



Gordon Graham here – and thanks for taking the time to visit the Safe Call Now website. I am so impressed with all the people involved in the operation of this site as well as the delivery of the valuable services this site has to offer! Although the site is relatively new, there are so many public safety personnel who have already benefited and that is a good thing.

Let me get personal with you for a few and I apologize in advance if any of this is too close to home or makes you feel uncomfortable, but for some reason some recent events have pushed me into writing this piece.

It was 1974. I was a relatively new cop with the California Highway Patrol assigned to Central Los Angeles. For those of you who don't know this, CHP is the largest State Police organization in America and although I am a bit biased, I was and am proud to be a part of it; however, the CHP had a problem which still exists today. I did not know this at the time, but the problem is how many of our officers end up killing themselves.

I became aware of a statistic in 1975 and that "stat" was another fellow assigned to Central Los Angeles whose name was Dan. He was just another guy in the office and at that time it was all men until 1976 or so. Dan had a locker close to mine and while I was a young motorcycle cop he was assigned to a car and we worked the same beat. He was a "typical cop" who kept to himself and was somewhat quiet. Dan lived in Newhall with his wife; he did his job and seemed like a nice, conscientious guy.

This seems so shallow, but what I remember most about Dan was his car. He had a "cherry". A beautiful 1957 T-Bird. The one with the portholes in the top with beautiful white over dark green in color. I don't remember if that was his *daily driver*, but I admired his car and we spoke about it a lot.

Anyhow, one day while working together, we took a break at some dive on the south end of the Harbor Freeway and at 2200 or so we called it a day. I went home as did he and fifteen hours later I came back to work and learned that Dan was dead.

While I do not remember all of the details, I do recall it started off as a *domestic* and he left his house in the T-Bird. Just a short while later, a LA County Sheriff's Office deputy tried to stop him for some vehicle code violation. Dan then pulled over and shot himself in the head. He was dead.

The next day I remember the Sergeants in the locker room cleaning out Dan's locker and how I had seen Dan just one day prior. He was gone...forever. I would not say he was my best friend, but he was a friend and fellow cop. Who knows what made him take his own life. I am not a PhD specializing in police suicides, but Dan was the first cop I knew who had taken his own life.

Sadly, he was not the last. Over the ensuing years, while assigned to Los Angeles, I heard about LA County deputies and LAPD cops committing suicide. Some were very dramatic and well laid out events, such as on the roof of the station or near the coroner's office. Some decided to commit suicide in the woods while others decided to do it in a cemetery next to the grave of a friend. And then there were those similar to Dan who were involved in a personally owned vehicle after being stopped by another cop.

And while I was not formally accumulating data, it seemed to me that more and more cops were killing themselves in the greater Los Angeles area than we were losing from hostile gunfire. As I grew on the job and started to read, I learned there was this phenomenon known as "Police Suicide".

It is no secret that a few years ago the California Highway Patrol had a flurry of suicides in a short period of time and of course, that required another study as to cause. But more importantly, what could be done to prevent these deaths? When I read some of the data I was not surprised by the identified "causes". My findings included marital problems, criminal activity, substance abuse, mental health issues, finances, sexual misconduct and even those that were left unexplained.

These findings mirrored the "causes" identified by other people collecting data and my uninitiated hypothesis that more cops were killing themselves than were being killed by criminals was and is true. Sadly, as I type this in October of 2009, we had a Los Angeles County deputy (well respected by all accounts) commit suicide last week and in the prior week, we had two California Highway Patrol officers do the same. I am retired now and somewhat out of the loop, but I wonder if the *studies* have reduced the frequency of suicides?

The question that caused me to write this piece for the Safe Call Now website came from another member of the Board of Directors who apparently had a spirited discussion with a "suicide" expert who has opined that cop suicides are not any greater in frequency than society as a whole, so who am I to argue with a PhD? I went to night school!

I don't know if that opinion is accurate or not. It would seem to me that being a cop exacerbates underlying issues and puts additional stressors on the person that might cause someone with a problem to perform this drastic final act, but I am not the statistician so I will defer to those smarter than me to talk about "rates" and "frequency" and "bell curves" and all that stuff.

But not even the PhD statisticians can deny that the “inordinate” number of cops who kill themselves annually is more than three times the number of cops who (on average) die in the line of duty. And I will debate any PhD in the world on this issue. Too many cops are killing themselves and this is an identifiable risk and as such is a manageable risk.

For years, I have pondered what can be done to reduce the frequency of these tragedies and YOU are on Safe Call Now’s website trying to do something about this phenomenon. I sincerely thank all those associated with Safe Call Now for their untiring efforts at addressing this severe problem.

Please spread the word about Safe Call Now. Our women and men in public safety have got to recognize the nature and scope of this issue. It is imperative we are all proactive and alert for *identifiers* and *clues* that someone is having a problem. And if you have thoughts about killing yourself – please, please, please don’t do it. **Make the call to Safe Call Now and get some help.** These people know what they are doing.

I do know that every time a public safety employee or family member takes their own life, a whole bunch of people suffer a terrible loss. In Dan’s case, I would have not wanted to be the deputy who pulled him over that night. My guess is Dan’s wife suffered a lot post suicide as did his Mom and Dad. And if children were involved, they are the ones who usually suffer forever. Please don’t forget about the Sergeants who had to clean out his locker after his death and maybe even the guy who had the locker not too far from Dan’s.

I know the impact this suicide had on me and 35 years later I still recall many of the details. This is our profession. Let’s do everything we can to protect it and our members.

Anyhow, I said what I wanted to say so that is that.

Gordon Graham
Co-President, Lexipol

