

# The Palm Beach Post

## Deaths Surge For Law Officers

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WASHINGTON — A record number of fatal traffic incidents and a sharp rise in shooting deaths has led to one of the deadliest years for law enforcement officers in the United States in almost two decades.

With the exception of 2001, which saw a dramatic increase in deaths because of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, 2007 was the deadliest year for law enforcement since 1989, according to a preliminary report being released jointly today by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and the Concerns of Police Survivors.

The report lists 186 deaths as of Wednesday, up from 145 last year.

Eighty-one officers have died in traffic incidents, which surpassed the record of 78 set in 2000, the report said. Shooting deaths increased from 52 to 69, a rise of about 33 percent.

"Most of us don't realize that an officer is being killed in America on average every other day," said **Craig Floyd**, chairman of the memorial fund.

Texas led the nation with 22 fatalities, followed by Florida (16), New York (12) and California (11).

Four of the law officers' deaths occurred in Palm Beach and Broward counties.

On Aug. 10, Broward County Sheriff's **Sgt. Chris Reyka** was fatally shot while investigating suspicious vehicles at a convenience store in Pompano Beach. Reyka, 51, of Wellington is survived by his wife, **Kim**, and four children.

On Nov. 7, Broward Sheriff's **Deputy Paul Rein** was shot and killed by a prisoner he was transporting in a medical van to the Broward County Courthouse. The suspect, **Michael Mazza**, already was serving a life sentence for a previous conviction.

On Nov. 28, Palm Beach County Sheriff's **Deputies Donta J. Manuel**, 33, and **Jonathan**

**D. Wallace**, 23, were struck and killed by another deputy's car while attempting to remove tire-deflation devices from a dark roadway near Pahokee. They were pursuing a suspected stolen car.

Police fatalities have generally declined since peaking at 277 in 1974, the report says. At one time, officers were more likely to be killed in an attack than to die accidentally, but 60 percent of this year's deaths were accidental.

Floyd credited technological improvements with reversing the trend. Safety vests save lives, and non-lethal devices such as electric stun guns prevent some fatal encounters, he said. He attributed the spike in shooting deaths this year to an increase in violent crime nationwide.

"Law enforcement is the front line against violent criminals," he said.

Of the 81 traffic deaths, 60 officers died in car crashes, 15 were hit by cars and six died in motorcycle crashes.

Police departments have worked to limit high-speed chases, Floyd said, and only seven of the car crashes were attributed to such pursuits. The accident near Pahokee was not the result of a high-speed chase, the state attorney's office determined.

After traffic crashes and shootings, physiological factors such as heart attacks were the leading cause of death, contributing to 18.

The report includes the deaths of 17 federal law enforcement officers, including five Air Force special agents killed in two Iraq bombings.

The report recounts six times when multiple officers were shot and killed in the same incident, including a shooting in Texas that left three officers dead on a domestic violence call.

Domestic violence and traffic stops were the circumstances that most commonly led to fatal police shootings, the report says.

### A DEADLY YEAR IN FLORIDA

**Other law enforcement officers killed during 2007:**

Jan. 12: **Sgt. Nicholas G. Sottile**, 48, Florida Highway Patrol; fatally shot during traffic stop in Highlands County.

Jan. 30: **Deputy Harold Michael Altman**, 42, Jackson County Sheriff's Department; shot while answering call for help.

April 4: **Lt. Corey Dahlem**, 45, Gainesville Police Department; struck and killed by drunk driver during celebration of University of Florida's NCAA basketball title.

April 13: **Lt. Delmar Teagan**, 32, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; killed in auto accident.

July 14: **Sgt. Karl Strohsal**, 58, Longwood Police Department; struck by vehicle while standing outside his car after an accident.

Aug. 15: **Sgt. Ron Harrison**, 55, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office; shot and killed while sitting in his patrol car.

Aug. 20: **Reserve Deputy Joe Bill Galloway**, 61, Holmes County Sheriff's Office; killed when patrol car struck tree during vehicle pursuit.

Sept. 13: **Officer Jose Somohano**, 37, Miami-Dade Police Department; shot and killed during traffic stop.

Oct. 4: **Officer Alfred L. Gordon, Sr.**, 52, Orlando Police Department; shot and killed during robbery attempt.

Oct. 12: **Officer Scott Eric Bell**, 50, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office; killed in accident involving drunk driver.

Oct. 27: **Wildlife Officer Michelle A. Lawless**, 47, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; killed in ATV accident while on patrol for poachers.

Dec. 13: **Deputy Robin Tanner**, 47, Monroe County Sheriff's Office; killed in auto accident while responding to a medical call.

*Career Safety Alert From*

## American Police Beat

### Fire-Power: AR-15s Replace Shotties

Ever since the Bank of America shootout in North Hollywood, CA, concerns about cops being outgunned by bad guys have been heightened.

After an extraordinarily violent day in South Florida recently, police reached a scary conclusion—more offenders are taking to the streets with high-powered assault weapons.

That deadly day in Florida began with the shooting of four police officers south of Miami and ended with the death of the gunman in Pembroke Pines.

"You can buy an assault rifle for about \$200," **Carlos Baixauli**, a special agent with the Miami district office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives told reporters with the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*. "That gives you a lot of firepower with the flick of a finger."

Police officials say **Shawn Labeet** used an assault weapon to gun down **Miami-Dade Officer Jose Somohano**, 37, during a vehicle stop in south Miami-Dade County.

Labeet also shot **Officers Jody Wright**, 31, who suffered a serious leg wound, **Christopher Carlin**, 34, and **Tomas Tundidor**, 37.

"I would say they were pretty much outgunned," Miami

Dade spokeswoman **Commander Linda O'Brien** said. "This guy used a military-grade, or assault, weapon."

"We're seeing those cases more and more frequently, shooting not only police but innocent people as well," O'Brien added, citing a Miami shooting three years ago in which an officer survived a wound from an assault weapon.

Back in 2005, Miami-Dade police reported two killings involving an assault rifle. Last year, there were ten. The Miami Police Department said 15 of its 79 homicides last year involved assault weapons. That was up from the year before. This year so far, 12 of 60 killings have involved the high-powered guns.

Assault rifles such as the notorious AK-47 are the weapons of choice of guerrilla fighters around the world. The rifle can spit a lethal spray of up to 600 rounds a minute when in full automatic mode.

**"It's almost like we have water pistols going up against these highpowered rifles," said John Rivera, president of the Dade County Police Benevolent Association.** ●

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3