

# Safety Culture for All

An NSP patroller's guide for awareness,  
wellness, safety and service



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"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

— *Mother Teresa*

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“The Emergency Room should be a safe place or home for EMS personnel. The “Patrol Room” represents a safe place and a safe community for all patrollers and the staff who work there.”  
— *Chuck Allen, NSP National Medical Advisor*

## Introduction

Patrollers face stressful situations every day in the course of performing their jobs. Whether patrollers are paid or volunteer, most join the National Ski Patrol for a love of the sport, camaraderie, a challenge to learn new skills and to help others. Patrollers may not be aware that while caring for ill or injured patients that they too could be impacted.

The National Ski Patrol is dedicated to the safety and well-being of each patroller. Through education, training and regular proactive activities, NSP can help patrollers foster a culture of wellness, safety and resiliency.

The Patroller Wellness Task Force has prepared this document as a knowledge base and guide for individual patrollers, patrol leadership, area management & staff to help them develop their own local Patroller Wellness program.

## Goals and Objectives

1. Develop an awareness of Patroller Stress Injury.
2. Eliminate the stigma related to stress injury.
3. Prioritize patroller wellness and safety.
4. Encourage and support local patrols to develop their own program in Patroller Wellness.

## Mission Statement

National Ski Patrol is committed to creating and supporting a culture of wellness, safety, and resilience for all our members and those whom we serve. Honoring NSP core values, we will provide our community with the awareness, leadership, guidance, education, and resources needed to help ensure their emotional and mental well-being.

## How To Use This Document

- Review the Talking Points page for an understanding of the program.
- Invite 2-6 patrollers, local PD & area management rep for an informal meeting.
  - Discuss what your area is doing currently.
  - Discuss what issues you face locally and suggestions.
- Present your findings/suggestions at a general patrol meeting.
  - Form a task force to develop your local program.
- Reach out to your region or division leaders to inquire what resources they may have and what patrols near you have a program up and running to speak with
- Understand patrols are not all the same.
  - Different patrols will start in different places, choose different support models and emphasize different elements and activities as they develop programs suited to their unique needs and culture.
- Review in depth section “How Do We Get a Local Patrol Program Started.”

# Talking Points

## What we call it and why:

**Patroller Wellness** (name of current task force): The NSP desires to create a culture of safety and wellness for all patrollers. It is important that each patroller has an awareness of their fellow patrollers on a regular basis. Facilitating conversations and providing peer support training with leads in every patrol to develop resiliency throughout the NSP.

**SafetyCulture4All** (Our Motto): Since 1938, the NSP's Creed has been Service and Safety. It is imperative that we build & sustain a solid foundation through all disciplines of safety and wellness in our patrols, regions & divisions.

## What it is not:

- We are not clinicians who specialize in mental health or trained counselors.
- It is not Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)
- It is not Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM).

## Why is this important?

- A patroller's health and well-being are crucial in making clear-headed choices on and off the mountain.
- We care for the injured and ill guests of local outdoor recreation resorts, but who takes care of us?
- Focus on proactive education and training to enhance a patrollers wellness, safety and resiliency.
- Patrollers who feel valued stay in the organization improving recruitment and retention.
- We need every single patroller's acceptance and commitment.

## What barriers do I expect to face?

This is a new skill set for us all. A foundation & awareness is change and with change. brings uncertainty. We may find resistance with long standing perceptions of mental health. The amount of time required, and financial limitations may also be potential barriers.

## How do we get buy in from others?

NSP is developing an organizational program from the top down and from the bottom up, so we have support on all levels. This booklet can be used as a guide to develop a local patrol program. Recruiting "champions" to support the cause.

# Stress & Traumatic Incidents

## Stress

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges, threats, uncertainty or loss of control in our lives. Depending on how pronounced the uncertainty is, different degrees of stress may occur. A reasonable degree of activation, good stress, may contribute to the achievement of the individual's goals, for example, an athlete who wants to perform at the top level in a competition. If the uncertainty and stress are greater, it may be described as tolerable stress, however, if the uncertainty and stress are more pronounced, it may be described as toxic and thus lead to physical or mental suffering over time.

## Traumatic Incidents

A traumatic incident may result from an accident, natural or manmade disaster, mass casualty, interpersonal violence or technological failure. A traumatic incident may involve exposure to catastrophic events, severely injured children and/or adults, dead bodies or body parts, or loss of a colleague.

A large majority of the population will be exposed to a potentially traumatic event during their lifetime; however, a much smaller number of individuals will be at risk of more serious psychiatric conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder, alcohol use disorder, substance use disorder or other psychiatric conditions following potentially traumatic events.

Patrols and patrollers are not all the same, there is a large variation of how individuals respond to a traumatic incident. Individuals may be at higher risk of serious reactions if their own life was threatened, or if they develop guilt/shame from their involvement in the event. Previous exposure and upbringing can dramatically affect our responses.

# Reactions & Recovery

## Reactions

We have an innate fight or flight reaction when we face a threat or danger to increase our chance of survivability. This immediate response system may lead to a person freezing if overwhelmed or surprised by a traumatic incident while another will kick into action, or another may try to remove themselves from the situation. Education and training can improve our abilities to respond appropriately in these types of events.

- Reactions to traumatic incidents may include:
- feelings of anxiety or nervousness
- being overwhelmed, or grief-stricken
- repeated and vivid memories of the event
- rapid heartbeat or sweating
- difficulty with concentration or decision making.
- Sleep and eating patterns can be disrupted.
- Sirens, loud noises, burning smells, or other environmental sensations may stimulate memories of the disaster creating heightened anxiety.
- Increased conflict or disagreements with family members and coworkers, can occur.
- withdrawing, isolating, or disengaging yourself from usual social activities
- Headaches, nausea, and chest pain may occur and could require medical attention.

## Recovery

Most will exhibit resilience and recover relatively well while some recover a little slower with or without help in the first three months. A certain proportion of individuals may develop chronic symptoms and require professional involvement. The World Health Organization offers a stress management guide – [Doing what matters in times of stress](#) – this document aims to equip people with practical skills to cope with stress. One of the most helpful things we can do when we see a fellow patroller having some difficulty is to validate their experience and learn to be an active listener.

### Recommendations for a healthy recovery:

- Connecting with others
- Keeping a daily routine and good sleep hygiene
- Healthy diet and regular exercise help us keep our focus.
- Participate in activities that provide an experience of control at work or in our leisure.
- listen to music or focus on mindfulness in our everyday life.
- Body relaxation, breathing techniques, meditation and visualization can help us restore our everyday balance in life.
- Allow yourself to talk with others about the incident.

### Activities to avoid:

- Too much news on television or social media
- Blaming others or withdrawing from friends and family
- Consuming too much food, alcohol or drugs to calm oneself.
- Risky activities can have a negative impact on recovery.
- Overthinking and oversharing the incident with your social connections.

# How to Get a Local Patrol Program Started

1. Initial Meeting patrollers & area management (suggested discussion points)
  - a. What are/should we (be) doing to promote wellness, safety and resiliency?
    - i. Discuss at morning check-in and/or after sweep.
    - ii. Discuss at refreshers.
    - iii. Educational opportunities and resources available
    - iv. Involve local EMS, Fire, PD, mental health individual, medical advisor to discuss and develop a plan.
    - v. What is our current culture to help each other out, is there a buddy system?
    - vi. Do we have regular social gatherings to develop community?
    - vii. What is the relationship between the volunteer and paid patrollers?
    - viii. Awareness of division patroller awareness resources
    - ix. Are their individuals that would be great advocates to develop a program?
    - x. Are their individuals who may be a hindrance? How do we approach?
    - xi. Area managements support
    - xii. Do we do any physical stretching/exercise before/after the day?
    - xiii. Do we have any type of debrief and if so, how do we do it?
    - xiv. Do we have any type of a check-in process?
    - xv. Are there any off-season gatherings.
  - b. Review what other patrols are doing.
    - i. Examples provided in the resources section.
    - ii. Contact your division/region director and medical advisor.
    - iii. Explore various division websites.
    - iv. Explore Responder Alliance website.
2. Plan an introductory educational session with the entire patrol.
3. Appoint a task force of interested individuals.
  - a. Invite someone from area management to be on the team.
  - b. Create a list of objectives and goals.
  - c. Create a mission statement.
  - d. Define roles or job descriptions (examples available under resources)
  - e. Invite local EMS, Fire, PD, mental health provider etc. to a meeting to review goals and gain their perspective and willingness to participate and/or offer services.
  - f. Utilize “Champions”
    - i. Veteran patroller that fellow patrollers will listen to
    - ii. Content experts – invite to speak at a meeting or write an article if you have a patrol newsletter.
  - g. Craft your own elevator speech (ex under Talking Points)
  - h. Involve your current OEC class IOR in the task force.
    - i. Emphasize throughout OEC/OET training.
  - i. Involve your alumni advisor.
    - i. May utilize past patrollers and incidents they experienced.
    - ii. May be valuable instructors/speakers on this topic.
    - iii. May spark a return to patrolling with a program in place.
4. Create and distribute materials appropriate for your patrol (i.e., posters, wallet cards, stickers etc.)
5. Establish social programs to foster team connectedness.
6. Implement your program.
  - a. Re-evaluate, revise and refresh the patrol at least monthly.



## Next Steps (Advanced) for Your Patroller Wellness Program

1. Review “The Stress Continuum”, “3-3-3 Protocol”, “Buddy System”, “Resilience Team”
2. Recommend at least 1 person complete a training course (links in resources)
3. Develop your local program with roles and responsibilities.
  - a. Who do I contact if I believe there has been a traumatic incident?
  - b. When someone is involved in a traumatic incident, who is responsible to notify their team members to do frequent check-ins.
4. Ask input again from local resources as appropriate (PD, FD, MD etc.)
5. Provide additional education to patrollers/management.
6. Develop a confidential form of communication.
7. Utilize a form of check-in.
  - a. During boot-up and morning meeting
  - b. After Sweep on the hill before departing for the day
    - i. Hot Wash – what went well or not.
    - ii. Ask for a funny or peculiar happening of the day along with any areas of concern.

## Deeper Dive

- More information will be added in the future.

## Resources

### Emergency Phone Numbers

- National Suicide Hotline – 988
- National Poison Control – 1-800-222-1222
- National Emergency - 911

### Responder Alliance – [www.responderalliance.com](http://www.responderalliance.com)

- Responder Alliance works with teams to build individual and organizational resilience in the face of long-term and acute, traumatic stress. They help develop systems that foster resilience, so your team is protected from stress injury and burnout. They have options that range from self-support to full support and provide you with tools, training and guidance that match your needs and budget.

### Eastern Division – <https://www.nspeast.org>

- Patroller Stress Awareness - <https://www.nspeast.org/stress-awareness-resources-701210.html>

### Pacific Northwest Division - <https://www.nsp-pnwd.org>

- Safety Culture for All - <https://www.nsp-pnwd.org/safety4all.html>
  - The PNWD SafetyCulture4All was started with a fluid approach, initiating with others on learning about Patroller Wellness, beginning with a core foundation for all to initiate and expand on. It is providing resources that meet a wide variety of needs as patrols begin to learn and evolve their own foundation.
- Emergent Resource Page - <https://www.nsp-pnwd.org/emergent-stress-awareness-resources.html>

## Southern California Region – <https://www.socalnsp.org>

- **Wellness** - <https://www.socalnsp.org/wellness>
  - The So Cal Region Wellness Fundamentals the Three E's Education, Engagement, and Empowerment by Patrollers for Patrollers
  - Developed in October 2023 in collaboration with our Wellness Peer Support Leads within our Region we are able to give valuable insights and tools to help identify one's signs and symptoms by becoming aware of our feelings. We are strengthening the mindset with coping skills to help them with their mental state.

## Videos

- Eldora Resiliency Innovations - <https://vimeo.com/559157510>
- Eldora Psychological First Aid - <https://vimeo.com/557606322>
- Eldora Patrol 3-3-3 - <https://vimeo.com/557608929>
- Outside Television: Ski Patroller Mike Ferrara Interview  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81qbCAIYOwc>
- Patroller Stress Awareness Grabber Video - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekT02LcYR\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekT02LcYR_M)  
Twelve-minute video on Patroller Stress Injury - what it is and what you can do about it. Learn how to use the Responder Stress Continuum, how to take care of yourself and build resiliency. Educational resources (QR stickers, wallet cards, posters, post incident documents) are available to download.