

National Peace Officers Memorial Day observed locally

Michele Gerber, *Fluor Hanford*

National Peace Officers Memorial Day will be observed this Thursday, May 15, to honor police officers, reserve police officers, sheriffs and their deputies and other peace officers who offer protection in United States civilian areas. The U.S. flag should be flown at half-staff on that day, just as it is on Veterans Day and certain other holidays, in honor of those men and women who have served as peace officers and have given their lives in the line of duty.

Since the first known line-of-duty death in 1792, nearly 16,000 officers have made the ultimate sacrifice. The largest number of officer deaths in a single day occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, when 72 officers perished in the terrorist attacks on America. A total of 230 officers died while performing their duties during 2001 — the most killed since 1974.

On average, one American law-enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty every 53 hours. For every officer killed, 400 are assaulted and 145 injured. That translates to 61,000 law-enforcement officers assaulted and 19,000 injured every year.

According to Lenny Perkins, Fluor Hanford manager of Technical Support for the Plutonium Finishing Plant Project and a former West Richland reserve police officer, "The men and women of our police forces put their lives on the line so that the people of the United States may live in relative safety. While serving in West Richland, I came to appreciate the fact that they do this service day and night, on patrol or off duty, and they ask very little in return. America is a wonderful country, because we live under laws made and implemented by us, through our government. We owe a lot to those who 'serve and protect.'"

The Plutonium Finishing Plant will hold a two-minute ceremony on Thursday, lowering the flag to half-staff and observing a moment of silence. There will be a Tri-Cities memorial ceremony at Kennewick's Columbia Park on Saturday, May 17, starting at noon with a police honor guard. A barbecue lunch after the ceremony is open to the public. For more information about the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial fund, call (202) 737-3400 or visit the Web site www.nleo mf.com. ■