



TRAINING BULLETIN

Volume LIV, Issue 2, May 2025

Jim McDonnell, Chief of Police

CROWD MANAGEMENT, INTERVENTION, AND CONTROL – PART I GUIDELINES AND OBJECTIVES

PURPOSE

“Respect for People” and “Service to our Communities” are fundamental core values of the Los Angeles Police Department. In a society where free speech and the right to assembly are guaranteed by the Federal and State Constitutions, it is the mission of police officers to protect the constitutional rights of all members of the public. These constitutional rights apply to individuals participating in lawful activities such as public speeches, marches, demonstrations, picketing, rallies, and celebratory events.

This document was developed to provide guidelines to assist officers and supervisors in identifying lawful versus unlawful assemblies. Additionally, it will provide insight into how the response and actions of law enforcement may affect the demeanor and response of a crowd. The thoughtful application of crowd management and intervention strategies will generally assist in efforts to facilitate legal First Amendment activity with reverence for life, fairness, respect and dignity for every individual, while at the same time removing those individuals whose illegal behavior jeopardize the purpose and safety of protected activity. Additionally, this document reviews the Department’s Use of Force policy relating to crowd control techniques.

PROTOCOL

In determining whether First Amendment activities are lawful, police officers must not consider their personal views of either the political affiliation or the message of those persons exercising their right to assemble and engage in expressive activities. The responsibility of police officers is to objectively determine at what juncture a demonstration or assembly leaves the realm of legal protest.

It is important for supervisors and officers to understand the definition of an unlawful assembly to determine the appropriate police response. Penal Code Section 407 defines an unlawful assembly as: “Whenever two or more persons assemble together to do an unlawful act, or to do a lawful act in a violent, boisterous or tumultuous manner, such assembly is an unlawful assembly.” “*Boisterous or tumultuous manner*” means conduct which *poses a clear and present danger of imminent violence*.

The California Penal Code identifies two different circumstances when an assembly may be declared unlawful. The first circumstance is when people assemble to participate in an unlawful act. The unlawful act must be an act made criminal by law, or by the commission of an overt act that leads to a violation of the law. In the absence of any unlawful conduct, an assembly may be declared unlawful only if there is reasonable cause to believe, based on articulable facts, that the assembly's purpose is unlawful. If people are assembled to commit an unlawful act, then they are an unlawful assembly (e.g., unlawfully blocking entrances to public buildings, highways, sidewalks or schools, or engaging in other unlawful or riotous activity).

PROCEDURES

Any public assembly of individuals or groups, lawful or unlawful, may require support and/or intervention by law enforcement. Depending upon the situation, the response of law enforcement can range from observation and crowd management strategies to crowd intervention and control strategies. The police response to each assembly or protest is different and will require law enforcement's flexibility, creativity, discipline and patience.

Crowd Management

First Amendment activity such as a march, demonstration, protest, rally, or celebratory event is most often successfully facilitated by initially using the least amount of visible law enforcement presence necessary. An ongoing assessment of crowd behavior is critical for supervisors and officers to appropriately respond to the actions of a crowd or protest group.

Crowd Management Primary Objectives

- Establish contact with crowd
- Obtain voluntary compliance
- Minimize enforcement action

Experience has shown that the appearance of an organized, disciplined contingent of police officers will often cause a disorderly group to abandon their disruptive activities. However, if used inappropriately, the mere presence of officers and/or horses in protective gear may be perceived as aggressive and may be sufficient to change the behavior of the crowd.

This can cause the focus of the protest to shift from the group's original cause to the presence and actions of officers. Therefore, supervisors should consider this potential impact on crowd behavior and be thoughtful about the strategic deployment of police officers and horses in protective gear.

Instead of thinking about the best form of police action to control the crowd, it is important for supervisors to focus on how to act in order to encourage the crowd to manage itself. One way of achieving this is to place a major emphasis on urging crowd

members to express their views in a lawful manner, even under conditions where one is aware of the presence of small, isolated groups with illegal goals and even at points where these small, isolated groups start to act in illegal and violent ways.

Intervention

Police officers and supervisors must understand the importance of differentiating between violent members of the crowd and peaceful protestors. When possible, officers should interact with crowd members in an effort to communicate law enforcement support of lawful First Amendment activity and rights of free speech and expression.

Unlawful behavior by individuals, or unlawful conduct observed in an isolated incident, should not automatically form the basis for declaring an otherwise lawful assembly to be unlawful. When it appears practical, officers should attempt to give warning to the leaders or spokesperson of the activity, the other participants, and/or the individuals about any observed unlawful or potentially unlawful conduct.

Crowd Intervention Primary Objectives

- Protect First Amendment activity
- Facilitate lawful protests
- Isolate unlawful behavior
- Arrest law violators

When appropriate, officers should instruct them on what they must do to comply with the laws, so as to allow an opportunity to correct the conduct in question. Every effort should be made to protect and facilitate the actions of lawful demonstrators while using intervention strategies to stop illegal activity and remove law violators. However, when group behavior appears to be unlawful, aggressive, or otherwise uncontrollable, it is reasonable for the assembly to be declared unlawful.

Crowd Control and Dispersal

In the event a group or portion of a group becomes involved in violent or riotous behavior, the mission of the Department is to protect lives and property and restore conditions to normal as rapidly and efficiently as possible. The dispersal of unlawful groups, and the rapid deployment of forces to contain and arrest those responsible for violent, riotous, or unlawful behavior, will help accomplish the Department's crowd control primary objectives.

Crowd Control Primary Objectives

- Protect life
- Protect vital facilities
- Protect property
- Restore and maintain order
- Arrest violators

Crowd dispersal strategies should only be used when immediate action is necessary to disperse an unlawful assembly, or to stop violence and/or property damage. When circumstances require crowd dispersal, the dispersal should generally not occur until

crowd control personnel and resources are in place to assist in managing the dispersed crowd, as unlawful conduct is extremely dynamic and mobile.

Dispersal Orders

The intent of a dispersal order is to permanently disperse a crowd, not to merely relocate the issue to another location. Supervisors should make a reasonable assessment to determine if the members of a crowd are attempting to comply with the dispersal order or relocate the unlawful behavior.

Methods to Deliver and Document Dispersal Orders

- Amplified sound
- Multiple languages when appropriate
- Confirm audibility from various locations
- Display signage indicating unlawful assembly and dispersal when practical
- Document with video/audio recording

It should be made clear that the crowd is expected to immediately leave the area and include a warning that force may be used which could result in serious injury. The dispersal order must be given in a manner reasonably believed to be heard and understood by the intended audience. Based upon the circumstances, multiple announcements from various locations may be required. Dispersal orders should be delivered in English and in other languages that are appropriate for the audience. Regardless of the delivery method, the name of the individual giving the dispersal order and the date and time each order was given should be documented.

MEDIA

It is the Department's goal to provide the media as much access as legitimately possible to assist them in their duties to gather, receive or process information for communication to the public. Prior to engaging in crowd management, intervention, and control, officers should review related training documentation for media during crowd control situations, including the associated Training Bulletin entitled *Crowd Management, Intervention, and Control – Part II, Media*.

USE OF FORCE

There are no exceptions to the Department's Use of Force Policy for crowd control situations. Officers may use only that force which is objectively reasonable. Verbalization should be used throughout the operation in an attempt to gain compliance. In determining the appropriate amount of force, officers shall evaluate each situation in light of the facts and circumstances of each particular case, including, but not limited to the seriousness of the crime(s), the level of threat or resistance presented by the individual(s), and the danger to the community.

Kinetic Energy Projectiles and Chemical Agents

Although there are no exceptions to the Department's Use of Force Policy for crowd control situations, some additional requirements/usage protocols apply to certain intermediate force options during crowd control situations, including crowd dispersal. Examples of these are the 40mm Less-Lethal Launcher and Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) Spray. Prior to any crowd control situation, officers should review Department policy and procedures for kinetic energy projectiles and chemical agents, including the Use of Force Directive entitled *Crowd Control – Kinetic Energy Projectiles and Chemical Agents*.

Baton

The baton may be used to push individuals who do not respond to verbal commands and encroach upon officers on a skirmish line or, after a lawful dispersal order has been issued, on individuals who intentionally delay departure while officers attempt to disperse the crowd. The push technique utilizes the baton as an extension of the officer's hand on passive/aggressive demonstrators failing to comply with officers' orders. During this technique, the tip of the baton is placed on the center of the chest, officers then push the demonstrator. The push technique is not considered a strike with an impact device and is not a reportable use of force while utilized in a crowd control situation, unless the push results in injury or complaint of injury.

Note: The use of a baton as an impact device (**not** a baton push) against an individual must be consistent with the legal concept of proportionality, and within the Department's policy on intermediate force. Even in a crowd control situation, the use of a baton as an impact device should be reported to a supervisor and appropriately documented.

Medical Treatment

Any suspect taken into custody that has been injured or complains of injury shall receive medical treatment in accordance with established procedures.

Points to Remember

- First Amendment Rights vs. Unlawful behavior
- Keep the peace
- Protect property and vital facilities
- Maintain situational awareness
- Stop unlawful behavior
- Obtain voluntary compliance
- Remain flexible

CONCLUSION

The police response to each assembly or protest is different and will require flexibility, creativity, discipline, and patience. A non-violent “sit-down” demonstration requires a much different police response than a violent group who has become destructive. The tactics used to manage or control a crowd should make every attempt to facilitate and protect First Amendment activity while isolating and arresting those engaged in unlawful behavior.

This Training Bulletin cancels and supersedes Use of Force – Tactics Directive No. 11.2, Crowd Management, Intervention, and Control, April 2021.

Field Training Services Unit
Police Training and Education

DISTRIBUTION “A”