

THE STANDARD RESPONSE PERFORMANCE

A FREE FIELD AUDIT

THE FIRST RESPONDER HEALTH AUDIT

*10 Warning Signs the Career
Is Taking From Your Body*



ROGER HILL

Deputy Sheriff, 17 Years on the Job · Founder, The Standard Response Performance

Built for the Call.

READ THIS FIRST

How to Use This Audit

Nobody hands you the bill during the shift. The costs of this career arrive quietly, over years, disguised as normal: tired is normal, sore is normal, short-tempered is normal, running on caffeine is normal. That is exactly how good people end up sick, hurt, or done a decade early.

This is a ten-minute audit. Ten signs, drawn from the occupational health research on law enforcement, corrections, fire, EMS, and dispatch, and from seventeen years of living the job myself. Read each one. Check the boxes that are true, not the ones you wish were true. Count your checks at the end. You run vehicle checks and equipment checks without taking them personally. Run this one the same way. It is situational awareness, applied to yourself.

Honest is the only setting that works.

EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AND DISCLAIMER

This audit is educational. It does not diagnose any medical or mental-health condition, and it is not a substitute for professional care. It is adapted from the book *Still Standing: Protecting Your Body, Mind, and Career Through a Life of Service*, where every claim is fully sourced. If you have a medical condition, consult your physician.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS

Call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. It is free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day, every day. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or go to an emergency room.

THE AUDIT

The 10 Warning Signs

Check every line that is true for you right now. Count the checks as you go.

01 YOUR SLEEP STOPPED RESTORING YOU

- ☐ You wake up tired more days than not, no matter how long you were down.
- ☐ After a run of nights, you cannot fall asleep even when you are exhausted.
- ☐ You have quietly stopped expecting to feel rested.

Why it matters. In a landmark screening study of nearly 5,000 police officers, about 40 percent screened positive for at least one sleep disorder, and most had never been diagnosed. Sleep is not downtime. It is where recovery, memory, emotional control, and reaction time get rebuilt, and the debt compounds silently for years.

The move. Wear dark sunglasses on the drive home from a night shift. Driving into a sunrise is a massive dose of daylight at the exact moment your body needs to power down. It costs ten dollars and two seconds, and it is the highest-return sleep habit in this profession.

02 THE DRINK HAS A JOB

- ☐ You drink to wind down, or to get to sleep.
- ☐ You are drinking earlier, alone, or more than you intended.
- ☐ You have told yourself you would cut back, and it has not happened.

Why it matters. About 26 percent of first responders screen positive for hazardous alcohol use. The trap is that it works in the short term. Alcohol sedates you into lighter, broken sleep, so the drink that puts you down steals the recovery you went to bed for, and tomorrow needs a little more.

The move. Run a two-week test with none. If you cannot, that is not a willpower problem. It is a medical one with effective, confidential treatment, and the number is on the last page of this audit.

03 YOUR FUSE IS SHORTER THAN IT USED TO BE

- ☐ You are snapping at people at home over small things.
- ☐ Someone you love has said something about it more than once.
- ☐ The anger shows up at nothing: traffic, lines, a dropped fork.

Why it matters. A shortening fuse is one of the most common early signs of accumulated stress load. It is not a character change. It is a nervous system that has been scanning for threat all shift and never fully stands down, so the people who least deserve it get what is left.

The move. Sixty seconds in the driveway before you walk in. Breathe in through the nose for a count of four, out through the mouth for six, ten times. The long exhale is the active ingredient. Leave the shift in the vehicle.

04 THE 2 A.M. EATING PATTERN IS WINNING

- ☐ Most nights include fast food or gas-station eating between midnight and 0400.
- ☐ Energy drinks plus whatever is available has become the default fuel plan.
- ☐ The weight climbs a little every year, and you have stopped fighting it.

Why it matters. Overnight, your metabolism handles food at its worst, so the same meal does more damage at 0200 than at 1400. That is how cardiometabolic wear builds. Among firefighters, sudden cardiac death is the leading cause of on-duty death, accounting for close to half of duty-related fatalities.

The move. Front-load. Eat your largest, most complete meal before the shift, keep the midnight-to-0400 window small and protein-forward, and keep shelf-stable protein in the vehicle so the holdover is not a disaster.

05 YOU CANNOT STAND DOWN

- ☐ You cannot actually relax, even on days off.
- ☐ The scanning does not stop when you are somewhere safe.
- ☐ Relaxing feels like a skill you used to have and lost.

Why it matters. Hypervigilance is trained, and on shift it keeps you alive. The problem is when the switch sticks in the on position and runs 24 hours a day. Researchers call the accumulating cost allostatic load: the price a body pays for staying half switched on. It burns recovery you never see.

The move. Ten to fifteen minutes of deliberate downshift after shift: the floor, long exhales, slow movement. Standing down is a trainable skill, not a personality trait, and it has to be practiced like anything else you are good at.

06 YOU ARE PULLING AWAY FROM YOUR PEOPLE

- ☐ You keep declining things you used to enjoy.
- ☐ It has been weeks since a real conversation with anyone outside the job.
- ☐ At home, you are present in body only.

Why it matters. Across the research, strong social connection is one of the most powerful protective factors that exists, and isolation carries health risks on par with well-established dangers like smoking and obesity. This job quietly takes connection first, and the loss is easy to explain away as being tired.

The move. One contact this week. A text, a coffee, a lift with someone you have drifted from. Connection is maintained the same way fitness is: in small, repeated, unglamorous reps.

07 THE PAIN BECAME PART OF THE UNIFORM

- ☐ Your back, neck, shoulders, or hips hurt most shifts.
- ☐ You have stopped mentioning it, because what would be the point.
- ☐ You get out of the vehicle differently than you did five years ago.

Why it matters. The duty belt, the vest, the car seat, and the boots on concrete compress and shorten the same tissues every single shift. Left alone, that pattern ends more careers early than the dramatic calls ever will, and it drags training, sleep, and mood down with it.

The move. Five minutes on the floor after shift: a figure-four stretch for each hip and a half-kneeling hip flexor stretch for each side. Pressure and stretch are fine. Sharp pain, numbness, or tingling is a stop sign that belongs in front of a professional.

08 CAFFEINE IS HOLDING THE BUILDING UP

- ☐ It takes multiple energy drinks or coffees per shift just to feel normal.
- ☐ You are still taking in caffeine within six hours of trying to sleep.
- ☐ The dose keeps growing for the same effect.

Why it matters. Caffeine has a half-life of roughly five to six hours, so the late-shift can is still working against you at bedtime. It thins out the deep sleep you need, which makes tomorrow more tired, which demands more caffeine. The spiral masks fatigue. It never repays it.

The move. The front-half rule: caffeine in the first half of the shift only. Hold it for two weeks and let your sleep tell you what the late doses were costing.

09 DAYS OFF DO NOT FIX IT ANYMORE

- ☐ You arrive at shift already running on empty.
- ☐ A weekend off means the couch, and you are still exhausted Monday.
- ☐ You cannot remember your last genuinely restored day.

Why it matters. Coming in empty is the signature of burnout: emotional exhaustion, creeping cynicism, going through the motions. Burnout matters on its own, and it is also a warning light for nearly everything else on this list, because a system with no recovery left has no margin.

The move. Schedule one protected recovery block every week: a real sleep opportunity, some unhurried movement, and something human. Recovery is planned like a shift. It is never found lying around.

10 THE PLAN IS “AFTER RETIREMENT”

- ☐ You keep telling yourself you will get healthy when things slow down.
- ☐ Physicals and screenings keep getting skipped or pushed.
- ☐ The important health decisions have been deferred for years.

Why it matters. The exposure outlasts the career. The heart disease, the weight, the broken sleep, and the accumulated load present their bill in the years after the badge, which is exactly when you were planning to start enjoying your life. The people who arrive there well built the habits during the career, not after it.

The move. Book the physical this week. Then pick the one sign in this audit that hit hardest and work its move for 30 days. Not all ten. One.

THE DEBRIEF

What Your Count Means

0 to 2 checks. You are carrying the load. Whatever systems got you here, keep running them, and hold the standard on the two or three habits doing the most work.

3 to 5 checks. The load is winning in places, and it is winning quietly, which is how it prefers to work. Pick the two signs that hit hardest and run their moves for 30 days. Not a life overhaul. Two moves, thirty days, honestly executed.

6 or more checks. This is not a discipline problem, and it is not weakness. It is accumulated load, and no amount of toughness out-disciplines physiology. Start with sleep, add one more move, and seriously consider talking to a professional who understands this work. That is early maintenance, not an admission of crisis. You would never let a patrol vehicle run this many warning lights.

ONE ITEM THAT IS NOT ON THIS LIST

Any thought that the people in your life would be better off without you is not an audit item, and it is not a wait-and-see situation. Call or text 988 today, or tell one person you trust. Suicidal thoughts are more common than you think, they are usually temporary, and they respond to treatment. Reaching out is not the end of your career. Staying silent is the greater risk.

Numbers worth having before you need them

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. For crisis, distress, substance concerns, or just needing someone to talk to. You do not have to be suicidal to use it.

COPLINE (law enforcement). 1-800-267-5463. Confidential, 24/7, answered by retired law enforcement officers.

Safe Call Now (all public safety and families). 1-206-459-3020. Confidential, 24/7, staffed by first responders.

Fire/EMS Helpline (Share The Load). 1-888-731-3473. 24/7, run by the National Volunteer Fire Council.

SAMHSA National Helpline (substance use). 1-800-662-4357. Free, confidential, 24/7 treatment referral. No insurance required.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

One Move Tonight, One System If You Want It

1. Do one thing tonight. Put the sunglasses in the vehicle. Do the sixty seconds in the driveway. Put 988 in your phone. One move, tonight, while this is still in your hand, is worth more than reading it twice.

2. Give this to someone who needs it. You already know who. The one who has gone quiet, or whose fuse has gotten short. Send it with one line: thought of you on a couple of these. That opens a door without forcing anyone through it, and it costs you nothing.

3. Go deeper: the book. This audit is the short version of *Still Standing: Protecting Your Body, Mind, and Career Through a Life of Service*, the full field guide: the science of what this career does to a body, and the complete toolkit for sleep, nutrition, training, recovery, and knowing when to call for backup. Every claim is sourced, and the clinical chapters were reviewed by a licensed mental health professional.

4. If you want the system, not just the read. The Standard Response Performance builds this into coaching written around your shift, your body, and your life: training, nutrition, recovery, and accountability, built by someone who works the same schedule you do. Apply at **thestandardresponse.com**.

5. If you lead an agency. The Standard Response Performance runs Department Wellness Workshops, from a sixty-minute class to a six-week program: practical, evidence-based, and delivered by someone with seventeen years on the job. Inquire at **thestandardresponseperformance@gmail.com**.

About the Author

Roger Hill is a deputy sheriff with seventeen years on the job and the founder of The Standard Response Performance. He has trained for twenty-five years and competed in NPC bodybuilding for twelve, with a dozen overall wins and a best national placing of eighth in heavyweight. He is an ACE Certified Personal Trainer, holds an ACE nutrition certification, and is a Yoga For First Responders (YFFR) Instructor. He is not a physician, a dietitian, or a licensed mental health professional, and his consistent position is that a coach's job is to know where the lane ends.

Selected sources

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