Police Suicide: The Enemy Within

John M. Violanti, Ph.D.
NY State Police- Retired
Research Professor
Social & Preventive Medicine
NY State University at Buffalo, NY
violanti@buffalo.edu
Some Probable Factors Leading to Police Suicide

• Relationship problems
• Legal troubles- internal investigation
• Marital difficulties
• Alcohol/drug abuse
• Depression
• Chronic exposure to traumatic events (PTSD)
• Chronic stress
• Availability of firearms
• Lack of support
• Fear of getting help
• Mistrust of mental health professionals
Statistics on Police Suicide

Total Suicides Per 100,000:
• U.S. Total Population: 11
• Police: Approx. 18
• U.S. White Males: 25

Police Suicides:
• 2008: 141
• 2009: 143
• 2010: 147
• 2012: 104 (as of October 1st)

• Mostly white male (95%)
• 35-44 age group (40%)
• Patrol level (90%)
• Used firearm (94%)

Military Vs. Police Suicides
(As of October 2012)

2011 Suicides
• Military: 165
• Police: 143

2012 Suicides (to date)
• Military: 126
• Police: 104
Prevention....
The Missing Link
Changing the culture.
The Air Force Suicide Prevention Program

Level One: Individual
Level One: Buddy care. Basic awareness training, stress and suicide risk factors.

Level Two: Supervisory Gatekeepers
Equip supervisors with tools necessary to act as a gateway to help officers.

Level Three: Community Gatekeepers
Involve those in the helping professions. Coordinate service delivery (e.g., chaplain, family support, wellness programs)

Level Four: Medical Professionals
Direct care. Medical providers trained in identifying, referring, and treating police officers
Peer Support in Law Enforcement
Developing Resiliency Against Stress: 
Integration of Individual and Department

Trust in leadership!!
And last but certainly not least...

- We need a national police suicide reporting system to determine the full extent of the problem
- Perhaps similar to the FBI “LEOKA” Program
- This will also help us better research the problem and aid in prevention efforts