Police Deaths Rise in First Half of 2010

Following a 50-year low last year, the number of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in the U.S. rose nearly 43 percent in the first six months of 2010, according to a recent report released by the Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF). The group noted that if the trend continues, "2010 could end up being one of the deadliest years for U.S. law enforcement in two decades."

The NLEOMF study found that in the first six months of the year, 87 police personnel died while on duty, compared to 61 officers killed during the same time period in 2009.

Traffic fatalities — which included automobile and motorcycle crashes, as well as police struck outside their vehicles — accounted for more than 48 percent of the deaths in the first six months of 2010. Firearms-related fatalities accounted for almost 36 percent, with deaths from all other causes making up the remaining 16 percent.

Kevin Morison, a spokesman for NLEOMF, noted that the increase this year comes after a record low of 116 officers killed in the line of duty in 2009, the lowest annual total since 1959. "It's too early to tell whether the 2010 increases are an anomaly or signal a larger trend," Morison said.

According to the report, police deaths in all major line-of-duty categories rose in the first half of 2010. Gun deaths for police rose 41 percent, from 22 in the first half of 2009 to 31 for the same period this year. The report noted that six of the officer deaths occurred in just three incidents.

Traffic deaths rose 35 percent, from 31 though June in 2009 to 42 through the first half of this year, with 29 police killed in squad-car accidents, four in motorcycle crashes, and nine struck and killed outside their vehicles. If current trends continue, 2010 will be the 13th consecutive year in which more law enforcement officers die as a result of traffic mishaps than from any other single cause.

Thirty states reported at least one officer death in the first six months of 2010, with California reporting the most at nine, Texas the next highest at eight, and Florida coming in third with six officer deaths. In addition, five federal law enforcement personnel have been killed so far this year in the line of duty.

In a statement, the NLEOMF noted that "2010 could end as one of the deadliest years for law enforcement since the late 1980s. If historical patterns hold true, the 2010 year-end fatality figure could approach the 2007 total of 185. Outside of 2001 — when 240 officers died, including 72 killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11 — 2007 was the deadliest year for U.S. law enforcement since 1989, when there were 195 deaths."

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