

FIA Worker Safety Chronology

In response to the death of Macomb County FIA Children's Protective Services Worker Lisa Renee Putman during a home visit May 20, 1998, the Michigan Family Independence Agency, in conjunction with the governor and with legislative support, moved quickly and aggressively to enhance the safety of staff who make home calls. Since April 1998, approximately \$4.1 million has been spent to enhance worker safety.

May 28, 1998 – June 4, 1998

Focus groups with about 200 staff were convened in seven counties; recommendations for enhanced safety measures were developed.

June 1998

Governor Engler announced proposed new worker safety improvements based on focus group recommendations, including:

- publish and enforce a strong Zero Tolerance of Violence policy;
- increase sharing of case information among FIA staff;
- provide cellular phones to all staff making home calls;
- provide access to the law enforcement information network;
- obtain greater law enforcement cooperation to support staff;
- provide an adequate number of keyless entry state cars for staff making home calls;
- identify potentially dangerous customers;
- maintain and distribute a detailed daily home call schedule;
- provide practical safety skills training;
- establish a staff emergency protocol in each local office;
- and provide additional staff to allow for joint home calls, as warranted.

900 new cellular phones were provided to local offices, nearly quadrupling the number previously available.

Staff in Northern Michigan were provided with two-way radios.

A Circle of Safety Videoconference presented practical safety tips to 4,500 staff; remaining staff viewed the conference on videotape in their offices. The Michigan State Police presented practical tips for staff self-awareness in assessing, and responding appropriately to, dangerous situations.

An additional 76 field staff were authorized to provide “Safety Partners” to accompany CPS and Foster Care Staff on home calls where a potentially adversarial relationship exists.

July 1998

Provisions were made for reimbursement of privately owned cellular phone call charges related to business in order to maximize the number of cellular phones available for use by staff on home calls.

The Zero Tolerance of Violence policy, covering threats or violence against FIA workers was reinforced with descriptive posters made available to all local offices. Local Offices were required to work with Prosecuting Attorneys to assure maximum prosecution of individuals who assault FIA staff.

Communication pilots for Nextel and Distress system units were initiated. Both models were field tested to determine effectiveness, reliability and staff preferences.

A survey was conducted to determine which local offices needed more state cars to enhance worker safety during home calls.

August 1998

An additional 30 vehicles with keyless entry/alarms were distributed and an order was placed for 59 more.

New home visit worker safety policies/practices were implemented. Joint worker home calls were required in specific situations, including:

Child Protective Services

- cases involving individuals with criminal histories for violent behavior and individuals with mental health problems who are expected to be a danger to others;
- all home visits where a mandatory petition for termination of parental rights will need to be, or has been, filed;
- all home visits where children will be, or have been, removed within 30 days;
- any other home visit to a family where case record documentation or other information available indicates a potential threat to worker safety;

Foster Care

- cases involving individuals with criminal histories for violent behavior and individuals with mental health problems who are expected to be a danger to others;
- all home visits where a contested termination petition will need to be, or has been filed;

- all home visits where the parent has failed to, or refused to, comply with the services plan and the worker will need to discuss this with the family and take actions which the parent may consider punitive;
- any other home visit to a family where the case record documentation or other information available indicates a potential threat to worker safety;

Adult Services

- cases involving individuals with criminal histories for violent behavior and individuals with mental health problems where the individual is considered a danger to self or others;
- any other home visits to individuals where case record documentation or other information available indicates a potential threat to worker safety;

Delinquency

- families and youth in non-residential settings with criminal histories for violent behavior and individuals with mental health problems who are known to, or are suspected to, be a danger to others;
- all home visits where the parent or youth has failed to, or refused to, comply with the services plan and the worker will need to discuss this with the family and take actions which the parent or youth may consider punitive;
- any other home visit to a family where the case record documentation or other information available indicates a potential threat to worker safety;

Family Independence Program

- when a case is in the fourth month of having an employment related penalty imposed and the FIP case will be closed at the end of the month for non-cooperation;
- when the family receiving FIP is also an active Protective Services case and the CPS worker believes that a second person should accompany the FIS;
- when there is a history of assaultive or violent behavior by a family member or a family member has mental health problems and is known or suspected to be violent to others;
- any other home visit where case record documentation or other information available indicates a potential threat to staff safety.

September 1998

Letters from the directors of the FIA and Department of Community Health and the State Superintendent of Education were mailed to collaborative partners urging coordination of worker safety information among entities such as Multi-Purpose Coordinating Bodies, schools, Community Mental Health, Community Action Agencies, substance abuse and services to the aging.

October 1998

Letters from the FIA director and the chair of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board to domestic violence directors statewide urged them to join the interagency collaborative efforts to coordinate worker safety information among agencies.

The 59 vehicles ordered in August of 1998 were delivered.

November 1998

The Court Law Enforcement Information System (CLEMIS) became operational in Oakland County. CPS workers gained access to law enforcement information on homes they visit.

February 1999

Staff call-in procedures implemented in August were relaxed, based on other worker safety options already in place:

- 1,230 cellular phones were available to local office staff;
- 850 state cars were retrofitted with keyless entry and alarms;
- closer working relationships with law enforcement existed;
- and safety plans were operational in each local office.

March 1999

In addition to the 1,230 cellular phones in operation, 1,459 Nextel systems were delivered to local offices and Nextel training was provided to staff. Distribution was initiated March 1, 1999 and completed April 12, 1999.

April 1999

Worker safety was enhanced by instantaneous communication with co—workers at the touch of a single button as a result of the two-way radio feature in Gladwin and Chippewa Counties.

26 Lower Peninsula counties, or 80% of field staff who make home calls, had Nextel.

80 existing cellular phones in counties that received Nextel were targeted for distribution to local offices outside the Nextel coverage area.

A deployment plan was under development to provide 22 counties not covered by Nextel or cell phones with two-way radios.

January 2000

After a total of 862 vehicles were retrofitted with keyless entry/alarms , all local office vehicles, including new, replaced and reassigned vehicles, will have this as a standard feature.

1520 Nextel phones were available in local offices. Nextel units are the recommended communications device for worker safety purposes where adequate signal coverage exists.

The Michigan State Radio Network was complete in the southern half of the Upper Peninsula through a line extending from Mason to Clare, down to Isabella and over to Sanilac. The balance of the Lower Peninsula is scheduled for completion by August 2000. Completion of the eastern half of the Upper Peninsula is scheduled for the summer of 2001 and the western half is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2002. Testing continues on deployment of MSP Radios in counties where they are deemed necessary.

Testing also continues on Nextel Phones in counties where the company's coverage area has been increased, to see if they are usable in the entire county. Standard cell phones are replaced by Nextel units where there is verified coverage.

November 2000

The quantity of Nextel phones exceeds 1,600. The Nextel coverage area appears to have stabilized and Nextel is operational in 28 FIA Local Offices. Nextel is adding towers in their existing coverage area to improve quality of service and along major interstates and highways to accommodate their customers that travel north to the bridge.

The Michigan State Radio Network is complete in all of the Lower Peninsula. Two-way radios using this network are operational in Branch and Hillsdale. Testing has been conducted in Berrien, Lake and Mason. The findings of these tests are being compiled and reviewed. FIA is targeting an additional 12 Local Offices for testing in FY 2001.

The first Safety Summit was held November 28, 2001. There were 8 areas targeted for discussion. The sessions consisted of: 1. Safety Awareness Week, 2. Rapid Response Team, 3. Field Support Equipment, 4. Office Safety, 5. Home Call Procedures, 6. Incident Reporting, 7. Training Needs, and 8. Safety Collaboration with Other Agencies. The Summit was well attended with all aspects of FIA being represented.

The ideas, information, and recommendations from all the sessions were consolidated into a comprehensive report by OHR staff, which is available on the OHR homepage .

February 2001

The distribution of MSP two-way radios was completed in Berrien and Lake/Mason Counties. Testing of the MSP two-way radios was initiated in Missaukee/Wexford , Manistee and Huron counties.

Authorization was given to use money from the Worker Safety allocation to purchase the software and server to implement the statewide usage of LEIN to obtain information to aide in determining the safety needs when workers are planning home calls on new cases.

April 2001

Additional MSP two-way radios were placed in Alcona, Crawford, Antrim, Kalkaska and Gladwin counties for testing to determine if they will meet the need for communication devices to supplement the cell phones and Nextel phones that do not have adequate coverage.

By the end of April approximately \$3 million has been spent on communication devices and vehicles to enhance worker safety in the field.

May 2001

The first Annual Safety Awareness Week was held May 21-25, 2001. Information was distributed and local offices were encouraged to develop activities to stress all safety in the work environment, not just worker safety on home calls and in the office.

June 2001

HB 4099, PA 14, was passed, which requires FIA to provide training for its Children's Protective Services workers and a "buddy system" in riskier situations. The bill takes effect September 1, 2001. It will cover any employee whose duties include field investigations or home visits. Training is to include tactics to defuse threatening behavior, perform a safe visit and recognize a dangerous situation. Additionally, the worker would have to be accompanied by another trained worker or law enforcement officer if a reasonable risk to safety exists.

FIA has already implemented a pilot of a new Worker Safety Training course designed to meet this training requirement and more. The pilot course was conducted during the week of June 25, 2001. Classes are being scheduled throughout the state for the training, which is based on the video "Working Safe, Working Smart". Staff who make home calls and conduct investigations will be trained first.

July 2001

Two additional pieces of legislation have been passed to help protect FIA workers and the public. These are the last two parts of "Lisa's Law", which was a collaborative effort between the FIA, UAW and the legislature.

SB 72, amends 1931 PA 328, and made it a crime for individuals to threaten or impose physical harm to a family independence agency employee.

SB 74, amends 1927 PA 175, and imposed penalties for individuals who threaten or impose physical harm to a family independence agency employee.

SB 73 amends 1931 PA 328, and made it a crime of fraud, to impersonate a family independence agency employee.

SB 75, amends 1927 PA 175, and imposed penalties for impersonating a family independence agency employee.

September 2001

The Worker Safety classes, based on the video “Working Safe, Working Smart” (WS,WS) have begun statewide. All FIA Staff, especially all staff who do field investigations and make home visits, will be able to receive this training, which provides the elements imposed by HB 4099, PA 14. The WS,WS classes have continued to be scheduled and presented around the state. The Worker Safety portion of all new worker, training classes now includes the basic concepts of WS,WS.

November 2001

The Worker Safety Summit was held November 28, 2001. The progress of worker safety activities since the last summit were reviewed and recommendations for changes, improvements or new initiatives were presented in the various work groups. The workgroups presented their information and recommendations. The complete summary report of the Safety Summit is listed on the FIA Web.

April 2002

The distribution of MSP radios continues in the upper half of the Lower Peninsula. It is still expected that the MSP radio network will be available in the Upper Peninsula by the end of FY 2002.

The replacement of retrofitted state vehicles with newer vehicles that have standard worker safety equipment continues to be a priority item.

July 2002

The replacement of the Nextel i600 phones with i550plus phones has been completed. This initiative was the continuation of FIA’s efforts to provide staff who make homecalls and field visits with dependable and appropriate tools for worker safety communication. These phones will provide better reception than previous phones.

October 2002

Local offices have been asked to review their wireless communication needs to assure staff have access to needed equipment, while working to stay within the ever shrinking financial resources of the agency.

December 2002

Worker Safety has been strengthened by the collaboration between local Law Enforcement, Prosecuting Attorneys and FIA in prosecuting violators of Lisa's Law. A specific example is in Lapeer County where a customer threatened to kill an FIA employee. He was arrested and charged, but was acquitted by a jury. In addition to the legal process the local office took extra precautions such as hiring temporary security guards during the period of time the problem was going on.

January 2003

The distribution of MSP radios has begun in the Upper Peninsula. Radios will be programmed and staff trained in their usage by the end of February. The radios are meant to enhance the communication abilities of the workers and not replace the existing cell phones. Workers will continue to have cell phones to use in areas where they have adequate power.

ASCAP feature: There is a new worker safety alert that has been developed to allow Adult Services Workers to note in a case record if there is a situation that could pose a danger or threat to a workers safety. The features are activated by the worker clicking the Add New button and entering the information. This is to alert anyone else handling the case that there is information in the file that should be reviewed before making a home call.

There are multiple parts to the alert system. The first part is a "Traffic Signal" icon that appears in the top left corner of the ASCAP page.

For a new case that does not have any safety information the green light is activated on the traffic signal. Once information is entered and the alert is activated the red light on the signal goes on. If the situation changes and the immediate danger is removed, the change information is entered on the system. The yellow light then goes on to show there have been concerns, but they currently are not active. The light will not go back to green once a concern has been entered on the system.

The other parts of this alert include the customer's name being highlighted in red and a colored narrative display of the status of the worker safety feature corresponding to the colored lights on the traffic signal. Instructions for using the Worker Safety Feature are in the ASCAP User Guide on the FIA-Net.

April 2003

The Working Safe, Working Smart training has continued to be presented throughout the state. Wayne County personnel have been trained and are providing the training for their staff. The training has been presented to virtually all FIA staff. As new staff are hired, arrangements will be made for them to also receive the training.

May 2003

The Worker Safety Summit is being presented this year in a new format. The concept of Open Space format is being used to elicit more concerns and solution ideas from the staff who attend the meeting. Attending staff will be representing their local office and will be bringing everyone's ideas to the summit.

April 2004

For FY 2004 the Agency has worked to continue providing the necessary safety equipment, training and policy to ensure the safety of all staff and customers while providing required services and activities.

The Working Safe, Working Smart training is being incorporated into New Worker Training, in addition to the traditional safety training. The Working Safe, Working Smart training is available, by request, for presentation to experienced local office staff.

The availability of state vehicles has become more difficult as the number of vehicles has been reduced. FIA is currently developing an agency-wide plan for distribution of state vehicles. In local offices, the distribution will be based on the workload need, not just prior expenditure patterns.

FIA is continuing to work on improving the ability of staff to communicate with their local office and law enforcement.

An evaluation of major cell phone providers is being completed so local offices can select the service that will be most appropriate and beneficial for local office needs. The replacement and upgrade of all cell phone equipment is also being worked on.

The offices with the Michigan State Police radios have had a recent upgrade and update of equipment.

July 2005

Worker Safety continues to be an integral part of all new worker training. The Working Safe, Working Smart training is also available as needed.

During FY 2005, DHS was not able to hold the annual Worker Safety Summit conference due budgetary constraints. In the past this had been a forum to review past worker safety activities and gather current concerns.

The DHS/UAW Health and Safety Committee was initiated as the format to deal with statewide worker safety concerns that are brought forward by DHS staff. Local Offices continue to have their own committees to deal with local office concerns.

The statewide Health and Safety Committee has been meeting on a regular bi-monthly basis and sharing information electronically. The committee has worked on a variety of issues.

The committee was instrumental in getting L-letter 05-046, Identification of Potentially Violent Customers issued. This L-letter points out precautionary measures to take, and establishes local office procedures to flag cases, alert staff, report incidents and how to follow up on incidents.

The committee has also been part of the Child and Family Services committee working on safety concerns about Methamphetamine (Meth) labs. A draft has been completed with information workers need to be aware of to protect themselves in situations that would involve investigations that would cause them to be in contact with a Meth lab.

A DBO was issued on 03-29-05, reference "Updated Incident Reporting Procedures". This DBO explained the new web based reporting procedure that will ensure more consistent reporting of local office incidents to the Office of Labor Relations. This reporting system will include verbal assaults, physical assaults, workplace violence and other issues affecting employees in the course of the work. The report can be made directly by the employee or management accessing the incident report form through the DHS-Net

The Telecommunications office in Departmental Services has continually reviewed the wireless communications needs for staff making homecalls and has identified service providers in addition to Nextel that offer direct connect services. This provides local offices with additional options for worker safety communication devices.