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Date: November 6, 2017

To: Portage County First Responder Agencies

From: Amber Osowski, NRP, AAS, EMS Coordinator, Portage County Emergency Management; and
Lori Kawleski RN BSN, Public Health Planner, Public Health Emergency Preparedness

Re: Portage County First Responder Safety

Portage County Emergency Management/EMS and Portage County Health and Human Services – Division of Public Health, Public Health Emergency Preparedness aim to make the job of our local first responder groups as safe as possible by minimizing the risks they face each day.

One risk that first responders face is the presence of unknown substances in response environments, including fentanyl, synthetic opioids, and other drugs that may be laced with these substances. We ask for your help in distributing the enclosed information and encourage your agency to review your current department guidelines regarding the risk of unknown substances and personal protection equipment.

Recognize and React

It is important that all first responders are:

- Aware of the risks of exposure to unknown substances
- Recognize environments that put them personally at risk for contact with these substances
- Understand department guidelines related to unknown substance exposure and response
- Know how to protect themselves with personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Safely don and doff PPE
- When exposure occurs, know how to prevent other responders from being exposed and the actions to take to limit their own personal risk
- Recognize symptoms of exposure in themselves and other first responders and how to access care

For more information on Responder Safety, please feel free to contact Amber Osowski at osowskia@co.portage.wi.us or Lori Kawleski at kawlesl@co.portage.wi.us.