

Despite all the twists and turns of 2020- along with new workplace hazards-we are halfway through the year! The pandemic has redefined how quickly things can change and how instantaneously we must adapt to a health crisis that is evolving daily. It's been difficult and challenging at times- but hopefully the adaptation and new reality will make us even stronger and more resilient. Opening businesses back up to the public was an encouraging sign. Being able to enjoy a meal at a restaurant, return to the gym and restart the economy was definitely a positive. However, the shutdowns may not be over and we may be continuing to cope with COVID-19 for a while. Although wearing masks is not ideal- especially on patrol, while collecting evidence, dispatching calls, etc.- we can and will work through it. The inconvenience is worth being healthy so we can continue to serve the public. The positive cases in the Fresno County Jail's North Annex should be a reminder of the reality of the situation locally. The numbers are rising in institutions like jails and rest homes, but also throughout the community at large.

Unit 1 MOU

I would like to report some positive news regarding our Unit 1 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Although we had been negotiating for a successor MOU prior to March – once the pandemic began, all talks ended. In order to keep our working conditions in contract and all the terms and conditions of our MOU, the county and FDSA agreed to push out the expiration (July 12, 2020) to November 1, 2020. By doing this, County Labor and the FDSA Bargaining Team can have time to analyze the economy and how its recovering, while also navigating budget hearings to see where things fall into place financially. I do not like to be out of a labor contract at all. Although when you are out of a contract you are still guaranteed certain work protections, the fact that we had to stop bargaining can present a challenge for those conditions. We intend to start the bargaining process very soon, and see how economics plays into the county budget. I am happy to proudly say that our workforce showed up every day and did not try to police the community from their homes. Your effort and additional risk during the pandemic is appreciated by county leaders.

During all of the civil unrest throughout the state, we sent 20 deputy sheriffs under the mutual aid system to the Bay Area. They were there for four days, serving in the San Francisco and Oakland area. We are proud of the representation to help our fellow law enforcement officers and enforce the laws to protect the first amendment right. However, during this process property was destroyed and crimes were happening. There will be more protesting in the future, until people feel their voice is heard. In Fresno, we have seen the professionalism from those wanting to share their feelings publicly- through signs, marches and peaceful gatherings. I cannot emphasize enough, that freedom of speech is not only the first amendment- but one that allows the US to be the home of the free. However, by giving us the right to free speech, does not give the right to break the law(s) at the same time. As law enforcement officers, our job is to maintain civility at all times.

COVID-19 in the Workplace

Avoiding COVID-19 when we work with the public can sometimes be difficult. The nature of our jobs is to respond to calls for service and assistance from our community. Sometimes we can stay away from crowds- but that is not always the case. For deputies who work in the various courthouses it is a daily challenge. This week more than 500 inmates tested positive at the Fresno County Jail – a deputy who works in the courts was also positive. All of you in the court services unit (CSU), received an email regarding testing, exposure procedure, and filing a worker's comp claim. FDSA agrees with the overall procedure the department has set up regarding the COVID exposure. The health guidance we are receiving is from the Fresno County Health Department and Dr. Rais Vohra, the health director.

Although masks are not mandated for this agency, procedurally, we should be taking the necessary steps to ensure our health. I recommend continuing to follow the guidelines when it comes to mask wearing, using personal protective equipment (PPE)- when applicable, washing your hands, and social distancing. The more isolation, the better your chances are of not being exposed and ultimately not contracting the virus. Use that methodology on and off the job.

Masks

The FDSA is working with a vendor who is sending 25 masks next week for our personnel to try out. Please let me know if you would like to try one. If these get good reviews from those who sample them- we will look at supplying each of you with one. This is our way of helping you avoid exposure while on the job. These are adjustable and more durable than a hospital mask, and a lot less bulky and cumbersome than an N95.

This virus is likely going to linger for the remainder of the year. Until there is a vaccine approved, we all have to continue working together to stay as healthy as possible.

I appreciate all the work you all are doing at your various work sites. Continue pressing forward as this will pass.

Eric