

How Covid 19 has affected the first responder's in the State of New Hampshire

I would like to begin by saying how proud I am of my fellow first responder's. They have stood strong during these unprecedented times, adapting and responding to calls with one focus; to continue to provide the residents of their communities with the level of safety and security that they have come to expect in the state of New Hampshire.

This security came with an unexpected risk, one that is not taught at the police or fire academy, this risk is Covid 19. I have spoken with members of both police and fire throughout the state and the topic is always the same. "I am worried about bringing Covid-19 home to my wife, my children, my elderly parents or loved ones, but they all continue to go to work and answer every call for assistance.

Early on in this pandemic the New Hampshire Police Association, The New Hampshire Troopers Association and the Professional Firefighters of New Hampshire asked for a meeting with Fire Marshall Paul Parisi who is manning the New Hampshire Emergency Operations Center to address some concerns that we had. Our main concerns were:

1- PPE for our first responders. There was a window of seven to ten days in the beginning of the pandemic where getting PPE was a challenge. Luckily, Fire Marshal Parisi working with Governor Sununu was able to secure enough PPE to make sure the first responders in the state were all protected.

2- Alternative housing for first responders, who had high risk family members at home, while they waited for Covid test results from work related exposures. This was a huge concern for many first responders. We understand there is a risk when we go to work but having the added stress of bringing Covid into your home was something that we needed to address. Again, Fire Marshal Parisi working with the Governor was able to secure housing for these men and women. Being away from their families was not their first choice but knowing that their families would not be exposed brought some level of relief to those first responders.

3- The last issue that we asked to be addressed was the need for expedited testing for first responders. Most importantly, allowing these men and women to be reunited with their families as soon as possible. There are so many smaller police and fire departments in the state of New Hampshire that keeping one or two police or firefighters out for the recommended two week quarantine was not possible. This would decimate a two or three man agency and put the citizens of that town at greater risk. Fire Marshall Paris was able to secure specific testing sites for first responders with expedited testing to get these men and women back to work once they received a negative test. The amount of work that the Fire Marshal's office has done to protect the first responders has been impressive and it brought some calmness to the first responders in this state.

As of this morning, the number reported to the Emergency Support Function-4 desk dating back to March 13, 2020:

First responders that have experienced an unprotected exposure: 950

Covid-19 Testing

Positive: 47

Negative: 339

Pending: 58

Test not administered: 463

Unknown or not reported: 43

Current number of first responders in quarantine: 60

Emergency quarantine housing provided to first responders: 101

Fortunately, there have been no deaths or serious cases of Covid-19 within the first responder community. We all continue to protect ourselves with PPE knowing if there is an issue, there are safeguards in place to extend that protection even further.

In closing, the main issue with first responders right now is the added stress this pandemic has brought to an already stressful job. Not only are we dealing with it at work but we are dealing with it at home as well. Just like the rest of the country, we are dealing with daycare issues or home schooling and having to miss work to stay home with our children. All this while most agencies are changing work schedules to limit exposure in an attempt to keep employees separated from particular shifts or groups. This has been challenging to all employees from the rank and file to the administration but this is a fluid situation that we will continue to work through and overcome.