



NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL FUND

RESEARCH BULLETIN

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Law enforcement officer deaths: Final 2009 Report

A Tale of Two Trends: Overall Fatalities Fall, Fatal Shootings on the Rise

2009 was a tale of two trends in law enforcement fatalities in the United States. Data from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund show that total officer deaths declined nearly 16 percent, from 138 in 2008 to 116 in 2009. That is the fewest line-of-duty deaths since 1959, when there were 109. The 2009 reduction was driven largely by a steep drop in traffic-related deaths (see page 4). After reaching a record high of 84 in 2007, traffic-related fatalities have fallen by 39 percent over the past two years. Still, for the 12th year in a row, more officers died in traffic-related incidents in 2009 than from any other single cause of death.

Total fatalities: 1959-2009



The encouraging news on traffic fatalities is offset by a disturbing rise in the number of officers shot and killed in 2009. Firearms-related fatalities increased 22 percent, to 49 in 2009, from 40 in 2008. The number of officers who died from other duty-related causes declined sharply in 2009. Interestingly, just one female officer was killed in 2009, compared with 13—or 9 percent of all fatalities—in 2008.

2000-2009 was one of the safer decades in recent law enforcement history, although it also saw the deadliest single day for U.S. law enforcement: September 11, 2001, when 72 officers were killed in the terrorist attacks on America. An average of 162 officers a year died in the 2000s, compared with 160 a year in 1990s, 190 in the 1980s, and 229 in the 1970s, which remains the deadliest decade for U.S. law enforcement.

The statistics contained in this report are final, and represent an update to the preliminary numbers released in December 2009.

Multiple-fatality shootings shock law enforcement in 2009

Nearly one-third of this year’s firearms-related fatalities—15 deaths in all—occurred in just five incidents in which more than one officer was fatally shot by the same gunman.

March: four Oakland (CA) Police officers killed following a traffic stop and subsequent barricade situation.

April: three Pittsburgh (PA) Police officers ambushed by a heavily armed gunman wearing a bullet-resistant vest as the officers responded

ed to a domestic disturbance call.

April: two Okaloosa County (FL) Sheriff’s deputies gunned down while trying to arrest a domestic violence suspect.

July: two Seminole County (OK) Sheriff’s deputies fatally shot while attempting to serve an arrest warrant.

November: four Lakewood (WA) Police officers executed in a local coffee shop as they planned their upcoming shift.

Incidents in which more than one officer was shot and killed

	Incidents	Deaths
2009	5	15
2008	2	4
2007	6	13
2006	1	2
2005	2	4
2004	6	13
2003	5	10
2002	2	4
2001	4	8
2000	2	4

Trends in firearms-related fatalities: 1959-2009



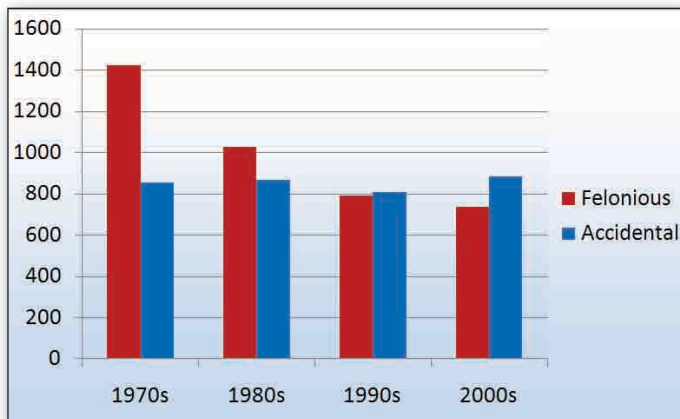
While the 49 firearms-related deaths in 2009 was a 22 percent increase over 2008, it is important to keep that number in some perspective. The 40 gunfire deaths in 2008 represented the lowest annual figure in more than five decades. The 2009 figure was still lower than all but three years during that time period: 1959 (45), 1999 (46) and 2008. The 2009 figure was 13 percent lower than the average annual number of firearms-related deaths over the previous 10 years, and it was 69 percent lower than the 1973 figure of 156 gunfire deaths, which was the highest in the past five decades.

Circumstances of fatal law enforcement shootings: 2009

Once again, responding to domestic disturbance calls proved to be particularly dangerous for America’s law enforcement officers during 2009. Almost one-quarter of the year’s firearms-related deaths—12 in all—involved domestic disturbance calls. Unprovoked ambush attacks claimed another seven officers’ lives. Fewer than 10 percent of the firearms-related deaths involved traffic stops, a lower percentage than in recent years.

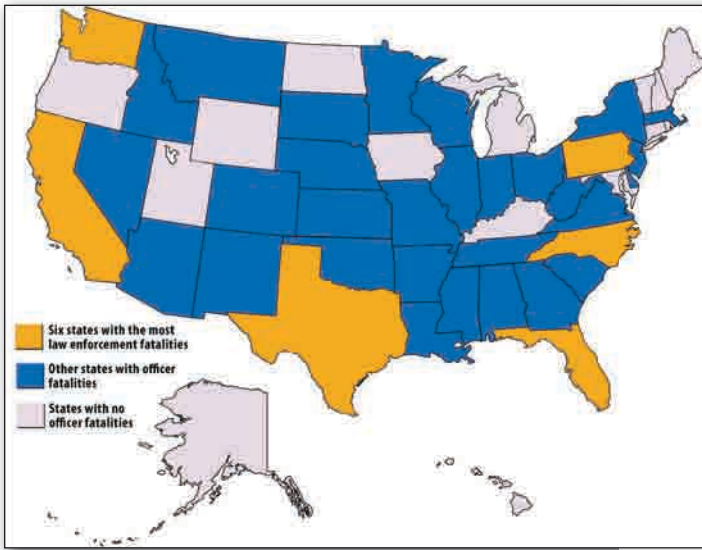
Domestic disturbance call	12
Ambush	7
Disturbance call (non-domestic)	6
Traffic stop or pursuit	4
Robbery-related	4
Tactical situation (barricade, hostage, etc.)	4
Attempting other arrest (excl. robbery, burglary)	2
Accidental	2
Burglary-related	2
Handling/transporting prisoners	2
Investigating suspicious persons/circumstances	2
Investigative activity (surveillance, searches, etc.)	1
Handling mentally deranged persons	1

Felonious vs. accidental officer deaths



The past four decades have seen a dramatic shift in the distribution of felonious vs. accidental deaths among law enforcement officers. In the 1970s, 62 percent of all officer deaths were felonious killings; in the 1980s, the figure was 54 percent. During the 1990s, accidental and felonious deaths were nearly equal. By the 2000s, accidental deaths (54 percent) had surpassed felonious killings (46 percent), as proportionally more officers died on the roadways. In 2009, however, more officers were killed in felonious circumstances (54 percent) than accidental (46 percent), reflecting the increase in firearm-related deaths.

Geographic distribution of officer fatalities: 2009



Thirty-five states and Puerto Rico experienced officer fatalities during 2009. For the third year in a row, Texas, Florida and California had the most fatalities—a combined total of 25, or 22 percent of the national total. For the second consecutive year, Pennsylvania was among the top five states, with seven fatalities in both 2008 and 2009. Washington state, which had two officer deaths in 2008, experienced seven fatalities in 2009—the largest percentage increase. Six federal law enforcement officers died in 2009, including three DEA special agents killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan while conducting counter-narcotics operations.

Demographic profile of officers killed: 2009

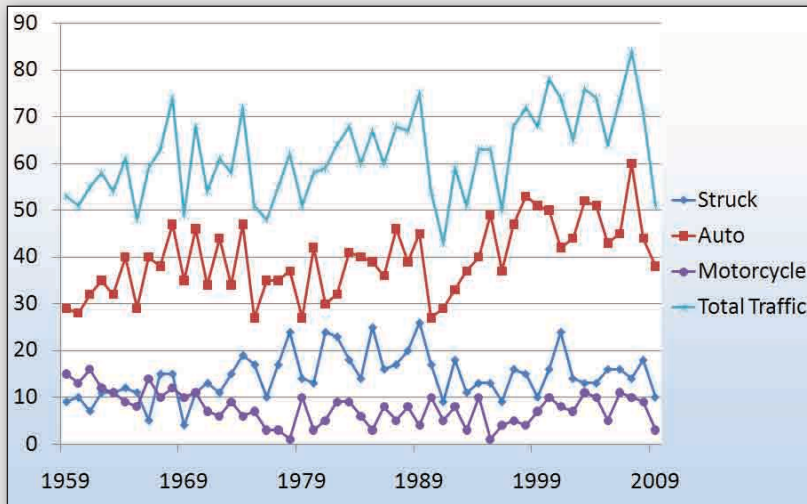
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian	95
Hispanic	11
African American	7
Native American	2
Asian American	1
Gender	
Male	115
Female	1
Average Age	38
Average Years of Service	11

State	Number of Fatalities	State	Number of Fatalities
TX	10	LA	2
FL	8	MN	2
CA	7	MO	2
NC	7	AZ	1
PA	7	CO	1
WA	7	DE	1
AL	5	KS	1
NY	5	MT	1
NV	4	NE	1
AR	3	NJ	1
GA	3	OH	1
IL	3	SC	1
IN	3	SD	1
MA	3	TN	1
MS	3	WI	1
NM	3	WV	1
OK	3	PR	2
VA	3	Federal	6
ID	2	Total	116

Causes of law enforcement officer fatalities: 2008 vs. 2009

	2008	2009
Traffic-related		
Automobile crash	44	38
Struck (outside vehicle)	18	10
Motorcycle crash	9	3
Subtotal:	71	51
Firearms-related		
	40	49
Other		
Physical-related incident	17	12
Helicopter crash	2	4
Bomb-related	2	0
Aircraft accident	1	0
Beating	1	0
Drowned	1	0
Electrocution	1	0
Stabbing	1	0
Train accident	1	0
Subtotal:	27	16
TOTAL	138	116

Encouraging news on traffic-related fatalities



After peaking at 84 deaths in 2007, the number of law enforcement officers killed on U.S. roadways continued to decline in 2009. The total of 51 traffic-related deaths in 2009 was 28 percent lower than the 2008 figure, and was the lowest annual number of traffic deaths since 1996, when there were 50.

All three major categories of traffic-related fatalities decreased between 2008 and 2009. Automobile accidents fell from 44 to 38; motorcycle crashes, from 9 to 3; and officers struck and killed while outside their vehicles, from 18 to 10. The latter number is encouraging, as it suggests more motorists are paying attention to emergency vehicles stopped by the side of the road and heeding the “move over” laws that have been enacted in all but a few states.

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