

# Memorandum



**Date:** May 13, 2014  
**To:** All Stations and Offices  
**From:** Dave Downey  
Fire Chief  
**Subject:** 24-Hour First Responder Dedicated Help-Line  
**Memo #:** 05-14-274

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It is with a great sense of pride that I introduce the first 24-Hour Help-Line dedicated to the South Florida first responder community. Through the efforts of the MDFR Chaplaincy Program, the leadership and support of Local 1403, and the South Florida Council of Firefighters, a relationship has been established with the Switchboard of Miami in order to operate this 24/7 dedicated line tailored to offer help and assistance to the first responder community of South Florida.

Switchboard of Miami was established in 1968 as a private, nonprofit organization that counsels, connects and empowers people in need. Switchboard serves as both a first point of assistance and a last resource for people in need through their suicide prevention programs, information and referrals center, and crisis counseling and wellness services.

The new phone number, **1-855-768-3473 (FIRE)**, is available for all South Florida first responders and their families, both retired and active, offering private and confidential assistance to all who call. The operators at Switchboard are not only highly trained crisis counselor professionals but have also received awareness training given by MDFR personnel as to the culture and personality profile of firefighters in particular and first responders in general.

We have many tools at our disposal in this fight against the self-destructive effects of unmitigated stressors in our lives. These include increased education and awareness through classes and videos; appropriate and timely interventions by caring and trained peers as part of the MDFR Chaplaincy and CISM Teams; Miami-Dade County's Employee Assistance Program; and the many relationships and partnerships being brokered with the professional counseling and faith communities in our area in order to assist us.

This Help-Line gives us another tool in our fight against two of the most common threats leading to destructive behavior – isolation/disconnect and the stigma of weakness in reaching out for help. As we know from our profession, **no one tool** is the answer to every situation, and **no** tool will help you if not used, and used properly. Having said that, I cannot overemphasize the fact that the first line of defense in the fight for our well-being is now, and will always be, each other.

I would personally like to thank Switchboard of Miami, Local 1403, the South Florida Council of Firefighters and all personnel involved in this project. If only one life is helped by the simple act of reaching out and making a phone call in a moment of distress, it will be a resounding success.

Attached is a poster advertising this Help-Line number. Staff will be distributing laminated copies to all stations and offices. Any questions can be directed to my office.

DD/mg

Attachment



**Switchboard**  
Help Anytime. Always.

**1-855-768-3473 (FIRE)**

*Help for those who help others...*



*...it's only a phone call away.*

A 24 hour dedicated help-line for those  
whose lives are spent helping others

**— *First Responders* —**

*Sponsored by The South Florida Council of Firefighters*