

2007: A DEADLY YEAR FOR U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT
Officer fatalities rose more than 28 percent to the second highest total in nearly two decades; fatal shootings surged 33 percent, while a record 81 officers died in traffic-related incidents

Washington, DC — 2007 has been a deadly year for law enforcement in the United States, with 186 officers killed nationwide as of December 26, according to preliminary statistics from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) and Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.). When compared with 2006, when 145 officers died, officer fatalities rose more than 28 percent this year. Outside of 2001, when 239 officers died—72 in the September 11 terrorist attacks—2007 is the deadliest year for American law enforcement since 1989, the NLEOMF and C.O.P.S. said in their preliminary report on 2007 officer deaths.

The number of officers killed by gunfire and in traffic-related incidents both increased in 2007, the latter reaching a record high of 81. So far this year, 69 officers have been shot and killed, up 33 percent from 2006, when there were 52 fatal shootings. Six times this year, two or more officers were gunned down in the same incident, including a shooting that killed three Odessa (TX) Police officers in early September.

“In 2007, our nation’s law enforcement officers were confronted with more brazen, heavily armed and cold-blooded criminals than they have faced in many years,” said Craig W. Floyd, Chairman and CEO of the NLEOMF, a non-profit organization that researches officer fatalities and maintains the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, DC. “Even in the face of incredible danger, our men and women in blue displayed remarkable bravery in working to protect the rest of us. As this tragic year comes to a close, every American owes our law enforcement officers an incredible measure of gratitude,” Mr. Floyd added.

Law enforcement officers killed in traffic-related incidents also increased, from 73 in 2006 to a new high of 81 this year. The previous high was 78 in 2000. 2007 is the 10th year in a row in which traffic-related incidents were the leading cause of officer deaths nationwide. Of the 80 traffic-related deaths this year, 60 officers died in automobile crashes and six in motorcycle crashes, and 15 were struck by automobiles while outside their own vehicles.

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Law Enforcement Officer Deaths Rose Sharply in 2007

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Among other causes of deaths, 18 officers died from physical causes, primarily heart attacks, four drowned, three fell to their deaths and two were killed by falling objects. Three officers died in aircraft accidents, and one was killed in a boating accident.

“The surviving families of these fallen officers will be struggling for many months trying to adjust to life without their officer,” said Jean Hill, National President of C.O.P.S., which provides resources to assist in rebuilding the lives of surviving families of officers killed in the line of duty. “There will be hundreds more survivors needing our services due to the increased numbers of deaths, and C.O.P.S. will need to increase its efforts to assist these families. We will strive to reach our mission for these families and help them rebuild their shattered lives. And that support from C.O.P.S. will be there for the families for as long as they need our support,” Mrs. Hill continued.

Other findings in the report include the following:

- Forty-one states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands experienced officer fatalities during 2007. Texas, with 22, had the most officer deaths, followed by Florida (16), New York (12), California (11) and Louisiana (9).
- Seventeen federal law enforcement officers died this year, including five special agents of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations who were killed in Iraq.
- The officers killed in 2007 ranged in age from 19 to 76; the average age was 39. The officers had an average of 11.4 years in law enforcement. Seven of the officers killed this year were women.
- Handguns were used in the vast majority of fatal officer shootings (51). Shotguns were used in eight officer killings and rifles in nine others, including September’s fatal shooting of Miami-Dade (FL) Police Officer Jose Somohano with an assault weapon.
- Approximately 40 percent of the officers who died this year were killed in felonious attacks; the other 60 percent died from accidental causes. Up until the late 1990s, more officers died in felonious attacks than accidents.
- Alcohol was a contributing factor in 21 of this year’s officer fatalities, up from 17 in 2006; illegal drugs played a role in 21 deaths, up from 11 in 2006.

After peaking at 277 in 1974, officer fatalities have generally declined over the past three decades, with the exception of the increase in 2001. The annual average number of officers killed was 228 in the 1970s, 190 in the 1980s, 160 in the 1990s and 167 from 2000-2006.

The statistics released by the NLEOMF and C.O.P.S. are preliminary data and do not represent a final or complete list of individual officers who will be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in 2008. The preliminary report, “Law Enforcement Officer Deaths, 2007,” is available at www.nleomf.org. For more information about C.O.P.S., visit www.nationalcops.org.