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Fire and Medical First Responders Get New Training on Human Trafficking

Video Teaches How to Recognize Signs, Help Victims of Labor and Sex Trafficking

Whether responding to a house fire, a car accident on the road, or providing emergency medical assistance to someone in a hotel room or a business, firefighters and medical first responders are in a unique position to join the fight against human trafficking by identifying victims and reporting their observations to law enforcement. That's why a new training program is being rolled out across the county as part of Human Trafficking Awareness Month to teach thousands of first responders how to recognize red flags.

The training includes a video designed to provide awareness of warning signs of human trafficking and ensure that fire and medical first responders are safe when they are in potentially volatile situations. The training provides information on recognizing both labor and sex trafficking, how to identify a victim or a trafficker, the misconceptions of human trafficking and how to properly report any suspicious activity. About 3,000 firefighters from 40 fire departments, as well as emergency medical service (EMS) employees from American Medical Response and Mercy Medical Transportation will receive the training.

[You can watch a clip from the Training Video, here.](#)

In San Diego County, sex trafficking is an \$810 million industry. One aspect of preventing and prosecuting trafficking is identifying and supporting potential victims. The goal of this training is to help first responders recognize a potential human trafficking situation and know what to do to help. In 2019, the Human Trafficking Task Force investigated 194 leads and helped 121 victims of commercial sex trafficking – an increase from 77 victims the year before. As a result, 74 cases were submitted for prosecution.

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“This training greatly expands the number of people in the community who are in a position to spot the signs of human trafficking, creating a multiplier effect that can save lives,” said District Attorney Summer Stephan. “Firefighters, paramedics, and EMTs are already saving lives through the work that they do every day by giving lifesaving medical care and rescuing people from dangerous situations. In the course of their duties, they also interact with victims of human trafficking but until now may not have even realized it.”

The training video includes interviews with a survivor of human trafficking as well as DA Summer Stephan, Lakeside Fire Protection District Chief Donald Butz, Rincon Fire Department Chief Ed Hadfield and San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force Officer Mike Wiener.

“We know this training will make a difference in protecting victims of human trafficking,” said Lakeside Fire Chief Don Butz, who is also President of the County Fire Chief’s Association. “Looking back on my career of over 40 years, I am certain there were more than a few calls where there may have been human trafficking going on, but we did not recognize it or know exactly what to do to help. As first responders, we have a duty and responsibility to protect those who may be in harm’s way. This training is yet another way we can provide safety and protection to victims of human trafficking.”

As part of the training, there is also a quick reference tip sheet that will be shared for quick access to red flags while in the field. The goal is to have the tip sheets loaded onto fire department-issued phones and iPads. The training video will be distributed to the fire departments through TargetSolutions, the online training management system they use for accessing training videos. EMS companies will be given a copy of the training to share with their employees.

The San Diego County District Attorney’s Office partnered with the San Diego County Fire Chiefs Association, the San Miguel Fire Department, Rincon Fire Department, San Diego Fire Department and American Medical Response to provide the specialized training to all the fire departments across the county as well as medical first responders.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.