



Risk Management Solutions



Summer 2026

A Quarterly Newsletter of the AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division

Officer Employment History: The Most Critical Component of the Law Enforcement Hiring Process

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In recent years, news outlets and social media's focus on law enforcement has generated an increase in public scrutiny. Added interest has resulted in new laws being passed across our nation. Although some laws appear to be "knee jerk" reactions others are well thought out and serve the interests of public safety. This article will focus on one such law, Code of Alabama Section 36-21-55.3 - **Background Checks Required for Employment or Appointment of Law Enforcement Officers**, which was enacted as part of the 2021 Legislative Session. Alabama Code Section 36-21-55.3 both serves the public interest and enables agencies to employ more suitable officers. This law covers both **employment** or **appointment** of law enforcement officers. Municipal governing bodies that oversee the selection process of their police chiefs must conform to 36-21-55.3 during these appointments.

The law requires agencies to address 10 key areas during the selection process. This article will focus on two of the requirements covered in section 2 and section 4. These sections read as follows:

- (Sec.2) Review the current and prior law enforcement officer employment history confirmed through access of the information in the database as required by subsection (e) of Section 36-21-55.1.
- (Sec.4) Review reportable offenses, if any, against the law enforcement officer while appointed or employed with any other law enforcement agency confirmed through access of the information in the database as required by subdivision (a)(1) of Section 36-21-55.1.

It is important to note that the law does not state that an agency simply check with the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission (APOSTC) on law enforcement history (Sec. 2) or reportable offenses (Sec. 4) but that the agency "**confirm**" this information having conducted an independent investigation.

The Alabama RADIUS system (Reporting Application for Disciplinary Incidents Use of Force and Separations) is a vital part of the employment process. It requires agencies to report disciplinary actions and check for records during background investigations. However, all agencies are not reporting to RADIUS as required. Do not rely solely on RADIUS.

Both the Alabama Code and RADIUS requires "full disclosure" on exactly why an officer is separating from an agency. If an officer resigns in lieu of termination the circumstances of the resignation must be reported to APOSTC. Agencies conducting employment background checks should contact every law enforcement agency an applicant has worked for to obtain employment history. Equally important the past employment agency "shall," by law, provide all information. Municipalities with personnel policies that state the only information that can be released for employment background checks is date of hire, date of separation and would you hire back, commonly referred to as "Neutral Recommendation/Reference" policies, must amend these policies to comport with Alabama law in regard to the employment of police officers.

Agencies would be wise to record on a form each agency contacted, who they talked to, along with documentation of the following questions.

- What is the reason for separation?
- Was the applicant allowed to resign during or following an internal investigation or other administrative matter?
- Did the applicant ever receive any:
 - Written Reprimands,
 - Disciplinary Suspensions,
 - Demotions,

continued on following page



- Remedial Training,
- Other types of Disciplinary Action,
- Complaints of Excessive Use of Force,
- Complaints of Criminal Activity,
- Or Complaints of Sexual/Custodial Sexual Misconduct?

Agencies that fail to comply with this law place personnel involved in the employment process in legal jeopardy for “negligent hiring.” Vicarious liability would include both the police chief and mayor in any litigation. Agencies must check for past misconduct to prevent “wandering officers” from moving between departments.

Failure to conduct the required background investigation creates an unnecessary risk. If, or when, the employed officer gets involved in litigation, both the plaintiffs’ attorneys and the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) attorneys will gain access to personnel records and determine whether the proper background investigation was conducted. Officers that have a pattern of misconduct often take that pattern from one agency to another and in some cases to multiple agencies. AMIC insures 330 Alabama municipal police departments with law enforcement liability protection covering 5,300 police officers. With law enforcement liability insurance increasing significantly across the country the employment process of police officers has become increasingly important.

In closing, Alabama law provides a measure of liability protection for information providers. Due to the results being confidential and not subject to public inspection it provides a legal barrier against disclosure of background information, reducing the likelihood of defamation suits. There is no excuse for agencies not to follow this law and hire the best possible officers to serve and protect their communities.

If your agency does not have a written policy on hiring procedures, you can download one from our loss control website at www.losscontrol.org by clicking on “Reference Documents” and entering “Hiring Practices for Law Enforcement or PSOP-005” in the search field. ■



COMMERCIAL VEHICLE OPERATOR COURSE (CVOC)

Large trucks and heavy equipment are vital to keeping your city moving forward. To keep your employees safe and minimize risk, it is essential that your operators be professionally trained on a routine basis. Regular operator training should be conducted for beginners as well as experienced operators to prevent accidents and injuries from common hazards involving commercial vehicles and heavy equipment. The Loss Control Division of AMIC and MWCF has partnered with Better Safety and Training, from Albertville, AL, to provide a commercial vehicle operator course (CVOC) for our members.



These one-day courses (8-hours) will be held quarterly at various locations throughout Alabama. Visit www.losscontrol.org or scan the QR code for more information and upcoming CVOC events.

BAY MINETTE
SEPTEMBER 15 & 16

DOTHAN
OCTOBER 20 & 21

Body Health and Wellness: Preventing Musculoskeletal Injuries

Cody Marcum • Deputy Loss Control Manager • AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division

Strains, sprains and back injuries remain among the leading causes of workers’ compensation claims in municipal operations. These musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) contribute to lost work time, increased claim costs and reduced productivity. Recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data indicate that overexertion and related exposures accounted for more than 946,000 serious workplace injury cases involving days away from work or job restrictions during 2023-2024. These patterns closely mirror the experiences of Alabama municipalities, particularly in public works, utilities and maintenance roles.

Most of these injuries are preventable. Poor body mechanics, especially bending at the waist, twisting while carrying loads or holding awkward positions for extended periods, place excessive compressive and shear forces on the spine. In some cases, the stress on the lower back can equal several times the weight of the object being lifted. Over time, this leads to muscle fatigue, inflammation, reduced coordination and a higher risk of both acute injuries and chronic conditions, such as herniated discs.

In municipal settings, these injuries most often occur when employees:

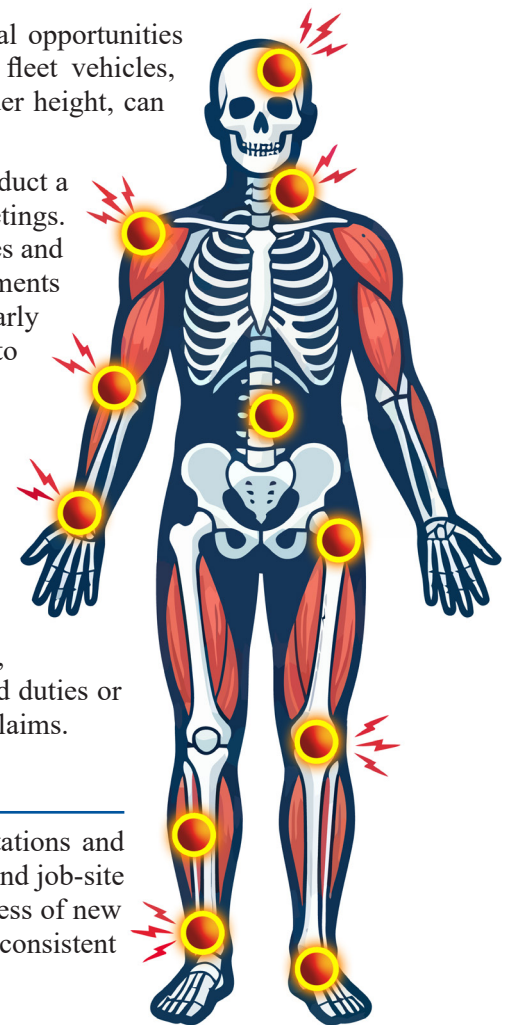
- Lift heavy or awkward items such as pipes, tools or containers
- Perform repetitive bending, reaching or overhead work
- Sit or stand for extended periods without proper support
- Continue working through fatigue without adequate recovery time

Applying proper body mechanics reduces these risks by distributing forces across larger, stronger muscle groups (primarily the legs and core) while maintaining a neutral spine position. This approach allows employees to handle loads more efficiently and with less stress on vulnerable areas such as the lower back and shoulders.

Key Prevention Strategies

- **Reinforce Proper Lifting Techniques:** Employees should lift with their legs and maintain a neutral spine. Key steps include planning the lift in advance, positioning the feet shoulder-width apart, bending at the knees and hips, keeping the load close to the body, and pivoting with the feet rather than twisting the torso. As a general guideline, loads over 50 pounds or bulky, unbalanced items should be handled with mechanical assistance or team lifting.

- **Improve Ergonomic Conditions:** Regular evaluation of job tasks, equipment and vehicles can reveal opportunities to reduce physical strain. Simple adjustments, such as optimizing seating and mirror positions in fleet vehicles, using extended-reach or lightweight tools, and storing frequently used items between knee and shoulder height, can significantly lower cumulative stress over the course of a workday.
- **Implement Daily Warm-Up Routines:** Many public works, utilities and maintenance departments conduct a short, structured 10- to 15-minute warm-up session in conjunction with their daily safety or tailgate meetings. These brief exercises, such as shoulder rolls, torso rotations, leg swings, and light squats, prepare muscles and joints for the day's physical demands by increasing blood flow and improving range of motion. Departments that consistently apply this practice often report improved employee readiness and fewer strains, particularly at the start of the workday. It is advisable to consult with qualified trainers when designing routines to ensure they remain low-impact and suitable for all fitness levels.
- **Support Overall Conditioning:** Physical conditioning, flexibility, hydration and proper nutrition all contribute to better endurance and reduced fatigue. Employees who maintain baseline fitness are better equipped to handle the repetitive and physically demanding tasks common in municipal operations.
- **Use Mechanical Aids and Team Lifting:** Whenever possible, reduce manual handling by using dollies, carts, hoists and lift-assist devices. When team lifting is necessary, ensure clear communication and coordinated movement to avoid sudden or uneven loading.
- **Encourage Early Reporting and Intervention:** Supervisors should recognize early signs of discomfort, such as stiffness or soreness, and encourage prompt reporting. Addressing issues early through modified duties or professional evaluation can prevent minor strains from developing into recordable injuries or lost-time claims.



Making It Work

Training alone is rarely sufficient to create lasting change. Supervisors play a vital role in setting expectations and modeling safe behaviors. Incorporate body mechanics discussions into daily safety meetings, pre-task planning and job-site observations. Tracking injury trends and near-miss reports can help identify patterns and measure the effectiveness of new practices. Many departments have observed measurable reductions in strains and sprains after implementing consistent warm-up routines and reinforcing proper lifting techniques.

Conclusion

Musculoskeletal injuries are common in municipal operations, but they are also highly preventable. Consistent attention to proper body mechanics, ergonomic improvements and daily wellness routines can significantly reduce both the frequency and severity of these injuries.

Supervisors and employees who reinforce proper lifting techniques, support daily warm-ups, and proactively address job-site risks will help create a safer, healthier and more productive workforce. ■

LocalGov 

SUMMER ONLINE TRAINING

FREE Courses Available 24/7 to MWCF and AMIC Members

- Commercial Lawn Mower Safety
- Lawn Care Equipment Safety
- Chain Saw Safety
- Dealing with Heat Stress
- Defensive Driving Basics



Sign up online

losscontrol.org/online-training.html

SUMMER SEMINARS 2026

Join the Loss Control Division for our Summer Seminars, coming soon to a location near you!

Education and training are essential to preventing accidents, identifying loss exposures, and implementing appropriate solutions to mitigate risk.

To better serve our members, the Loss Control Division of AMIC and MWCF develops and provides training focused on employee safety, entity liability, identifying risk, as well as other risk management related topics. Each presentation is designed to provide practical guidance and timely information to help members reduce risk and improve safety performance.

- **Tuesday, August 25** - Saraland, Municipal Complex
- **Wednesday, August 26** - Greenville, Beeland Park Community Center
- **Tuesday, September 1** - Athens, City Hall
- **Wednesday, September 2** - Vestavia Hills, City Hall

2026 SKIDCAR Schedule

Through an advanced, computer-controlled driver training vehicle known as the SKIDCAR System, trainees learn how to react quickly and safely to a range of hazardous driving conditions. Training is conducted throughout the state at a minimal cost. If you would like to schedule or host a SKIDCAR session in your area, please contact **Donna Wagner** at (334) 386-8125. View the SKIDCAR in action by scanning the QR code.



Pelham	July 7 - 17	Valley	September 8 - 18
Decatur	August 11 - 21	Fort Payne	October 13 - 23

Register and pay online at www.losscontrol.org!



Loss Control Division

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Defining Moment: 10 Internet Phone Safety Tips

If you are like most people, your primary connection to the online world is right in your purse or pocket. Your smartphone is an incredibly powerful tool. It can function as your wallet, your news source and your social lifeline all at once.

However, with that convenience comes risk. Without the right precautions, your phone can also open the door to serious online threats.

To help you stay protected, here are 10 practical tips to safeguard your personal information and reduce your exposure to cyber risks when using your phone:

- Keep your software and apps updated.
- Know your phone and its privacy settings. Disable Bluetooth when you are not using it.
- Enable Find My Phone in settings.
- Lock your phone when not in use, and make sure you have a strong passcode or pin to unlock it.
- Back up your data to the cloud or your computer regularly.
- Consider using a mobile VPN. A virtual private network protects your phone from hackers and ensures privacy by hiding your IP address.
- Only install apps from official stores; do not install any app from a third party or unfamiliar website.
- Do not use auto-login features. It might be a hassle to type your password, but think about what would happen if a thief who opens your browser gains access to all your online accounts.
- Do not connect to public Wi-Fi or use public USB charging stations.
- Do not open unexpected or unknown email or text attachments or links. Block unknown numbers and email addresses.