

# Officer deaths up in first half of '09

By [Kevin Johnson](#), USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The number of police officers killed in the line of duty increased 20% during the first six months of 2009 compared with last year, according to a report to be released today. But the number still remains below midyear averages.

All categories of officer deaths in the U.S. are up in 2009, including those killed by gunfire. Despite the increases, the 66 officers killed — up from 55 in the first half of 2008 — marked the second-lowest midyear total since 1965, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, which tracks officer fatalities.

The low 2009 midyear numbers come after law enforcement fatalities in 2008 plunged to the lowest level — 133 — in nearly 50 years, according to the group's records. The average number of police officers killed at the middle of a year is 76, the records show.

This decade, the statistics have varied widely. The 2008 numbers, for instance, marked a dramatic reversal from 2007 when 182 officers were killed, 68 by gunfire.

Memorial fund chairman Craig Floyd said police agencies are doing a "much better job of making it safer" for officers by encouraging the broader use of body armor and re-thinking police involvement in risky high-speed pursuits of suspected criminals.

"There are three-times more officers on our streets than in the 1970s, and we have half the number of fatalities," Floyd said.

Among the findings:

- Officers killed in traffic-related incidents increased 17% at midyear, from 30 during the first half of 2008 to 35 in 2009. For the past 11 years, more officers have died in traffic-related incidents than any other cause.
- Fatal shootings are up slightly, from 20 in the first half of 2008 to 22 in 2009.
- Deaths due to job-related injuries increased from four in 2008 to eight in 2009. In addition, one officer was killed in a helicopter crash.

Multiple deaths in one incident are rare, according to the report.

During a five-week period this year, however, nine officers were shot to death in three separate incidents.

Four of the officers were killed March 21 in Oakland after a traffic stop. Two of the Oakland officers were killed when the driver of the stopped vehicle opened fire.

Two other officers were fatally wounded by the gunman after they pursued him to a nearby apartment. The suspect was shot and killed by another officer.