

Safety Committee Minutes

Honorable Council
City of Newark, Ohio
May 4, 2020

The Safety Committee met on YouTube streaming via Zoom on Monday, May 4, 2020 with these members in attendance:

Mark Labutis- Chair
Spencer Barker – Vice-chair
Jeremy Blake
Sean Fennell
Jeff Rath

We wish to report:

1. Chiefs Connor and Connell will be giving an update as to what each of their teams are doing to protect citizens during COVID-19.

Chief Connor – The Fire Department life has changed the normal is now not normal. We've gone in to protect mode for all of our members on the fire department, just given the unknown. We're trying to watch Gov. DeWine and Amy Acton' briefings each day and to comply with any regulations moving forward. We'll start with supplies. Public Safety nationwide were having problems getting supplies. Initially we had about a 5 week supply of masks, glasses gloves, and suits. We got down to about a 2 ½ - 3 week supply before we got additional resources. Everyone has their own N95 mask, we have also purchased 30 N100 masks which have the canister on the side. Each position on each apparatus has that and also have additional canisters. We also purchased ozone machines for each of the fire stations. It's a device that you put in a space and it sanitizes everything in that space, in addition to wiping everything down with Clorox wipes etc. We have spent about \$12,000 on COVID response for cleaning supplies and additional supplies that we've purchased to make sure we have a safe work environment. Early on I put out an order to lockdown the stations. Inspections right now are at a minimum in vacant structures and unopened businesses. There are no tours being conducted right now and members of the public are not allowed inside the buildings. Only mission critical people are permitted inside. We had our heart monitors updated and those types of mission critical things are still happening. We made one of our back up units a COVID response vehicle. Anytime there's a run that's a potential COVID patient it is sent. It has been stripped down and has a barrier between the patient and passenger compartment. In this way all of our 1st response units are taken out of service to have to decontaminate them. Run interactions are very different right now. They may seem very insensitive simply because we're trying to limit interaction. One crew member may stand on the porch while other crew members remain on the

sidewalk, while we ask questions trying to determine if the patient is a COVID patient. The County Regional Communication Center has given us the ability to add addresses where there have been confirmed COVID cases. At one time we were up to 15 addresses and now we're down to about 4-5 addresses. We had 2 of our members quarantined back when it was taking 14 days to get the results of the COVID test. They ended up being negative. In the beginning we had limited information. Since then, with the directive from the Governor and Amy Acton, LMH is allowed to share limited information with us and the Health Department on potential COVID cases that we transport. We have multiple people on our team that have immune depressed family members and if they're exposed they don't want to go home. The Doubletree downtown has offered space and Denison University has offered up to 40 spaces with 20 having their own kitchens and bathrooms for us to use if needed. Laurel Kennedy was the contact there, she's been great and she's also working with Granville Fire Department. LMH reached out a week ago and said they've received some antibody testing kits. They asked if we'd like to test the Fire Department. On May 7th all of our Fire Department employees will be tested. I spoke with Chief Connell and on May 15th we will be testing the Police Department. Financially, nationwide there may be an impact on transports. EMS calls are down. Between March and April of 2019 and 2020 there's a 20 percent reduction in transports. We have seen an uptick in runs lately, but normally we have 40-45 calls per day and we're down to 20 calls per day. They do not want us taking anyone to the hospital unless they have underlying issues such as diabetes, cardiac, respiratory like COPD or immune suppressed like someone who's on chemotherapy. Our medical direction comes from Ohio State University and Dr. Ashley Larimore writes our protocol that we operate under. We have information resources coming from her. We're working with the Ohio and International Fire Chiefs Associations to get the best guidance that we can.

Mr. Blake – I want to thank Mr. Labutis for having both of the Chiefs in tonight. While they're updating us, they're also updating the community. We were on the Kiwanis meeting earlier, you were talking about why the run calls are down. I want to share with the other members of council. During this time people are dealing with loss of jobs and money. Lots of time people go to street drugs. I wanted you to share about overdose percentages you're seeing.

Chief Connor – We had quite a few overdose runs this past weekend. That's consistent with the Columbus news. It shows there is a certain batch of drugs coming through communities. We do have weekends that we typically have increases in these calls. We have also had an uptick in suicide calls. We usually see suicides in Newark during the holidays. I'm sure the NPD could comment on this. They see it as much as we do. The mental health situation is definitely affected during this COVID crisis.

Chief Connell – I can say ditto to a lot of the things that Chief Connor talked about. As far as the overdoses and suicides, it's a big circle. We're looking at mental health and

addictions and traditionally people who were in recovery or being treated for mental health issues have had a big kink in that lately and we would see a big increase in calls. Our numbers have gone up recently. Thanks you to LMH and Chief Connor for getting the testing set up. My Deputy Chiefs yesterday did want me to remind you that this is the best police department in Ohio. Something we've been dealing with early on is with supplies. They're things we don't typically use so we were a little behind the curve on that. We're finally starting to get caught up, the Central Ohio Drug Enforcement Task Force made a delivery today of some things. We haven't spent a lot of money on things because we've had other agencies that supplied them. I don't want to go into numbers of our force that have had to quarantine because that's a tactical issue. There have been a couple of issues, so I'll just leave it at that. From a command staff level, one thing we've struggled with is dealing with directives for our employees because we're trying to juggle the Federal and State and County Directives. One such thing we've been dealing with is responding to overdoses and what protective gear we put on. We have the Fire Department go in first, we have to evaluate if there is a crime scene. We've put out a couple other personnel directives that we've gotten input on from City Hall. Our schedules have changed. If you had told me a couple of months ago that I could work from home, I'd have thought that was a great thing, but it's really not it makes our communications with our sergeants etc. a little more difficult. We've cancelled our ride a long programs and out lobby and anything that's non mission critical. If you have a vehicle in impound or have evidence that you need to retrieve we can still do that by appointment. We're not able to provide services that we would necessarily like to but we're doing the best we can and providing adequate service. We're sort of at a loss because we're not able to incarcerate people that we would normally due to warrants etc. our officers are having to deal with those types of things. We're having circular issues such as a call for criminal activity where we made some apprehensions and within 24 hours that house was on fire. A lot of those things prevent us from taking safety measure with our officers that we would like to.

Chief Connor – It's been difficult, as many of you remember we had 30 fires in the first 2 months of the year. Dealing with everything being shut down right now, it's made it difficult on our investigative team working with the police department to find a cause and get the people responsible for these things. We're keeping a very close line item narrative on everything we've spent for COVID in case we are able to get any reimbursement for those things.

Chief Connell – Jeff Prince our administrative sergeant and Craig Riley have been working on finding deals early on. We normally keep well stocked on gloves, but the masks are something we don't normally deal with. They shop on the quartermaster program on Amazon and are able to get deals and free shipping. Something to note is Amazon gave first responders priority early on and that has helped us out. There are employees in any first responder agency that cannot work from home. They work from

other people's homes. We've had to take steps in patrol. We have everyone working on Wednesdays so we have an overlap. So, we're trying to isolate for lack of a better term, pods, of our employees so we limit exposure to each other. So, on Wednesdays we'll send some of them to other training or have them work from home on call. Then the next week the opposite ones will do that. We are covered that way on emergency response times. So, our teams are co-mingling, but not ends of the week, so we think we are isolating them a lot better. Eric McKee has been working on the administrative side, and we're hoping that grants come through. We've diligent on keeping track of all of our expenditures on this, hoping at some time we may get some reimbursement. There've been some problems with staffing that we're trying to deal with to alleviate having problems next year. We're concerned because we're dealing with citizens dollars and we're trying to be fiscally responsible. We've had great support from the Mayor and Safety Director. The Director and I talk daily.

Mr. Blake – With Schools not in session, what types of activity are you seeing out in the neighborhoods? Is it teenagers being reckless or domestics, what types of patterns are you seeing?

Chief Connell – We're seeing the same types of things as all law enforcement with any state that is in a type of lockdown. My son's in law enforcement in Georgia and they recently have had a pressure release there. There's going to be pressure with kids not being in school. I know Newark City Schools are looking for some kids. Of course programs and our brand new boys and girls club are not able to operate the way they have been. We're probably seeing an uptick in teen activity. I know the brand new skate park has been a subject of contention. We get phone calls daily that people aren't socially distancing. We're trying to deal with that as best we can. We have to be understanding that there's a frustration with all citizens with the way things are. There's probably a small increase in domestic situations just because of shear frustration. Nationally, domestic violence cases are going up, so I'm sure we'll be a microcosm of that.

Mr. Blake – When are officers using masks? Is it just based on the situation and their best judgement?

Chief Connell – It's different based on each call. Some calls it's just not tactically possible to wear a mask. I will say that cops are some of the most resistant people to change, however, they are also some of the most adaptive people. So, they figure out ways to get the job done with what they have to work with.

Mr. Labutis – I want to thank you both for everything your teams are doing and everything you've done to protect your teams as well as the community and for taking great fiscal responsibility as well. Thanks for being here.

Mark Labutis, Chair