International Hazard Datasheets on Occupation

Police / Law Enforcement Officer

What is a Hazard Datasheet on Occupation?

This datasheet is one of the International Datasheets on Occupations. It is intended for those professionally concerned with health and safety at work: occupational physicians and nurses, safety engineers, hygienists, education and Information specialists, inspectors, employers ' representatives, workers' representatives, safety officers and other competent persons.

This datasheet lists, in a standard format, different hazards to which police / law enforcement officers may be exposed in the course of their normal work. This datasheet is a source of information rather than advice. With the knowledge of what causes injuries and diseases, is easier to design and implement suitable measures towards prevention.

This datasheet consists of four pages:

- Page 1: Information on the most relevant hazards related to the occupation.
- Page 2: A more detailed and systematized presentation on the **different hazards** related to the job with indicators for preventive measures (marked as numbered shields and explained on the third page).
- Page 3: Suggestions for **preventive measures** for selected hazards.
- Page 4: **Specialized information** , relevant primarily to occupational safety and health professionals and including information such as a brief job description, a list of tasks, notes and references.

Who is a police / law enforcement officer?

A worker whose main job is to protect the public. This includes protection against crime, the preservation of civil order, enforcement of traffic and other regulations, prevention of alcohol and substance abuse, prevention of neighborhood disorders, firearm and weapon control, law enforcement and investigations as mandated by law and requested by the relevant national or local authority.

What is dangerous about this job?

- Police / law enforcement officers run a high risk of being attacked, wounded or even killed by criminals, hoodlums and other people whose behavior disagrees with the law and the society norms. They may also suffer from "friendly fire".
- Many police / law enforcement officers are involved in work-related accidents - vehicle crashes, falls during chase, rescue and similar operations, etc.
- Police / law enforcement officers usually live under constant apprehension of physical danger, work long and irregular hours, and are exposed to unpleasant sides of life. This often results in psychological stress, family and personality problems.
- Police / law enforcement officers may develop health problems as a result of spending much time outdoors, including under the sun or in bad weather.
- Unavoidable physical contact with people who have contagious diseases (especially HIV) is a serious health hazard.

Hazards related to this job

Accident hazards	• Accidents are most likely during emergency response of the policeman/law enforcement officer and may occur especially while doing first aid work, patrol car driving and riot control • Slips, trips, and falls while ascending and descending from roofs or while chasing suspects in a crime • Wounds caused by knife or other object (metal rod, baseball bat, etc.), as a result of being attacked by persons contacted in the course of duty (suspects, offenders, their sympathizers, etc.) • Wounds caused by random or careless shooting by others (incl. "friendly fire")	1
	• Self-inflicted wounds caused during firearms cleaning, loading, etc. • Car or motorcycle accidents while chasing fleeing vehicles, or while fast driving in response to emergency calls	
Physical hazards	• Exposure to ambient environmental factors (low or high air temperatures, rain, wind, snow, sun) resulting in acute (common cold, heat stroke, dehydration, etc.) or chronic (rheumatism , etc.) diseases	
	• Exposure to high noise levels from the emergency horn or on the firing range	2
Chemical hazards	• Exposure to lead while directing traffic, working on the firing range, or doing finger printing work [See Note 1] • Exposure to excessive levels of carbon monoxide while directing traffic	
Biological hazards	• Risk of contracting a contagious disease (HIV, infectious hepatitis, rabies, etc.) as a result of needle stick injury, human or animal bite, or close contact with infected/ill people (esp. members of high-risk groups)	3
	• Infection caused by insects or rodents while entering polluted or abandoned places (esp. cellars, basements, etc.) for the purpose of inspection, search, observation, etc.	
Ergonomic, psychosocial and organizational factors	• Long periods of time spent inside vehicles may in the course of time result in musculoskeletal disorders (esp. low-back pains)	4
	• Cumulative trauma disorders of lower extremities (e.g., flatfoot) as a result of long-time, extensive foot patrolling assignments • Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), most likely if the incident witnessed by the policeman has resulted in serious injury, or death to any of those involved	
	• Exposure to various psychological stressors (stress - related disorders may be manifested as behavioral problems, marital or family problems, or sometimes as alcohol or substance abuse)	5
	• Personal and/or family problems caused by shiftwork, irregular work hours (incl. at night), constant state of alertness (incl. when off duty), relations with peers and superiors within an hierarchical system typical of police and law-enforcement forces, and similar psychosocial factors [See Note 2]	6
	• Fear of being prosecuted afterward for actions which seemed to be clearly indicated as necessary during an event, but later not considered as such (particularly by others) when the moments of peak stress were past [See Note 3] • The paperwork duties, as opposed to active law enforcement, are often experienced as a major stressor	

Preventive measures

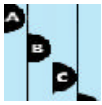
1. When on duty, wear the personal protective equipment provided for the job at hand, e.g., bulletproof clothing
2. Wear appropriate hearing protection on the firing range
3. In rescue operations or when dealing with drug addicts, take precautions to avoid contact with body fluids; in particular do not expose cuts or other open skin wounds to body fluids, to avoid contamination with agents causing diseases such as AIDS, hepatitis, etc.loves
4. Learn relaxation exercises and perform them during long waiting periods
5. Seek psychological or vocational advice if experiencing work-related stresses or burnout
6. Select a shiftwork schedule that would have the least harmful effect on the employee's health, family and personal life - consult employees and specialists in shift scheduling

Specialized information

Synonyms

Policeman / woman, Law Enforcement Officer, Officer, Cop [slang]

Definitions and/or description



Protects the public from attack, mugging and robbery. Takes prisoners under control where possible and transports them to jail or other restraining facility. Works in traffic control and issues tickets (court summons) to violators of traffic laws. Disperses unruly crowds Renders first aid at accidents if there are no others more highly qualified (physicians, nurses, MDA) on scene. Serves warrants and makes arrests of sought persons. Examines medical and dental x-rays, finger prints and other information to identify bodies held in morgue. Testifies in court to present evidence regarding cases. Guards prisoners detained at police station or in detention room pending hearings. Searches all prisoners for weapons, contraband, drugs and other harmful articles. May investigate offenders and causes for arrest and make recommendations to magistrate concerning disposition of the case. In most jurisdictions, whether on or off duty, these officers are expected to exercise their authority whenever necessary (Based on DOT [Police Officer I, II, III] and Occ. Outlook Handbook [Police, Detectives, and Special Agents]

Related and specific occupations

Police Officer - Identification and Records Unit; Police Officer - Community Relations Unit; Police Officer - Traffic Unit; Police Officer - Complaint Evaluation Unit; Police Officer - Police Officer - Motorized / Mounted Unit; Police Officer - Investigation Unit; Police Officer - Homicide Unit; Police Officer - Police Academy Instructor; Police officer - Vice Unit; Police Officer - Internal Affairs Unit, and Police Officer - Fingerprint Unit [In addition, the name of Detective may be connected with each of the occupations above]; marshal; sheriff deputy; trooper; etc.

Tasks

Arresting; assisting (citizens, etc.); chasing; checking; consulting; directing traffic; driving; evaluating (evidence, complaints, etc.); examining; impounding; issuing (tickets, reports, etc.); fingerprinting; immobilizing a prisoner; investigating; negotiating; patrolling; protecting; responding (to calls, alarms, etc.); reporting; running; shooting; tackling; testifying; training

Primary equipment used

Communication equipment; vehicles of different types (mostly automobiles); weapons (incl. personal firearms); personal protective equipment (bulletproof vests, helmets, shields, etc.); subduing and riot-control equipment (incl. handcuffs, clubs, smoke grenades, launchers, nets, etc.);

Workplaces where the occupation is common

Administrative authorities at different levels: state, regional, municipal, local, etc.: law-enforcement agencies of different types: civilian, military, or paramilitary

Notes

1. Firing-range instructors must submit periodical urine/blood tests for lead.
2. The profession of a Police / Law Enforcement Officer is rarely meeting an impartial attitude on the part of the public: it may vary from high respect and praise to despise and hate, depending on the social consciousness and law-abiding practices of a certain person or group. This, often unpredictable, emotional diversity contributes to the development of anxiety and similar personal traits in Police / Law Enforcement Officers.
3. Such second thoughts may make actions look unnecessary (particularly to others and at a later time when the stress is lower) and the result of having acted may lead to reduction in rank, possible removal from the police force and even to loss of the pension due the officer.
4. Police / Law Enforcement Officers have a 200% greater risk of cardiovascular diseases, including heart attack and stroke, than the general population.

References

Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 4th Ed., ILO, Geneva, 1998, Vol.3, p.95.9 - 95.12.

Occupational Outlook Handbook , U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1996 - 1997 Ed., p. 303 - 306.

Environmental and Occupational Medicine, by William N. Rom (Ed.), Little, Brown & Co., 1992, p.729.

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