



Metin Enver, Managing Editor

Editorial - May 2009

Driving concern

How quickly this year is passing. It's hard to believe we're almost at the start of summer and the annual Police Federation conference is already upon us. As the delegates makes their way from the 43 forces across England and Wales, *Police* magazine exclusively reveals Federation research which clearly shows the toll and often tragic consequences of officers working long hours and shift patterns.

Research conducted by the Police Federation's health and safety sub-committee (see 'Death by Driving?' p.13) demonstrates the very real danger for officers who get behind the wheel of a car if they are suffering from fatigue. This could be as a result of a long and arduous shift, having had to work overtime to complete a job or paperwork or just through pure physical exhaustion because of the nature of duty just worked. And for many officers travelling long distances at unsocial hours, public transport is not an option and the car or motorbike is the only way of getting to or from their place of work. But what is really worrying is the fact that there doesn't appear to be national guidelines in place. The result; a loophole that is being exploited by some forces that then simply read this as 'do nothing.' Well that's just not good enough.

Forces have a duty of care to look at the effects of shift patterns, long periods of overtime and the strains endured in the job, particularly by frontline officers. They have a duty to ensure that a proper work/life balance exists and that officers are not pressured to work ridiculously long hours. They also have a duty to implement sensible shift patterns that allows sufficient rest time between days and to stop changing officers' duties to cope with poor planning by management.

The Federation has made clear that the status quo cannot be continued. There must be proper training for managers and national guidance to support them in the inevitable unpopular decisions they will be forced to take to chief officers. And it's not right to put this burden on the shoulders of sergeants; this is an issue that should be led from the front.

But let's not forget we all have a duty to protect ourselves, our colleagues and the public. Sometimes we are our own worse enemies. We push ourselves to the absolute limit, often never stopping to question our own health and well-being. The time has come to say enough is enough. Forces must take this issue seriously as, regrettably, the research shows this truly is a matter of life or death.

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