

SEPTEMBER 2025 **ISSUE #47** 

SAFETY HEALTH AND RISK E-CONNECT NEWSLETTER

### HR meets Al



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The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of LGRMS, ACCG, or GMA.



201 Pryor St. SW Atlanta, GA 30303









### **UPCOMING WEBINARS AND TRAINING**

Webinar: A Georgia Local Government Employer's Guide to Identifying Issues Arising from Secondary Employment/Moonlighting by Law Enforcement Officers

Sep. 24 | 2-3PM 🔗

Webinar: Law Enforcement Crisis Communications: OOH!!! You will wish you hadn't said that

Oct. 7 | 2-3PM 🔗

Webinar: Elected Official Crisis Communications: If you are explaining, you are losing. What should you say in a crisis?

Oct. 15 | 2-3PM 🤣

**Safety Coordinator I** 

HALF DAY | 8:30AM-12:30PM Sep. 27 - Gainesville, GA

**Safety Coordinator II** 

HALF DAY | 12:30-3:30PM Sep. 27 - Gainesville, GA 🔗

**Law Enforcement Risk Specialist** 

FULL DAY | 8:30AM-3:30PM Oct. 29 - Cedartown, GA Oct. 15 - Pine Mountain, GA Nov. 12 - Tifton, GA

**Law Enforcement Risk Specialist Conference** 

Sep. 30-Oct. 1 - LaGrange, GA 🔗

Events subject to change. Check website for updates.



<u>lgrms.com/training-event-calendar.aspx</u>



Welcome to the September edition of SHARE, the monthly publication of Local Government Risk Management Services (LGRMS). SHARE is sent to all GIRMA/IRMA, and WC, members 10 times per year around the 20th of the month. SHARE has two sections: (1) a general safety and risk, and (2) a worker safety-focused section. We cover topics and issues most relevant to local governments in Georgia. We look forward to your feedback.

If you are not currently on the distribution list to receive our monthly newsletter, it can be downloaded for free from the LGRMS website (www.lgrms.com).

### In this issue

This month's Safety Theme is Preparedness Starts at Home, the theme for National Preparedness Month 2025. Since 2004, FEMA has observed September as the month to encourage Americans to get ready for an emergency. Know your risk, make a plan, build a kit, and get involved in your community! Read this month's safety theme article and make sure you and your family are prepared.

Many government workers have physically demanding jobs. How many stretch before their shift? They all

should! Vincent Scott shares the benefits of stretching to reduce injury in "Notes from the Road."

Al has entered the local government workplace, and it has important benefits for human resources departments. In "Liability Beat," Chris Ryan looks at ways to integrate Al into hiring, training and more.

In "Law Enforcement Matters," Natalie Sellers shares the risk of operational drift—a slow, subtle departure from best practices and adopted policies. Use her checklist to see if your agency suffers from this potentially hazardous phenomenon.

Be safe.

Dennis

**CONTACT:** Dennis Watts, dwatts@lgrms.com



### Take Time to Stretch

A few simple stretches can decrease risk of injury

By Vincent Scott LGRMS Risk Control Consultant

Local government maintenance, parks, roads and utilities employees face a high risk of musculoskeletal injuries. Public works employees often perform physically demanding tasks such as lifting, repetitive motion, awkward postures and vibration exposure from operating heavy equipment.

Back, shoulder, knee, and hand/wrist injuries are the most common for public works employees. A single preventable musculoskeletal injury in public works can easily cost tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars. Across a department, these injuries can drain budgets, reduce workforce availability, and delay essential local government services.

Public works departments can reduce injuries by combining training, stretching programs, ergonomic tools, job rotation and a strong safety culture. These strategies not only prevent injuries but also lower costs, improve morale and keep essential local government services running smoothly. Stretching programs provide a proactive, low-cost, high-benefit strategy that helps public works departments reduce injuries, cut costs, boost productivity, and reinforce safety practices.

The best stretches for public works employees are simple, job-specific and quick, so they can be done as a group before a shift. The goal is to loosen muscles, increase circulation, and prepare for lifting, bending and tool use.

By making stretching a routine part of the workday, public works departments demonstrate a clear commitment to employee safety and well-being. When paired with training, proper equipment and a supportive safety culture, stretching helps reduce costly injuries while improving productivity, morale, and keeping essential services running smoothly.

Photo by Yellow Garnet Photography



### DAILY STRETCHES TO PREVENT INJURY ON THE JOB SITE

#### SHOULDERS AND ARMS

- Extend one arm at shoulder level across your chest.
- Place your opposite hand on your elbow and gently apply
   pressure toward the opposite shoulder, stretching your arm across your chest.
- · Repeat, alternating sides.



### NECK

- Start with your head facing forward.
- Turn your head slowly to one side as far as comfortable.
- . Then turn to the other side.
- · Repeat five times.



#### SHOULDER CIRCLES

- Slowly move your shoulders in a circular motion: upward, forward, downward and backward for forward circles.
- Reverse the direction for backward circles.
- Repeat five times each direction.



#### ARMS, SHOULDERS AND RIB CAGE

- · Interlace your fingers.
- With your palms facing upward above your head, press your hands upward, stretching your arms. Hold for five seconds.
- Gently stretch to one side, hold for five seconds and return to center.
- Gently stretch to opposite side, hold for five seconds and return to center.
- · Repeat five times.

VARIATION:

Press hands forward at shoulder level.



#### CHEST AND SHOULDERS

- Bend your elbows with your hands near your shoulders.
- Breathe in through your nose. As you exhale, lower your elbows down and back. Aim your elbows at your back pockets.
- Hold this position for a few seconds and then relax.
- · Repeat five times.

VARIATION:

Keep elbows at shoulder height.



### SHOULDERS, BACK AND HIPS

- Place your palms on your lower back while in a standing position.
- Leaning your shoulders back, stretch your upper body backwards. Hold this position for five seconds.
- · Return to a neutral position.
- · Repeat five times.



### WRISTS

- With your forearm in a comfortable horizontal position and your palm toward the floor, bend your wrist down.
- Then raise your hand, extending your wrist.
- · Repeat five times.



### "FENCING"

- In a standing position, place your hands against a stable object or wall to support yourself. Move one foot back about two feet. Be sure that both feet point forward.
- Shift your weight forward over the foot in front, bending the forward knee up to 80-90 degrees.
- Hold the position for 1-2 seconds and slowly return to the standing position, keeping the forward foot out in front.
- · Repeat five times.
- Switch position with the opposite leg forward and repeat five times.



#### KNEE STRETCH

- In a standing position, support yourself by holding onto a stable object, like a wall or a table that is bolted to the floor.
- Bend your right knee, bringing your foot up toward the back of your thigh.
- Grasp your foot with your right hand, gently stretching your knee, moving your foot toward the back of your thigh.
- Slowly release your foot and return to the original standing position.
- Repeat, alternating legs, five times each leg.

## PUBLIC SECTOR HUMAN RESOURCES

4 HR Challenges and Trends in 2024

By Chris Ryan LGRMS Sr. Risk Control Consultant

According to Oracle.com, to address the following trends and challenges, HR teams are getting creative—applying strategies that have worked in the private sector while branding their public missions as rewarding opportunities. They're also adopting cloud applications that are increasingly Al-powered to help serve employees, and ultimately the public, more efficiently.

### 1. Technological advancements

Government HR managers already rely on cloud applications to hire and onboard employees faster, help manage healthcare costs, analyze how to achieve the most with taxpayer-funded budgets, and manage a variety of other processes. Now, machine learning and generative AI capabilities built into cloud-based human capital management (HCM) applications are building on these benefits.

These tools can help HR professionals identify skills gaps and the best recruits, write job descriptions and classifications, assist with drafting performance reviews, produce personalized career development plans, and give employees automated answers to benefits, payroll, and other questions. All algorithms can help perform these tasks more efficiently than legacy on-premises and cloud systems.



Most state and local HR departments are just beginning to explore Al's potential. According to a 2024 study by consulting firm NEOGOV, 76% of government agencies aren't using Al yet to improve recruitment and 78% still lackdocumented Al policies and procedures. As adoption increases, organizations will need to protect the privacy and security of workers' personal information—just as governments protect constituent information.

### 2. Recruitment and retention

Between February 2020 and January 2023—a period dominated by the pandemic—450,000 people left US state and local government jobs, per data compiled by the Federal Reserve of St. Louis. Thankfully, public sector employment rebounded in 2023, with governments hiring 581,000 people, according to the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

While this rebound is promising, factors such as lengthy hiring processes, lower salary scales relative to private-sector employers and limited chances for advancement can make it tough to recruit and retain government employees. Only 9% of agencies offer mobile employment apps, which is perhaps one reason why 93% of public sector HR managers have had to repost jobs due to insufficient response, based on a 2024 study by Mission Square Research.

Al and other advanced technologies make it easier for government HR managers to customize career sites, advertise new jobs, use job matching to connect a person's skills with open positions, and make job offers faster. The city of Memphis, for example, moved its police hiring online, no longer slowing down the process with in-person applications. To help strengthen retention, automation can speed up onboarding, clarify career paths, and outline training needed to move up the ranks.

### 3. Aging workforce

When COVID-19 hit, many Baby Boomers retired earlier than planned, either due to job loss or their own health concerns. That trend only accelerated a growing skills gap. Ventura County in California estimates that half of its 10,000 workers will be at retirement age within the next few years. In response to these recent departures and impending retirements, managers are now scrambling to fill open positions with younger workers who are less experienced but often more tech-savvy.

To avoid a shortage of expertise, governments are seeking to improve succession planning by creating pipelines of skilled workers to fill leadership positions. The state of California, for instance, uses an automated system that predicts when younger workers will be

ready for leadership roles. In the years ahead, AI will be able to help forecast such talent and management gaps, protecting institutional knowledge and business continuity.

### 4. Training and development

To develop tomorrow's leaders, governments must provide continuous learning opportunities, training and retraining workers in all phases of their careers. To illustrate this, the state of Rhode Island not only runs its own learning management system—offering training in cybersecurity, professional writing, collaborative customer service, and many other topics—but it also partners with external providers such as edX, an education platform founded by Harvard and MIT that offers a wealth of professional development and academic courses, many of them free.

In the years ahead, AI will be able to shape training and development, creating customized learning paths that offer targeted, relevant content that could include specialized modules for areas such as police and fire departments. Today, with AI-driven tools, HR can more easily monitor employee progress, identify room for improvement, and recommend the best ways for workers to upskill.







### Signs for Spotting Operational Drift

Beware the slow shift away from established standards

By Natalie Sellers LGRMS Sr. Law Enforcement Risk Consultant

Are the national events of the past decade the result of operational drift?

Every organization and profession can experience operational drift. Operational drift occurs when an organization or its people slowly and often unintentionally shift away from established policies, standards, or procedures. It is subtle and usually happens over time, so spotting it early is key to avoiding major failures. Detailed herein are some signs to look for when trying to spot operational drift and some suggestions to help prevent it.

Spotting operational drift in law enforcement is critical because drift happens slowly, often without notice, until it leads to serious consequences. A good way to spot drift is to compare "work as imagined" vs. "work as done." That means checking whether what is written in policies and procedures is truly what is happening on the ground.

In short, spotting operational drift is about catching small shifts before they become cultural norms that jeopardize safety, trust and effectiveness. Treat findings as early warning signs—not proof of failure, but signs of a looming problem. Catching operational drift early means the difference between making minor corrections or having devastating consequences.

Small shortcuts, policy bends or minor oversights can become "the way we do things here" if not corrected. What begins as a harmless deviation can evolve into systemic risks—like unsafe driving habits, improper evidence handling, or diminished officer safety practices. This is also referred to as the Normalization of Deviance. Diane Vaughn is credited with this term after having studied the Challenger Disaster. Vaughn stated, "It is the gradual acceptance of deviant or unacceptable practices as normal over time because they don't lead to immediate negative consequences." She further postulates that repeated departure from standard procedures becomes a new organizational norm, leading to a gradual desensitization to risk and an increased likelihood of catastrophic events.

Law enforcement relies heavily on community trust. If the public sees patterns of misconduct, inconsistent policy application, or "drift" away from ethical standards, legitimacy erodes. Operational drift in training, use-of-force procedures, or emergency response protocols can endanger officers, suspects and the public. Training standards drift, with less emphasis on refreshers and fewer checks on competency.

Policies exist on paper but are no longer actively reinforced. Safety habits degrade subtly unless leaders actively reinforce them. Shortcuts become normalized: "This is how we do it now." Slight deviations from standard procedures are tolerated without correction, and the operational drift of the organization begins. It creeps in ever so slightly that subtle changes are often missed, and before you know it, "good enough" replaces "by the book," and the once high standards on which an agency relied erode.

When agencies drift from established policies or fail to enforce them, they increase their exposure to lawsuits, settlements and costly litigation. Courts often look at whether an agency followed its own standards—drift shows a failure of oversight. Misalignment Between Policy and Practice occurs when leaders assume procedures are followed, but the frontline reality differs. Field adaptations become the de facto standard without review or approval, and written expectations don't match day-to-day operations.

Shifts in accountability become apparent when supervisors stop consistently enforcing the rules and excuse mistakes as "just the way things are." Responsibility for errors gets pushed down the chain instead of being addressed systemically. Over-reliance on past success is the warm blanket caused by incidents that are narrowly avoided and treated as proof that the system works, instead of using that near miss as a warning sign. Before you know it, the agency has a false sense of security, and complacency sets in.

Drift can distract officers from the agency's vision, values, and goals. However, spotting it early ensures daily practices align with the broader mission of protecting communities and upholding the law. Continuous reinforcement of best practices prevents complacency.

### OPERATIONAL DRIFT SPOTTING CHECKLIST

### **Procedures vs. Practice**

- 1. Do staff follow written procedures, or are there "workarounds"?
- 2. Are deviations openly discussed and corrected, or quietly tolerated?
- 3. Is "tribal knowledge" (unwritten practices) replacing official policy?

### Leadership & Accountability

- 1. Do supervisors consistently enforce standards?
- 2. Are minor violations addressed, or ignored unless something significant happens?
- 3. Is feedback from leadership aligned with actual field practice?

### **Training & Competence**

- 1. Is refresher training happening on schedule?
- 2. Do new employees learn correct procedures—or copy shortcuts from veterans?
- 3. Are skills tested realistically, not just "check the box"?

### **Culture & Attitudes**

- 1. Do staff use phrases like "we've always done it this way" or "nothing bad has happened yet"?
- 2. Is there openness to questioning risky practices?
- 3. Are informal rules stronger than formal policies?

#### **Data & Outcomes**

- 1. Are near misses, complaints, or minor incidents trending upward?
- 2. Are performance metrics (like reports, inspections, or reviews) consistent with the lived reality of staff?
- 3. Are incident investigations identifying root causes—or just blaming individuals?

### **Communication & Reporting**

- 1. Do employees feel safe reporting minor problems or mistakes?
- 2. Are reports acted on, or do they "die in the system"?
- 3. Is there alignment between what management thinks is happening and what is happening?

### **Continuous Improvement**

- 1. Are changes to practice deliberate and documented, or gradual and unnoticed?
- 2. When incidents occur, are corrective measures followed through long-term?
- 3. Is there a regular review comparing "work as imagined" vs. "work as done"?

Spotting drift demonstrates a commitment to professionalism and continuous improvement.

To avoid the drift, look for the warning signs using data and metrics. Pay close attention to increased "near misses" or minor incidents. Look for rising trends in the form of complaints, small claims, or equipment issues, as well as gaps between performance reports and staff experience. Cultural signs can be evidence of operational drift as well.

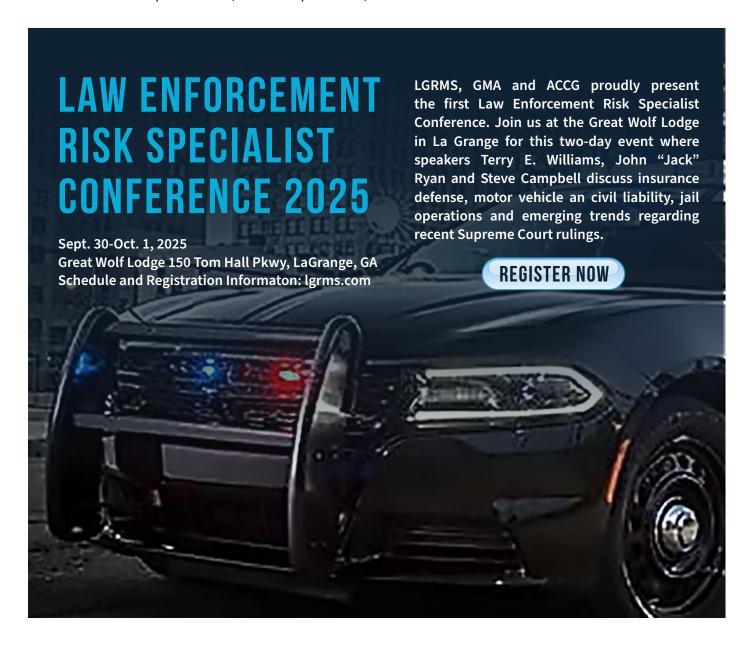
Complacency can make people stop questioning or challenging risky practices. New employees will quickly adopt bad habits because that's what they see modeled, and "Informal rules" outweigh official guidance.

Operational drift takes deliberate effort to avoid. Making a conscious effort to prevent drift, whether operational,

ethical, or cultural, means deliberately putting in safeguards so individuals and the organizations don't slowly slide away from their standards, values, or best practices without noticing.



Over-reliance on past success is the warm blanket caused by incidents that are narrowly avoided and treated as proof that the system works, instead of using that near miss as a warning sign.





Take a moment to exercise your brain and relieve stress by solving these fun safety puzzles! Answers on page 15.

### **CRYPTOGRAM PUZZLE**

Decode the message. Each letter in the phrase has been replaced with a random letter or number.

### **WORD SEARCH**

culture	leadership	report
data	operational	stretch
drift	practice	training
improve	recruit	workforce

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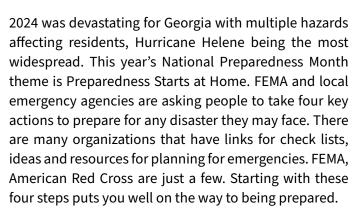


# SAFETY THEME KEEPING OUR MEMBERS SAFE ON THE JOB AND AT HOME

### PREPAREDNESS STARTS AT HOME

National Preparedness Month 2025

By Dennis Watts LGRMS Training and Communications Manager



- Know the different types of emergencies that could happen and appropriate responses to stay safe.
- Make a family emergency plan.
- Build an emergency supply kit.
- Get involved in your community by taking action to prepare for emergencies.

### Ready set, get prepared

☑ National Preparedness Month is a great time to take small steps to make a big difference in being prepared. Getting yourself, your family and your home ready for emergencies like home fires, power outages and local floods means you're more prepared for disasters like wildfires, flash flooding, hurricanes and more.



☑ We all have responsibilities for our families, pets, neighbors and communities. By taking steps now, you can be in control of both your safety and those you care about before, during and after a disaster. Think about what you'll need and how the people in your social circles can help each other. A great place to start is by knowing the risks where you are. Then, make a plan and build an emergency supply kit to help keep yourself and those you love safe and comfortable during and after a disaster. Finally, get involved by keeping up to date with your community's emergency and disaster plan and working with neighbors to prepare.

☑ When making your plans, make sure you consider any unique needs of those you care for, whether it be medical conditions, loved ones with disabilities, your pets, and any neighbors who might need help getting prepared.

☑ Does your family know what to do when a disaster strikes? Readiness starts at home. Create an emergency plan today:

- · Establish meeting points
- Assign responsibilities
- Practice evacuation routes
- Create a communication plan

☑ Different seasons bring different challenges. As we enter hurricane season, make sure you're ready with a checklist of disaster supplies. What's on your list?

☑ When the lights go out, will you be ready? Readiness starts at home with these power outage essentials:

- Battery-powered radio
- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Portable charger for phones
- Non-perishable foods

☑ Prep Tip: Keep emergency contact cards in everyone's wallet and backpack. Include an out of state contact often easier to reach during local emergencies.

☑ Many emergency rooms see surges in preventable injuries after disasters? Readiness starts with a wellstocked first aid kit and basic medical training.

☑ Battery Check Day! Replace smoke detectors, check flashlights, rotate portable chargers. Small actions = BIG preparedness.

☑ What's in your car kit? Readiness starts with you but extends everywhere you go!

☑ Your furry family members need their own emergency kits. Readiness starts at home for EVERY member of your household. Include:

- 7-day food and water supply
- Medications and medical records
- First aid supplies
- Collar with a tag harness and leash







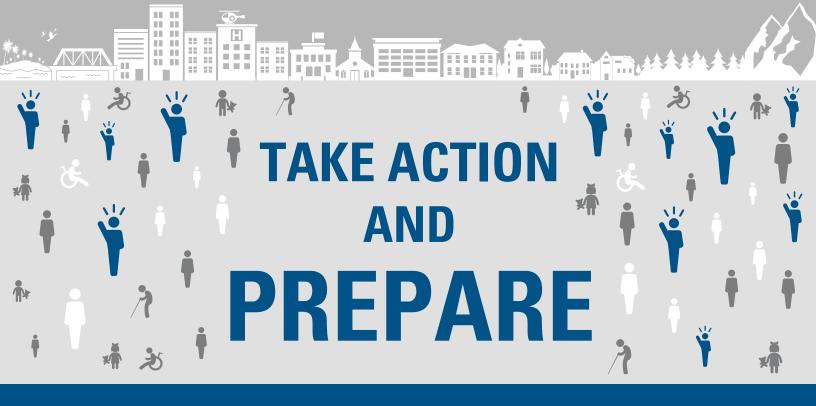




If you stay ready, you don't have to get ready. Find your local @NWS office https://www.weather.gov/ to receive the latest updates before, during and after hazardous weather. #PreparednessStartsAtHome









### 12 WAYS TO PREPARE



Sign up for Alerts and Warnings



Make a Plan



Save for a **Rainy Day** 



**Practice Emergency Drills** 



**Test Family** Communication Plan



**Safeguard Documents** 



Plan with **Neighbors** 



**Make Your** Home Safer



Know **Evacuation Routes** 



Assemble or **Update Supplies** 



**Get Involved in Your Community** 



**Document and Insure Property** 



There are many ways to take action and prepare before a disaster occurs. The actions on this card include some of the most important ways to help yourself, your family, and your community increase your preparedness. Simple actions at home and in your neighborhood can make a big difference!



Twitter.com/readygov



@Readygov Facebook.com/readygov



Fema.gov/mobile-app



Ready.gov/prepare



# HOW TO USE THE MONTHLY SAFETY THEME

Here are some hints to help you get the safety message across to all employees each month.

### **Theme Poster**

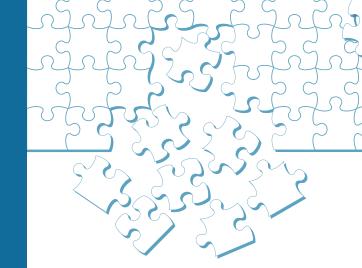
Make copies and post wherever you will get the most impact or email to your departments.

### **Theme Page**

Repeats the poster message with the safety theme topic of the month.

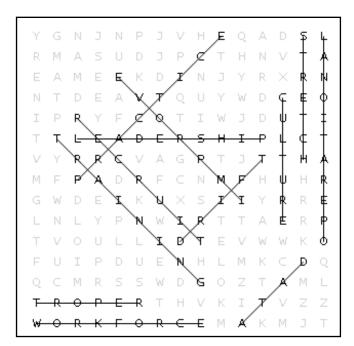
### **Safety Meeting Agenda**

- Assemble participants.
- Hand out copy of theme page.
- Pass around Participant Sign-in Sheet.
- Read theme out loud and discuss aspects of the theme in the department. Give examples. Ask for ideas, etc.
- Discuss accidents/incidents/near misses over the last month.
- Issue safety Self-inspection Checklists for each department inspection team.
- Discuss inspection items noted from last reports and the status of completion of reported items.

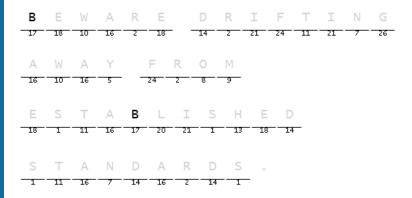


### **PUZZLE ANSWERS**

### **WORD SEARCH ANSWER**



### **CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER**





### General Self Inspection Program

Location, Area, or Department:			Date	e:		
Surveyor:						
General Evaluation	Needs Action	Needs Improvement	Good	Very Good		
A. Property/Liability						
<ul><li>a. Fire protection</li><li>b. Housekeeping</li></ul>	<del></del>					
c. Slip/trip/fall		<del></del>				
d. Public safety						
B. Employee Safety						
a. Safety meetings		<del></del>	<del></del>			
<ul><li>b. Safety rules</li><li>c. Work conditions</li></ul>		<del></del>	<del></del>			
d. Auto/equipment	<del></del>	<del></del>	<del></del>			
Property/Liability					Yes	No
Fire protection Emergency numbers posted						
Fire extinguishers available/serviced						
Fire alarm panel showing system is o						
Automatic sprinkler system control va		•				
Automatic sprinkler heads clear of sto Flammable, combustible liquids store						
Flammable, combustible liquid contain			or container.			
Smoking, No Smoking areas designat						
Any cigarette butts noticed in No Smo	_					
Comments:						
Housekeeping						
Stairwells clear of combustible items.						
Furnace, hot water heater, and electric						
Work and public areas are clear of ext Floor surfaces kept clear of oils, other			nt, or other trip	ping hazards.		
Stored items are not leaning or impro			are not up high	ı <b>.</b>		
Comments:		-	_			
Slip/Trip/Fall						
Stair treads are in good condition; no	t worn, damag	ed or loose.				
Handrails for all stairs/steps.						
Guardrails for all elevated platforms. Stair handrails are in good condition;	not loose or bi	roken				
Floor surfaces are even, with non-slip						
All rugs are held down or have non-sl	lip backing.					
Any holes, pits or depressions are ma		, barricades, or	guardrails.			
Wet floor signs are available and used						
Comments:						



### General Self Inspection Program

Public Safety	Yes	No
Public areas kept clear of storage and supplies.  Emergency lighting for public assembly areas in buildings.  Evacuation plans posted for public assembly areas in buildings.  Public areas have necessary warning or directional signs.  Construction work has barriers, covers, and markings.  Street and road signs noted in good condition, clear of obstructions.  Sidewalks smooth and even; no holes, no raised or broken areas.		
Comments:		
Employee Safety		
Safety Meetings		
Held in the department.  Meetings held monthly quarterly other ; documented  Different topic each time.  Covers department safety rules.		
Safety Rules		
Rules specific for this department. Rules are written, posted in the department. Reviewed with new employees.		
Work Conditions		
Employees exposed to: Heat Cold Rain/sleet/snow Use of chemicals Noise Work in confined spaces Work in trenches Traffic Blood/body fluids Other		
Comments:		
Auto and Equipment  Seat belts provided.  Seat belts required to be used.  Drivers noted wearing seat belts.  All lights working including strobe lights, turn signals.  Tires in good condition, tread, sidewalls.  Glass in good condition; not cracked, broken.  Reflective tape, signs in good condition.  Any periodic, documented, self-inspection of the vehicles/equipment.  Proper guards on mowers, other equipment.		
Comments:		



### Safety Meeting Attendance Sign Up Sheet

City/County:		
Date:		
Department:		
Topic:		
Attendees:		
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Next meeting scheduled for		
Safety Coordinator		



### CONTACTS

### LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

### LGRMS HOME OFFICE

### Dan Beck

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### **Dennis Watts**

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### **Kayla Frazier**

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### LAW ENFORCEMENT RISK CONSULTANTS

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