

Institute teaches officers how to save lives



Your partner gets a knife in the chest. Suddenly, you hear a distinct sucking sound and he's almost unable to breathe. What do you do? Where do you turn?

This particular injury, known in medical circles as a sucking chest wound, is not covered in the conventional First Aid Training courses which policemen have historically depended upon. And neither are many other injuries which a cop often runs into on the job.

Taking note of the oversight in the spring of 1982, Governors State University Police Chief Phil Orawiec, and St. James Trauma Center, developed a special course of instruction designed to address the unique problems a police officer encounters on the beat.

"I really got into it," said Orawiec. "I absorbed a lot of information. Ironically enough, several weeks afterward, I saved my 3-year-old daughter's life using the Heimlich Maneuver, which I'd learned about during the class."

So fascinated was Orawiec with the entire experience, that he continued his paramedical training, eventually becoming a licensed EMT instructor and starting the Public Safety Training Institute in the fall of 1982. Using the Institute as an informational vehicle, Orawiec again went over and beyond traditional first aid boundaries and zeroed in on medically related problems police officers encounter, like sucking chest wounds.

Since 1982, the Institute has expanded its base of operation annually and is currently in such demand that Orawiec finds himself traveling from sea to shining sea, training FBI groups in D.C. and SWAT teams in San Francisco, etc. He'll work with anyone who's interested in learning more about police-related safety issues and how to handle them.

"This course concentrates on the trauma- and violence-related injuries often associated with our line of work," Orawiec said. "We simply try to give people in our profession the tools they need to protect

and to care for themselves and for others."

Orawiec has made sure that the Institute meets all state and federal certification requirements. Yet, he's also careful to keep it practical so officers can use the information on the street. Now he finds himself in the position where he puts so much time and effort into the Institute that sometimes he feels like he's working two jobs.

"We ran the first accredited FBI course in the Chicago area and exactly a week later one of our trainees saved someone's life. It made the front page of the *Tribune* and suddenly I was getting calls from everywhere."

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"Since 1982, the PSTI has trained over 800 police medics and can account for 154 medically accredited life saves, 48% of which were family or friends of the trainee. This makes the Institute even more valuable to those people," said Orawiec.

In any case, one of the leading causes of police deaths are ballistic injuries to the chest; anything from a pen knife to a bullet hole. And when it turns out to be a sucking chest wound, it quickly becomes a matter of life or death.

"The classic treatment for sucking chest wounds is an occlusive, air-tight dressing such as Vaseline impregnated gauze. It's kind of like trying to plug a hole in a tire so the air won't escape," said Orawiec. "But in reality, officers have used things ranging from the cellophane from a pack of cigarettes to a credit card to cover the area."

"To complicate things further, the bandage needs to adhere tightly on three sides, and loosely on the fourth, which allows the wound to burp every once in a while, making sure that internal pressures don't collapse the victim's heart or lungs.

"But recently we discovered a product called
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by
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Elastogel. It's turned out to be the perfect solution for the immediate treatment of sucking chest wounds. It's airtight, but it loosens up at the right time. It's sterile, it won't deteriorate, it absorbs fluid so it doesn't stick to the natural adhesive so it is the perfect solution for this problem," Orawiec said.

"In fact, the local manufacturers rep, Don Phelps, of Midwest Medical Technologies, in Naperville, has

designed a special kit to fit into a policeman's jump bag. Anyone interested can call Don at 1-800-352-7864," Orawiec said.

"In the Institute course there are several products that I recommend an officer should have at all times. One of these is Elastogel wound dressing to accommodate the possibility of a sucking chest wound," said Orawiec. "For me it's kind of like American Express, I just won't leave home without it."

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT MEMORIAL UPDATE

Flags to fly half-staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day

7he National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) has announced that a little-known provision in the recently enacted crime law requires the flag of the United States to be flown at half-staff at all government buildings on "Peace Officers Memorial Day," which is commemorated each year on May 15.

The proposal was spearheaded by U.S. Rep. John Edward Porter (R-10, IL) after NLEOMF leaders determined that no government flags—not even the one at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial—could be lowered to half-staff on "Peace Officers Memorial Day" without federal legislation. Rep. Porter first introduced a bill calling for the change in early 1993 and was successful in offering his proposal as an amendment to the crime legislation (P.L. 103-322). The change will take effect beginning on May 15, 1995.

"This new law recognizes the sacrifice of more than 13,500 federal, state and local law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty," Rep. Porter declared. It was Rep. Porter's daughter, Robyn,

who was responsible for documenting all of those deaths during her five-year tenure as NLEOMF's director of research and operations.

"For the past 31 years, May 15 has been designated as Peace Officers Memorial Day in honor of our fallen officers," Rep. Porter explained. "It is certainly appropriate that the activities on that special day include the lowering of our flags to show our deepest respect for those officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice."

One police officer is killed somewhere in America every 52 hours, according to NLEOMF chairman Craig W. Floyd. That averages out to 167 police deaths each year for the past 10 years. There are a total of 13,516 names of fallen officers engraved on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. (400 block of E. Street, NW), dating back to the first known death in 1794. New names are added annually.

Floyd encouraged all law enforcement agencies, private businesses and individual citizens to follow the government's lead and also lower their flags on May 15 as "an act of remembrance for our fallen officers."

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*Happy holidays from the
Illinois Police Association!*