

TO: Police Chiefs  
FROM: Chief Keith F. Hummel (Ret.)  
J. A. Montgomery Risk Control  
RE: Storage of Departmental Firearms  
DATE: September 25, 2017

The safety of our officers, their families and the persons we serve is of the utmost importance. In too many instances we read about family members or friends who become the victims of an accidental injury or death due to the unintentional discharge of an officer's duty or personal firearm. When a review of these incidents is conducted, we find that on several occasions the firearm was inappropriately handled or an unauthorized person gained access to it and used it in an unlawful manner.

I was speaking with one of my colleagues at J.A. Montgomery, Senior Risk Control Consultant Robert Howitt and he brought to my attention the idea of "Safety Drift." The idea of "Safety Drift" for our purposes of conversation is when personnel are aware of the procedures, but gradually they move away from them because they become immune to, or do not recognize the consequences of their failure to comply. This failure can occur for several reasons; time passes and we fail to communicate the importance of "why" we follow these procedures, leadership fails to lead by example, or it is repeated so often that people become immune to the message. The goal is to find that middle ground where we get our employees to buy-in and recognize the importance and value of the safety procedure. This is a challenge, and we need to build relationships with our fellow officers so that they will become mindful of their work and at the same time accept feedback that may improve our procedures.

Relationships, credibility, supervision, and procedures are key to minimizing these types of incidents.

#### Recommendations:

- Prepare, with the employees' input, a policy and or rule that outlines an officer's responsibilities when it comes to the handling and storage of the Department's Firearm. Be sure to include how the policy is to be enforced.
- If the policy permits an officer to take home their Departmental firearm(s), provide a gun safe or equivalent so these weapons (shotgun, rifle, pistol, etc.) can be properly secured.
- If the firearm is being unloaded on a daily basis and reloaded when preparing for duty, the officer should inspect their ammunition to ensure that the bullet is not being compressed back into the casing. If the bullet is compressed into the casing it should be surrendered to the department for proper disposal.
- Review proper loading techniques and identify possible outcomes of an accidental discharge in a residence (single family home, apartment, condominium, etc.).
- Supply real life examples of incidents that include negative and positive outcomes.

Special note: some firearms manufacturers have designed pistols that require the trigger to be pulled prior to disassembly. For safety reasons, it is recommended that officers receive training during their semi-annual qualification cycle on the proper unloading and disassembly of these types of firearms.

*Safety is Our Goal!*