcement agency leaders who are responsible for the safety, performance, and well-being of their personnel. It identifies the primary hazard categories facing Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs), outlines best practices for each, and provides a framework for building a culture of safety. Agencies that invest in safety training, proper equipment, and sound operational protocols see fewer injuries, lower absenteeism, reduced legal liability, and stronger community relationships.

PEOs are among the most visible and most vulnerable frontline workers in local government. Unlike police officers, they typically lack defensive tools, formal law enforcement authority, and the institutional infrastructure that sworn personnel receive. Yet they patrol the same streets, interact with the same communities, and face many of the same risks:

- Solo deployment, often without a partner or nearby backup
- High public visibility combined with a role that generates frustration and resentment
- Outdoor work in all weather conditions and active traffic environments

Hazard: Workplace Violence

Workplace violence is the most acute and growing safety concern for parking enforcement personnel. PEOs are routinely subjected to verbal abuse, threats, spitting, pushing, punching, and in some cases, being struck by vehicles. The public perception of parking enforcement as adversarial creates a hostility that officers must navigate daily.

Research confirms that the actions of enforcement personnel significantly influence whether a citizen acts threateningly or violently. Officers trained in de-escalation and neutral communication substantially reduce their risk of physical confrontation. Best practices:

- Deploy officers in pairs in neighborhoods with elevated violent crime or known high-conflict zones.
- Equip every officer with a body-worn camera, a functioning radio, and real-time GPS monitoring.
- Advocate for local ordinances that criminalize threats and assaults against PEOs.
- Mandate de-escalation training before solo deployment. Training should cover active listening, neutral body language, non-accusatory language, recognizing escalation signals, and knowing how to disengage safely.
- Conduct conflict management training annually. Officer safety skills are perishable.
- Use pre-shift briefings to communicate known trouble spots, recent incidents, and areas of heightened tension (protests, events, etc.). Establish post-incident debriefing and support protocols.
- Establish a clear "disengage and document" protocol. Officers must be empowered and expected to walk away from escalating situations and call for law enforcement support.
- Train officers never to physically restrain or confront a member of the public. Their role in a physical confrontation is to disengage, create distance, document, and call law enforcement.

Hazard: Struck-by and Traffic Hazards

Parking enforcement officers spend significant time on foot in active roadways, parking lanes, and traffic environments. The risk of being struck by a moving vehicle is a constant and serious hazard. Best Practices:

- Require high-visibility vests and outer wear meeting ANSI/ISEA 107 Class 2 or Class 3 standards for all officers working in or near active traffic lanes. Conduct quarterly PPE inspections to verify that all required safety gear is present, in good condition, and being worn.
- Train officers on safe vehicle approach techniques: assess the environment before stepping into the roadway, use available lighting to your advantage, maintain awareness of vehicle blind spots, and make eye contact with drivers before entering a drive lane. Require officers to keep their head "on a swivel" — situational awareness is a survival skill for anyone working in active traffic.

Hazard: Environmental and Weather Hazards

Parking enforcement officers work outdoors in all seasons and all weather conditions. Extreme heat, extreme cold, rain, ice, and high humidity all pose health risks during extended outdoor shifts. Officers may be exposed to vehicle exhaust fumes, chemical de-icing agents, and other environmental contaminants. Best practices:

Preventing Heat Illnesses

- Issue weather alerts and heat advisories before shifts when temperatures or heat index values are elevated.
- Provide hydration reminders and ensure officers have access to water throughout their shifts.
- Authorize additional rest breaks during extreme heat.
- Train supervisors and PEOs to recognize the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke and to respond immediately.

Preventing Cold Stress Injuries

- Issue appropriate cold-weather gear (insulated outerwear, gloves, waterproof footwear).
- Shift to vehicle-based patrol during extreme cold events where feasible.
- Train officers and supervisors to recognize signs of hypothermia and frostbite.

Hazard: Physical Strain and Slip-Trip-Fall

The physical demands of extended walking create cumulative ergonomic and slip-trip-fall risks. Best practices:

- Address slip, trip, and fall hazards on icy/snowy surfaces, uneven pavement, and wet conditions in patrol areas.
- Provide training on proper body mechanics for lifting, carrying, and operating equipment.
- Educate officers on how to fall to minimize head, arm, and shoulder injuries.
- Encourage officers to report early signs of musculoskeletal discomfort before they become injuries.
- Ensure footwear requirements include appropriate support for extended walking on hard surfaces.

Hazard: Mental Health Hazards

The cumulative effect of daily verbal abuse, public hostility, and the stress of working in a role that is frequently stigmatized takes a significant psychological toll on parking enforcement personnel. Research shows that chronic exposure to verbal aggression, even without physical assault, can be as damaging as a single traumatic incident. High rates of stress, burnout, and absenteeism are documented consequences of unaddressed psychological hazards in this workforce.

Best practices:

- Establish a culture in which reporting verbal abuse and threats is expected and normalized and not a sign of weakness. Officers should understand that accepting abuse is not part of their job description.
- Provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that include mental health counseling, stress management resources, and trauma support following serious incidents.
- Conduct regular check-ins with officers, particularly those who have experienced assaults or repeated aggression. Supervisors should be trained to recognize signs of burnout, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress.

Parking enforcement agencies are encouraged to develop a comprehensive safety program that includes written hazard assessments, written policies and procedures, education and training, daily pre-shift and end-of-shift debriefings, and monitoring of performance metrics. MSI LIVE and MSI NOW offer classes and videos, such as Dealing with Difficult People and De-Escalation, to support your training program. A model Parking Enforcement Policy is available by contacting your Risk Control Consultant.