

## **Introduction**

**Eva Setal:** We encourage everyone to stay engaged, ask questions and never hesitate to speak up about safety.

[Music]

**Kirsten Barber:** You're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast that dives into the stories of the people, programs and resources within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. Each episode, we'll give you the scoop from department personnel on how NCDPS enhances the safety of the people of North Carolina.

[Music]

## **Season 4 Episode 9**

**Kirsten:** Hello everyone, welcome to this episode of the Safety Scoop. We have a very special guest with us: the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's safety director, a very unique position within the department that provides public safety services statewide. So, please welcome Eva to the podcast. Eva, thank you so much for being here.

**Eva:** Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me! This is awesome!

**Kirsten:** Well, really glad to have you on board to talk about your position and things that you have seen since you've been here at the Department of Public Safety. So, just so everyone knows who you are, can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

**Eva:** So, my name is Eva Setal. Um, I've been the safety director here for DPS for about seven months now. So exciting! And in terms of me being in safety, it's basically been my entire career so far. I started off in the public sector in the state of New Jersey. I started off as a legislative aid for the House Assembly, and from there I kind of jumped more towards the private sector. But it gave me an opportunity to kind of, like, explore so many different worlds in safety. So, working in healthcare, working in insurance, working for construction, working for Amazon, you know, so it—it gave me an opportunity to really build a platform to, uh, come to DPS.

**Kirsten:** Thank you for giving us a peek into your career background. Um, I'm just curious, what is it like being the safety director for a department that oversees public safety initiatives across the state?

**Eva:** Yeah, I mean, like you said, it's truly unique, and I love that. So, I'm in a position where I help people that, to help them come home safe each day, they are employed to help North Carolinians come home safe each day, as well, and so, it

is a huge benefit as a result. It's a team sport for our agency, and traditionally, when I worked in safety, what I would be looking at is just one line of an impact. Like, how do I help this particular role, how do I help this particular site? But when it comes to working with DPS division, it's now multidimensional. And as a result, it's looking more closely at what are the risks and the solutions and how they impact not just the individuals that might be directly touching it but all other stakeholders that would be involved.

And what I love so greatly about working with all of the people that I've gotten to—to interact with and will be interacting with in DPS is that they're all engaged, and they feel the impact of that difference, not just for themselves but for their colleagues, for people that they work to, um, better every day. And we come up with some great solutions as a result, so I—I love it.

Um, one example is with ALE, they have implemented putting portable AEDs with all of their officers, and this truly impacts our employees that are out in the field. They're out in a space where there is not as much tools as readily available as a static building would provide. And so, it brings safety to them, but it also brings safety to the community, as well, because at any moment, they can be prepared to help someone in a manner that keeps them safe when they do it. And so, things like that are truly what makes this job great, and I love it.

**Kirsten:**

I love that example, and the Department of Public Safety, part of our mission is preparedness. And so, this example is just speaking, um, in my opinion, to that

preparedness aspect of the department's mission to not only, like you said, protect the special agents that are providing services across the state but to protect people in their communities, as well, for any type of scary situation that would involve using that device. So, great example. If we can dive a little bit deeper, are there any other specific aspects of your role for the department?

**Eva:** Yeah! It's a fun role indeed, um...

[Laughs]

...and our team is really fired-up and fun when we do it. So, every day is a bit different. Um, the way I like to describe it to, um, someone who doesn't get to step into safety on a daily basis, it's like taking a field trip every day, especially with having so many different divisions. What tends to happen in my day-to-day life is that I will look at the unique needs of a division. I'm learning a lot in regards to what individual roles do or individual sites do, and then I use that to apply that across divisions to really come up with systematic solutions for the safety of all.

One thing that we used or we did, for example, for accomplishing that is when we had State Highway Patrol with us, working together with them to work on our Safe Work Zone campaign back in April. We're all out on the road, for example, and we all have different levels of awareness. For someone who has to be on the road as part of their job, it's a whole different level of situational

awareness that they have to apply, and they have a higher frequency of being exposed to the risks that we all are exposed to when we're out there. They're better prepared because they see it more often, because they actually have to work with it, um, on more extreme cases, and as a result, using that information that they're able to gain to keep themselves safe helps us to be able to better prepare those who might not think about those higher risk portions of being out there on the road or might not see it on a regular basis because it's not out there when they're out there each time. And so, during our Safe Work Zone campaign we were able to develop a training to help people understand the parts of a safe work zone and why are those aspects and elements there and who it helps to be able to be able to follow all of the aspects of that properly so that you as a driver; any people who are working out in those—those zones; our—our own state, um, employees who are out there as well, that they're all able to stay safer because of us being more aware, more knowledgeable of what are the risks out there.

**Kirsten:** Another great example of a safety initiative.

**Eva:** Thank you, thank you! So, yeah, I love what I do. I love the field trips and I love getting to learn all of these different divisions that we have. We have so many different roles out there, so if I haven't gotten a chance to touch up on a certain role, I am so excited with the opportunity of someone reaching out or me getting a chance to work with them more closely in the future.

**Kirsten:**

Of course, and you said you've only been here for seven months, and it sounds like you've already made quite an impact from your different visits and field trips (I love how you call them that) to—to different divisions across the state. So, for those who may follow—follow us along on social media, Eva might be a familiar name. Uh, Eva participated in one of our campaigns, Public Safety Storytime. Eva did a fantastic job, um, so if you haven't seen it yet, be sure to check it out on our social media platforms or YouTube. But at the end, Eva, you shared some great safety advice for children, um, but I'd like to give you another opportunity to share additional or the same tips with our listeners now.

**Eva:**

Yeah, so, safety is one of those things where it can be a reaction, but in a lot of ways it's about being proactive in doing it, and one of the key things that we use is situational awareness. I would implore everyone to take just one moment every time they go into a new space, they do a new thing, they're entering into something that they might feel differently about than that last moment that they were in, just take that safety moment to look into, "Do I know how to do what I am supposed to be stepping in to do? Do I have what I need to do what I'm stepping in to do, and do I feel safe in the environment that I am stepping in to do it in?" And if any of those are off, those are the moments where we can kind of do our own mental risk assessment. And it doesn't have to be long; it doesn't have to be extreme. You don't have to grab out your—your pen and paper and do a whole checklist for it. It's really just capturing what are the things that might potentially go wrong so that you can prepare yourself for either avoiding it, working around it or improving above it.

So, yeah, situational awareness is key, and I love all the opportunities I get to help people who have found situational awareness, um, in their own workspaces. If there's any of that people find and they'd like to share it with us, we have an email address now: [dps.healthandsafety@ncdps.gov](mailto:dps.healthandsafety@ncdps.gov).

**Kirsten:** Great, and I will put that email in the show notes for anyone who would like to write in to Eva and her team. But something that you said, uh, in your answer, Eva, really stuck with me: the safety moment. I really loved that term and just something simple that people can apply day-to-day without really needing to think too deeply into it.

**Eva:** Yeah, s-safety is simple. Like...

[Laughs]

We—we're a pretty easy, um, um, team to work with and, um, I would say a pretty easy space. In all honesty, we are not the subject matter experts in—in most things, but what we do is really thinking about how to safely keep people able to do the things that they are experts in in the first place. So, yeah, safety moment.

[Laughs]

**Kirsten:**

So, now this is kind of the favorite part of every podcast that I get to record with our guests. It's time to share a success story, something that was a job well done or just went really smoothly. So, anything that you can share about what's going on well in your department or what you've seen that you can share with our listeners?

**Eva:**

Well, I would say one of our biggest successes has been our safety officers or what would be traditionally considered our site safety representation. We have a tremendous group of volunteer, sometimes volun-tolds...

[Laughs]

...who, um, lead safety on a site level, and what they come with in terms of ideas and enthusiasm and just willingness to kind of dive in deeper is truly what makes our safety program work. It builds a safety culture at all of our sites that really resonates beyond the sites that they might feel they're contributing to. And it has been, as far as I've seen, a huge success before I came and an even bigger success since I've arrived. I would say some of the things that we were able to accomplish as a result of it, we had our virtual safety and health fair that we had recently in June for Safety Month. We had, um, so much participation throughout the year for our fire drills and safety drills from all of our safety representation.



We had vocalization in regards to solutions that needed to be made for our safety forms directly from our safety reps. And so, because of how impactful it is, what they do, and this is not just the specific reps but also the safety committees at our sites that have worked so diligently to bring about improvement and change on their sites, that we have been able to increase our communication and really bring about a lot of the, uh, initiatives that we have within our department or within our office as a result of what directly is being told to us by our safety committees. So, things that we are bringing about is updating our form. We have updated our... We're updating our SharePoint page to increase information that is relevant to what our sites need. We updated our name. It sounds simple.

[Laughs]

But we traditionally were called the Safety, Occupational and Environmental Health Office, which is a mouthful. And now, we are the Workplace, Health and Safety Office, which is a way for us to include all aspects of our safety contributions in our team itself. So, yeah, there is a lot, a lot that's going on, and I'm looking forward to all the things that we're bringing about with this.

**Kirsten:**

Well, we are recording this episode and it will be published in September which is Preparedness Month. The Division of Emergency Management is sharing tips all month long for building out emergency plans and kits, um, but I'd love your take, Eva. Why is it so important not only for families but for organizations to

have these emergency plans or things on hand in case of a disaster or any kind of emergency?

**Eva:**

Yeah, great question. So, preparedness is what I like to call an unseen asset. It's one of those things that when it is used properly, you never fully see what it changed. But when it goes wrong, it goes wrong severely, um, when you don't have that preparedness in—in place and when you aren't preparing for things. Emergency preparedness, for example, is when you're preparing for the worst happening. Like, you don't need it to happen multiple times for you to feel like this is a bad thing. The first time is usually enough, right? You have a fire, or you have emergency weather conditions, or you have a major disaster in a building, or you have an incident or injury that impacts one or more people in a—a—a point of no return. These are things that you don't want to happen more than once, but by having preparedness as an organization, we know as a whole that when something happens that it is not one where we are responding in trauma. We are responding in resilience, in all honesty. And so, one of the things that we do and on a common basis, on all of our sites, is the fire drill.

[Laughs]

And it's so simple. When we do it, we're like, "Okay, the noise, you got to walk outside. You have to, like, make sure everybody's here." But when we do it in a way where when the moment comes that we need it is there, and we can take action without having to put in extra movement, extra thought, we are saving

lives. And so, that's a lot—in a lot of ways what we all do on a regular basis. We are preparing every day for emergency in the type of role that we do and the type of audience that we work with throughout the state. And by preparing them, we are making sure that they have a lasting asset, that they don't have negative impacts in their lives. And our—our office helps you to do that by preparing for the emergency. So, it's very important to be prepared. And I hope that you feel prepared here at DPS, um, especially when it comes to safety.

**Kirsten:** That's a great answer, and it's so funny that you brought up fire drills. Practicing those through school and, um, now in the office, it is something that sometimes you think, “Oh, okay, here's another drill,” but because it's been practiced over and over again, it becomes second, uh, a second nature response when you hear that fire alarm go off and your body almost just goes on autopilot and knows what to do, which I think is one of those simple preparedness moments that we referred to earlier.

**Eva:** Yeah.

**Kirsten:** So, Eva, you've talked about what your—you and your team have done over the past several months, but let's talk about the future. What are some of the plans in the pipeline to enhance safety within the department?

**Eva:** I would love to share. Um, so in terms of the Strategic Plan for 2025 to 2029, the goals that we have in safety are to reduce the frequency of workplace injuries (sounds simple enough) ...

[Kirsten laughs]

...and improve our reporting of incidences that have occurred. They may sound like they contradict each other, but they truly help each other. When we have people reporting something that happens as soon as it happens, it allows us the opportunity to learn from it while it's still fresh. It allows us the opportunity to change things while it's still in a state that can be changed or improved, and it helps the others around us that may have not experienced it yet, but we can prevent them from having it—the experience in the future.

So, some of the things that we're doing to be able to accomplish those plans is that we have recently created something called our protective action tracker. It essentially is going to take all of our injuries that are needed to be recorded to a regulatory agency, and we're going to be looking deeper into whatever is the root cause. We're going to be helping every site that has that experience find the corrective actions in a way that if it is something that can impact beyond their site, we can apply it beyond their site. So now, we are bringing about solutions agency-wide before it actually impacts multiple areas in the agency directly. And then, another thing that we're doing for improving our incident reporting is actually adding that into our new employee orientation, so we're

going to be updating that so all of our new employees are aware of what is the—the easiest way for reporting an incident and really sharing their input on making DPS or keeping DPS safe.

**Kirsten:** Eva, you have been such a fantastic guest, and I really appreciate all the tips you have taken the time to share with our listeners. Anything else you'd like to share as we close out this episode of the Safety Scoop?

**Eva:** Well, I would love to give a shout out to our entire, um, Workplace Health and Safety team. Um, we are a great bunch who's working diligently to keep DPS safe. We have our safety consultants, Glenda and Chris, who are in the east and the west, respectively. We have Becca who heads our worker's compensation for DPS and does a amazing job of keeping people in line with what is our process for injuries. We have our new nurse consultant who's going to be joining our team in the very near future, and we have our newest member, Aaliyah, who is our safety administrator, who is helpful for us making sure that we're responsive to safety needs as quickly as possible and, um, as thoroughly as possible. Um, and one of the things that she shared when we got to discuss this opportunity to be on the podcast was, uh, a great definition for what our team does. Um, the way she put it was, "Safety is truly a shared responsibility. It's not just the role of one office or one leader, every employee has a part to play, and together we can create a safer, healthier and more prepared workplace." Um, we encourage everyone to stay engaged, ask questions and never hesitate to speak up about safety.

**Kirsten:** I love what Aaliyah shared. Safety is a shared opportunity. I think that's great, and for our listeners out there, don't forget that email that's in the show notes if you have anything you want to write in to Eva and her team. Be sure to, um, send her a message. Eva, thank you so much for joining us on the Safety Scoop, and I hope that we can talk to you again soon.

**Eva:** Oh yeah, this was so much fun! Thank you again and again for this opportunity.

## **Conclusion**

[Music]

**Kirsten:** This is the Safety Scoop, a podcast written, produced and edited by the NCDPS communications team. The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety is to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through preparation, prevention and protection with integrity and honor. Follow the department on social media for a closer look at ongoing initiatives and resources. We're on Facebook, X and Instagram at NC Public Safety. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to subscribe to the Safety Scoop on your favorite podcast app. I'm your host, Kirsten Barber. Thanks for listening.