

Kansas Peace Officers' Association



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Officer Safety and Opioids

by Ed Klumpp, Topeka PD-Retired

As officers, we face a wide range of dangers every day. But the risk from exposure to opioid drugs is growing. New stories are appearing every week on more officers suffering an opioid exposure, many saved only by the availability of a Narcan for immediate administration to the stricken officer.

On June 6, the DEA issued a law enforcement safety bulletin on the exposure concerns.¹ The DEA has also released a roll call training video and a 20-page officer briefing document.²

Information has also been recently published about the need for officers to utilize some basic safety gear while handling suspected drugs.³ The Centers for Disease Control has issued a bulletin on safety gear for first responders.⁴ Those recommendations range from street officers using breathing masks and nitrile gloves⁵ (instead of vinyl gloves) to wearing full coverall type protection when processing known crime scenes with suspected opioid drugs.

Field testing drugs that can contain fentanyl or other opioids is also becoming a concern. Many agencies across the country are changing their approach to field testing.⁶

Earlier this year, an Ohio officer nearly lost his life when he brushed a powder off his shirt sleeve after a drug arrest.⁷ The powder was fentanyl. Fortunately, several doses of Narcan produced lifesaving results. The officer had gone to the station after the arrest and another officer pointed out the powder on his shirt sleeve. The officer brushed it off his shirt sleeve resulting in the exposure. Just think of the potential for that same thing to happen with an officer returning home for lunch or at the end of shift and having his children greet him with a hug.

It isn't just officers at risk. Several reports have been posted of canines overdosing while sniffing for drugs, and there is even a Narcan kit for canines now.⁸

Every agency and every officer should be informed about these risks and how to protect from them. We should all have each other's back reminding each other to use proper protective measures. Agencies should assure not only that officers are properly trained to protect themselves, but also to recognize the signs of exposure and making sure the proper protective gear is available.

¹ <https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2017/hq060617.shtml>

² <https://www.dea.gov/druginfo/fentanyl.shtml>

³ <https://www.fentanylsafety.com/safe-handling/>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/fentanyl/risk.html>

⁵ <https://www.policeone.com/police-products/apparel/gloves/articles/371935006-Coroner-to-first-responders-Throw-away-your-latex-gloves-when-responding-to-ODs/>

⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/05/fentanyl-first-responders/526389/>

⁷ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/ohio-police-officer-accidentally-overdoses-fentanyl-article-1.3170821>

⁸ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-drug-kits-save-police-dogs-from-opioid-overdoses/>