

NEWS

FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

UNCOVERING THE SILENT BATTLE OF FIRST RESPONDERS

You witness trauma, endure stress and carry burdens that few can comprehend. And while those dark moments are often glamorized in headlines, they leave invisible wounds that can lead to silent battles.

A CUMULATION OF STRESSORS

While any job contains stressors, the combined impact of the unique challenges that emergency services personnel face cannot be ignored.

Given the nature of the job, first responders are likely to experience a broad range of potentially damaging consequences related to:

- Being repeatedly called to scenes with direct and indirect exposure

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to death, grief, injury, pain, loss and threats to physical safety.

- The physical demands of the job, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting that firefighting is the most physically demanding job in the country.
- Long and odd hours, potentially leading to poor sleep and fatigue.
- Relationship struggles, including a lack of understanding of job demands or missing out on valuable time with loved ones.
- Other potential “side effects” like negative interactions with the public, media crises and administrative woes.

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Behavioral health encompasses mental health, substance use disorders and stressors, as well as the physical symptoms that arise from those risks, says the American Medical Association.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that 30% of first responders develop behavioral health conditions, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide, compared to about 20% of the general population.

SUICIDE RATES

There are several occupations that appear to be at a higher risk for suicide, including first responders, says the CDC. In fact, they report that firefighters are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty, and EMS providers are 1.39 times more likely to die by suicide than the general public.

While these statistics alone are staggering, it's noted that the number of suicides and mental health issues among first responders is likely underreported due to the perceived stigma.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), there is no single cause for



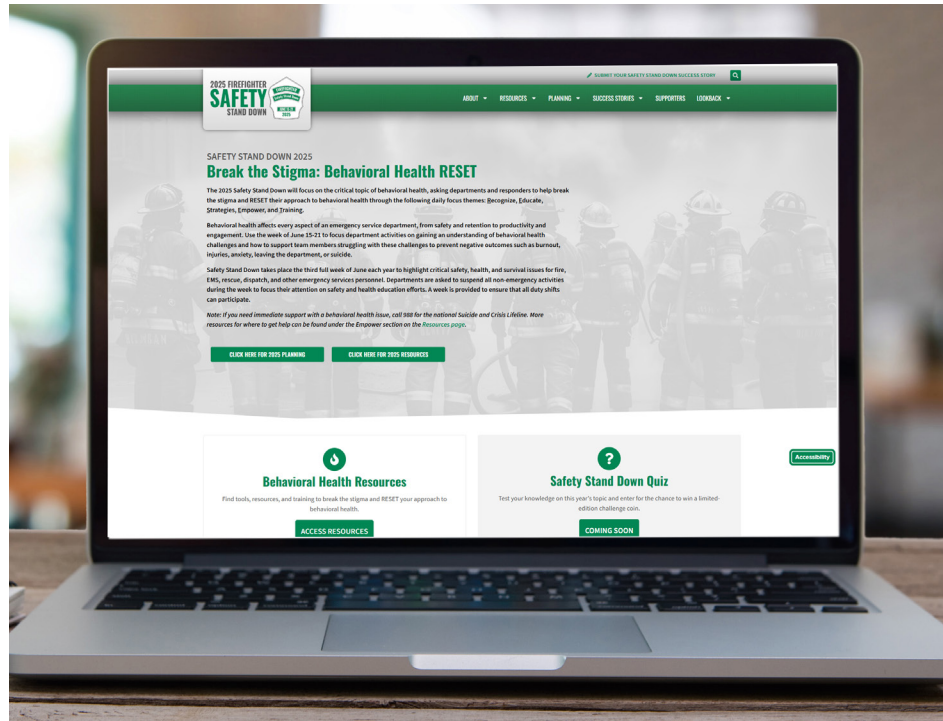
suicide. However, conditions like depression, anxiety and substance abuse (especially when they've gone unaddressed or untreated), as well as exposure to prolonged stress and stressful life events, do increase the risk of suicide.

SILENCE ISN'T THE ANSWER

While you can't take away some of the daily risk exposures that come with the job, you can raise awareness about what those experiences could lead to, be proactive about behavioral health, and create a culture that encourages seeking assistance.

- **Education:** Look for regular opportunities to teach your crew about their behavioral health risks. For example, assign your members the Behavioral Health Concerns course on VFIS University, which is free for all VFIS clients and gives an overview of behavioral health, associated concerns, appropriate actions and assistance options.
- **Prevention:** Consider instituting a peer support program and other proactive measures, like VFIS' Member Family Assistance Program, ([learn more on pg 5](#)) to help your team maintain productivity, health and wellness, and resolve personal and work-related issues, as well as offer support to them during difficult times.
- **Leadership:** Your resources, tools and policies are only as effective as you make them—to make a true difference, leaders should make behavioral health a top priority, pay attention to their members' wellbeing and make talking about mental and behavioral health an expectation.





START BY RECOGNIZING SAFETY STAND DOWN FROM JUNE 15-21, 2025

Safety Stand Down is an annual event that encourages fire and emergency service organizations to suspend all non-emergency activities during the third week of June, and take that time to focus on safety.

This year's theme is "Break the Stigma: Behavioral Health RESET," which could serve as a great opportunity for your organization to launch your latest behavioral health initiative.

The week will focus on the daily themes of Recognize, Educate, Strategies, Empower and Training ("RESET"), and seeks to help departments better understand behavioral health challenges, how they impact every aspect of your operations and how to better support those who are struggling.

You can learn more about this joint initiative by the NFPA, IAFF, FDSOA, NVFC and IAFC and get planning and additional safety resources at SafetyStandDown.org.

ABOUT VFIS ACCIDENT & SICKNESS

Your team faces unique health, safety and wellness risks while they serve and protect others—and those risks could have significant and devastating outcomes.

While some organizations believe that Workers' Comp will adequately protect their members during these times—unfortunately, many learn the hard way that this isn't always the case.

VFIS Accident & Sickness

(A&S) is designed to be there for first responders and their families during moments like these, with financial benefits for members who are injured or experience an illness while performing the normal duties of their organization.

Member Family Assistance Program

(MFAP) is also made available to A&S clients, and provides comprehensive and preventative approaches to health, wellbeing and productivity, including confidential counseling services and lifestyle coaching offered through trained professionals who are experienced in counseling emergency service personnel.

Ask your local insurance agent or broker about VFIS A&S to learn more.

An estimated 30% of first responders develop behavioral health conditions, including depression and PTSD.

First responders experience higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts than the general population.¹

VFIS' Member Family Assistance Program services help enable personnel to resolve personal and work-related issues to maintain individual productivity, health and wellness.

Dial 988 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

1. Source: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>



DON'T RISK IT!
a podcast by  **VFIS**



CELEBRATING 100+ MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

We recently released the 100th episode of the *Don't Risk It!* podcast series, giving you even more content to browse, listen to and revisit!

The VFIS team and special guests, including fellow first responders and industry specialists, come together bi-weekly to discuss the latest fire and EMS trends, safety best practices and industry news—and we're honored to share those conversations with you through the *Don't Risk It!* podcast series.

Here are some of our listeners' recent favorite episodes.

- **Highways with Limited Access**

Turnarounds, exit ramps and crossovers pose unique safety risks and challenges for highway response—and there's always potential for something to go wrong. In this episode, we discuss some best practices for responding to scenes on highways with limited access.

- **Fatigue Management**

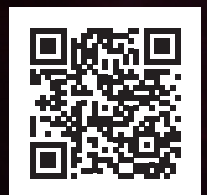
Is your crew in a state of readiness? How long have they been awake and active on the road? We chatted with Daniel Althaus from Orange Cross Ambulance to learn about the steps they've taken to help them develop a proactive approach to managing fatigue and how you can do the same.

- **Recordkeeping Best Practices**

The records you keep—or don't keep—paint a picture of your emergency service organization. In this episode, we discuss the importance of recordkeeping, including what records to save and how to maintain them, to help you accurately reflect the care and services you provide.

Whether you're new to the *Don't Risk It!* podcast community or already have your notifications for new episodes turned on—we're glad you're here and thank you for listening.

**SCAN TO
LISTEN NOW!**



THE TRUE COST OF VEHICLE CRASHES

Lives lost. Millions of dollars in damages. Up to four-year production delays for apparatus.

These are just some of the potentially devastating costs that your organization could face because of a vehicle accident—and these types of incidents are happening more often than some may realize.

Vehicle-related incidents are a leading cause of loss in emergency services.

Vehicle-related insurance claims, including stationary object strikes, backing incidents and intersection crashes, remain leading causes of loss for emergency service organizations with VFIS insurance over the past five years.

Most of these claims are 100% preventable. So, while it's usually the big blazes and extraordinary saves that make headlines, the members in your organization who are actively prioritizing vehicle safety, training and risk reduction are doing truly heroic and life-saving work, too.





You can make a difference in your organization by implementing a comprehensive emergency vehicle operations program, including provisions like these:

- **Selection criteria for drivers**, considering age, maturity and health, as well as reviewing Motor Vehicle Reports (MVRs) and Driving Records to ensure they have no more than two Class B and no Class A violations within the past three years. Also consider restrictions for inexperienced drivers, like not serving as frontline drivers until they're ready from an experience, maturity and training standpoint.
- **Training requirements**, like completing VFIS' gold-standard Emergency Vehicle Driver Training (EVDT) Program, as well as annual retraining, ongoing recertifications and refreshers. Also create guidelines to ensure drivers/operators are trained on all vehicles within your department, as they all drive, stop and maneuver differently based on their size and center of gravity.
- **Disciplinary actions for driving violations**, for example: suspension of driving privileges for anyone convicted of a Class A violation for a minimum period of two years, as well as requiring retraining and recertification prior to returning behind the wheel.
- **Written emergency vehicle response safety guidelines**, including SOGs for intersections, backing, spotter usage, maximum response speeds, driver and officer responsibilities, warning device usage and limitations, and personal private vehicle response.

- **Documented preventative maintenance program**, including regular inspection of your emergency vehicles to help maintain readiness and safety.
- **An incident investigation program**, which prompts your team to conduct thorough and equitable investigations of all incidents and near miss situations, and use of these opportunities to learn and improve safety in your operations.



- **Behavior expectations**, for instance: managing fatigue, never driving while under the influence, and acting responsibly—whether you're in the driver or passenger seat.

It all starts with accountability.

Some disasters, accidents and operational delays are completely out of your control. However, by taking accountability for manageable situations and circumstances —like your vehicle operations—you could make an instrumental difference in avoiding unnecessary costs and challenges and, most importantly, putting an end to senseless tragedies within your organization and community.

FIELD TRAINING CLASSES NEAR YOU!

Check out our online calendar to see upcoming in-person learning opportunities, including our refreshed EVDT!



vfis.com/fire-ems-training



IT'S MORE THAN AN INVENTORY; IT'S A LIFELINE.

Tips to help emergency service organizations create a facility inventory list.

In the event of fire, flood or other catastrophe resulting in the devastation of your entire facility, could you name every item in your station and provide accurate details on their values?

While it would be virtually impossible to do from memory, an up-to-date and comprehensive station inventory list could be utilized as a critical resource to help save time, simplify insurance claims processes and ensure you have the life-saving equipment, tools and facilities needed for your community when they call.

Here's a brief overview of what your station inventory list could include:

- Building systems, including those related to heating, cooling, exhaust, air quality and energy.
- Items in your apparatus bay, including storage units, tools and equipment.
- PPE items, like coats, pants, helmets, gloves, hoods, footwear, eyewear and air packs.
- Housekeeping and lawncare equipment, including any laundry appliances or lawnmowers.

- Electronics, like computers, phones and radio systems.
- Kitchen items, including cooking equipment, appliances and tools.
- Furniture, like beds, desks and tables.
- Recreational and fitness items, including televisions and fitness equipment.

Here are a few details to include for each item in your inventory:

- Item name and amount of item (if applicable)
- Purchase price
- Brand or manufacturer of item, as well as make and/or model
- When & where the item was purchased
- Estimated current value of item
- Serial number (if applicable)

4 Tips to help you get started with your station inventory:

1. Take stock:

Decide the easiest way to record your inventory (could be electronically or by hand) and take supplemental photos or videos to help ensure you're not missing any key items.

2. Start with your high-value items:

Identify and document your highest-value items, like building systems and major appliances, including refrigerators, ice machines, etc.

3. Keep a back-up copy:

Ensure you have an extra electronic and printed copy of your inventory.

4. Be proactive:

Once you have an inventory created, update it as new items are purchased to avoid an overwhelming or time-consuming task in the future. It's also good practice to review it on at least an annual basis.

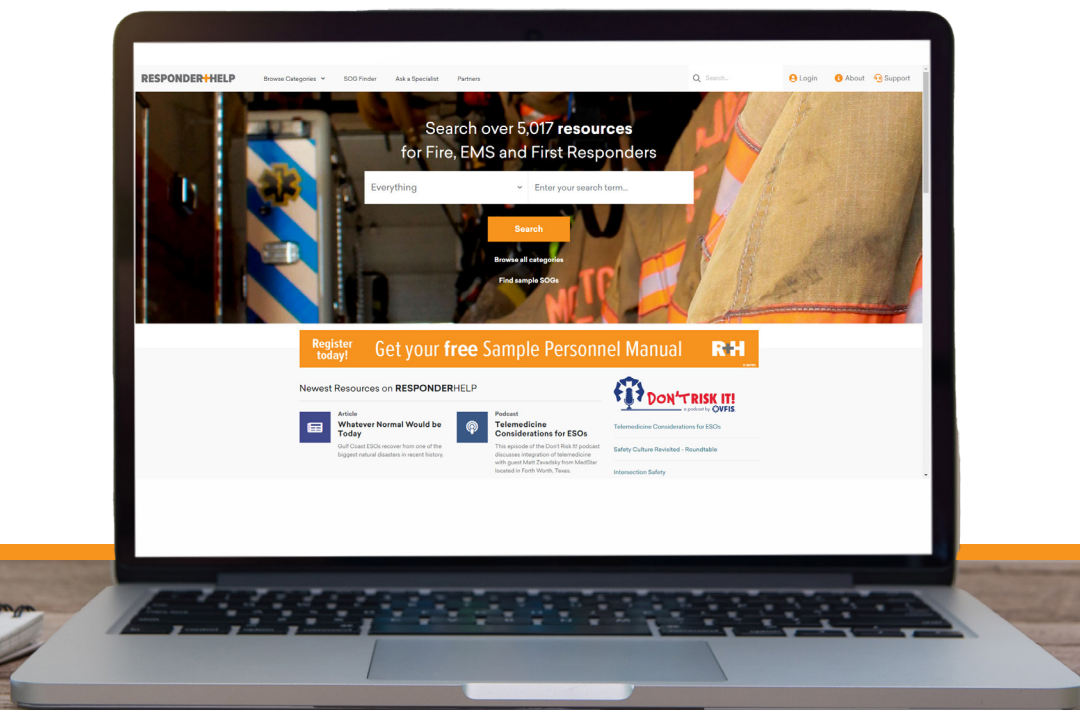
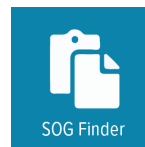
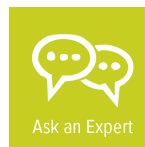
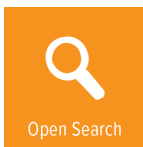
Whether it's for you, those you serve or both, it's likely a worthwhile project to add to your to-do list.

In the event of an already stressful and devastating situation, your station inventory list could make the difference between a swift recovery and a debilitating blow. So, while there's undoubtedly no shortage of things for you to do, it's likely a worthwhile project to add to your to-do list. Because it could be more than a document—it could be a lifeline.

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A middle-aged man with short, light brown hair, smiling slightly, stands with his arms crossed in front of a white fire truck. The truck has "NEVER FORGE" and "01" on its side, along with a yellow "Tice Fire" logo. The man is wearing a white polo shirt with a small "VFIS" logo on the left chest.

Erik Swanson

VFIS Sales Executive for 4 Years

Firefighter for 23 Years

EMBRACING THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In March 2018, the Weaver Piano & Organ Co. factory in York, PA was engulfed in flames—calling for first responders to act fast. What followed was a building collapse, multiple injuries, fallen firefighters and a long road to recovery for our very own Erik Swanson, VFIS Sales Executive. Watch as he recalls this tragic event, the impact it had on him physically and mentally, and how he found his way back to the brotherhood again.

Hear Erik's full story.
vfis.com/erik





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