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In This Edition:

I. Nevada department blesses napping on duty with special program

II. Do most people respect police? Gallup releases new findings.

Nevada department blesses napping on duty with special program

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Napping while on the clock has long been a taboo in policing, fraught with fears of embarrassing photos of officers dozing in squad cars going viral and angry citizens denouncing “lazy cops” for shirking their tax-paid duties.

But now under the name “Restorative Rest,” a department in Nevada has officially endorsed the practice with what may become a trend-setting policy.

In a program that’s believed by its creators to be unique, the Henderson PD near Las Vegas is providing secure rooms where tired officers can grab 40 winks on duty to fuel a resurgence of mental acuity.

“We truly believe this is going to save the lives of officers, lead to better decision-making and performance on the street, reduce liability for the department, and stand the test of public scrutiny,” says Capt. Wade Seekatz, a certified Force Science Analyst and one of the prime movers behind the anti-fatigue effort.

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INSTITUTE

Earlier this year, Seekatz and Chief Patrick Moers presented details of Restorative Rest to a briefing at the White House from the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Initially, “everyone gasped when we said we allowed officers to sleep on duty,” Seekatz remembers.

But afterward, he and Moers were urged to enter the program for an Officer Safety and Wellness Award next year from the Destination Zero risk-reduction project, sponsored by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, the DOJ’s Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the VALOR Initiative.

GRAVEYARD FATIGUE. “Every law enforcement agency that has a graveyard shift is dealing with a fatigue issue, officers falling asleep at work. It’s the reality of shift work,” Seekatz told Force Science News.

Several years ago when he was a graveyard patrol lieutenant and Moers was his captain, the two began discussing ways of addressing the problem, which at that time was most dramatically manifesting itself in a persistent series of squad car crashes and “a lot of near-misses” in which officers nodded off behind the wheel. One incident in particular, which involved a collision with a civilian’s Porsche, “got a lot of attention from the city,” Seekatz recalls.

“We kicked ideas around and reached out to other communities, but couldn’t find anything that seemed to offer a realistic solution,” he explains.

By attending the Force Science certification course, he says he gained greater insight into fatigue-related human factors. “That was the missing link that helped me better

understand the correlation between drowsiness and its impact on diminished performance,” he says.

Their discussions intensified after Moers became chief and Seekatz last year was promoted to captain and also was appointed chairman of the department’s risk-management committee.

Ultimately they crafted a pilot program that launched last December. After 90 days of field-testing and minor modifications, it has segued into a policy-based, permanent feature of department operations.

Here’s how it works:

RULES FOR REST. Henderson, Nevada’s second largest city, with a population of more than 280,000, has about 365 officers assigned to patrol. Typically 25 to 30 are on the street for the overnight shift, which runs from 2200 hours to 0800.

“During quiet times at night when not much is moving, it can be tough to stay awake,” Seekatz says. “Shift work is hard because it’s unnatural, and the fatigue that results can be dangerous not only to driving but to alertness and reaction in use-of-force situations as well.”

To discourage stolen naps behind buildings or in parks, the Restorative Rest program provides fatigued officers refuge in authorized secure rooms in four municipal facilities scattered across Henderson’s three patrol sectors.

A tired or stressed officer or supervisor in need of rejuvenation can ask to be “dispatched” to one for his or her normal lunch hour and, with approval, remain there

for any portion of the allotted 60 minutes. Each room is equipped with a restroom, kitchen, phone, desktop computer, and two Barcaloungers (scrounged for the program from the local fire department).

Only one occupant is permitted in a room at one time and only one officer or supervisor from each sector is allowed Restorative Rest at any given time.

Inside the room, the occupant can turn off their radio and remove their duty belt while sleeping or relaxing but otherwise “remain at a level of readiness” in terms of dress. The phone ringer volume must be set loud enough to awake them in the event an emergency requires their immediate return to the street, and they must set their cell phone alarm to assure they don’t overstay the limit. When they leave the site, they clear with dispatch that they are back in service, “rested and ready.”

For safety purposes, the exact locations of the rest spots are not identified in the department’s printed policy and radio communications regarding them are transmitted with a special code. “Obviously, we are not interested in setting up an officer for an ambush,” Moers says.

The fact that Restorative Rest is restricted to lunch breaks does not mean that participating officers have to forego a meal. If they don’t have something to eat in the rest spot, “they can grab food at a drive-thru or brown-bag it in their car” while patrolling, Seekatz says.

FEEDBACK. At this writing, Seekatz reports, “We have had 35 separate instances of Restorative Rest being used. All but one were

on the graveyard shift, the exception being a day-shift supervisor.”

“Research shows that even a 20-minute nap can generate two to three hours of heightened alertness,” Moers says. And while no scientific study of Henderson’s program has yet been conducted, authorities consider it a success anecdotally. “We haven’t had anymore fatigue-related accidents,” the chief says, “and we haven’t had anyone written up for sleeping on duty in unauthorized places.”

Nor, he says, has the program been abused. “If we found that a particular officer was excessively signing in to a rest spot, it might suggest there was something amiss in their life that was causing an unusual level of exhaustion. We’d expect a supervisor to compassionately intervene to explore the issue so the officer could get help.”

To date, the program has not been announced to the public, but the PD is expecting shortly to post all its policies on its website, including Restorative Rest provisions. With education about its purpose, Seekatz and Moers expect a positive response.

Officers who’ve tried the program praise it. “It’s been a huge help to me,” Ofcr. Brett Anderson told FSN. “I have three kids at home and getting good sleep, especially during the daytime hours, can be extremely difficult. A nap can get you back refreshed to where you’re not worried about being a danger on the road.”

Another father of three active youngsters, Ofcr. Jason Scoble says, “I love graveyards, but exhaustion can be a problem and adrenalin can only take you so far. To be

able to actually go to sleep—not just ‘relax’—is priceless. After even a 20 minutes, I can feel completely alert and prepared for whatever comes my way. And nowadays, you have to have a higher level of alertness.”

Dr. Bill Lewinski, executive director of the Force Science Institute, recently sampled one of the resting spots on a visit to Henderson and found it “amazingly comfortable and definitely conducive to reviving flagging energy.

“Research on the physical and cognitive importance of sleep has been abundant over the last 30 to 40 years,” he says. “One study found that up to 80% of decision-making errors and accidents in the police world are linked to fatigue.

“For a department to address the problem as Henderson is doing and trust officers to use this opportunity responsibly is very progressive and highly commendable.”

For further information, Capt. Seekatz can be reached at:
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Our thanks to Sgt. Jamie Borden, a Force Science instructor and use-of-force training and analysis specialist with Henderson PD, for helping to facilitate this report.

II. Do most people respect police? Gallup releases new findings.

So where does law enforcement really stand in the eyes of most Americans? The answer just might surprise you.

According to a recent Gallup poll, respect for law enforcement officers is near an all-time high, with 76% of Americans saying they have “a great deal” of respect for police in their area. Support for police is up 11% among whites, with nearly four out of five (80%) responding favorably, and up 14% among non-whites, with two out of three (67%) responding favorably.

According to Gallup, who has posed this question nine times since 1965, this is higher than any report taken in the 1990s and just one point away from a record level of respect set in 1967.

Hopefully that’s some news that will make your day.

Written by Force Science Institute
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