



TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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FIREARM SELECTION

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to provide personnel with a conceptual framework for selecting a firearm or firearms to deploy during incidents where deadly force may be necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury. Firearms are deadly weapons that present a serious threat of death or serious bodily injury to officers and citizens alike. As such, the careful consideration and appropriate deployment of a firearm is paramount in safeguarding all lives.

Each situation involving the deployment of a firearm is unique and has the potential to be infinitely complex. As such, attempting to designate which firearm would be best in each possible situation cannot be delineated via a simple, prescribed policy. When determining the best firearm option to deploy, officers should consider the capabilities and limitations of the firearm and whether it is appropriate for their specific role within the tactical incident.

DRAWING OR EXHIBITING FIREARMS

Personnel are reminded that the justification for the exhibition of a firearm is the responsibility of the individual who decides to exhibit any firearm. All personnel must continually evaluate the appropriateness and need for firearm deployment both in the type and quantity of weapons deployed at an incident. With every firearm deployment comes the expectation that the involved officer will be called upon to explain his or her rationale for the firearm selected.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Command and control must be established as quickly as possible to contain, de-escalate, and minimize the negative impact of an incident. The senior officer, or any officer on-scene who has gained sufficient situational awareness, shall establish command and control and begin the process to develop a plan of action.

FIREARM SELECTION

In the event of an officer-involved shooting, the reasonable management of firearm cover along with the appropriate firearm selection will help lessen both the number of officers who discharge their firearms and the number of rounds fired. While the decision to draw/exhibit and shoot a firearm is an individual one, officers must work as a team to develop the appropriate tactics to handle an incident. In developing the plan of action, there are a variety of roles to be filled at an incident. The differing roles may require the selection of differing firearms or may not require the deployment of a firearm at all.

Officers should utilize any time available to develop as thorough a tactical plan as possible. This is especially true for pre-planned operations (e.g. search warrant, parole compliance check, special events). Time and planning affords officers the ability to refine tactics, assess and mitigate potential risks, assign roles, and determine the appropriate firearm, less-lethal option (e.g. Taser, 40 MM, etc.), or other tool (e.g. breaching, fire extinguisher, etc.) that may be necessary for the situation. Officers must also, to the extent possible, anticipate contingencies and be prepared to adapt to unforeseen or changing circumstances.

Upon arrival at rapidly unfolding incidents, officers should attempt to assess what firearms are already deployed, what role is in the most critical need of being filled, and select the firearm most appropriate to fulfill that need. If there are sufficient firearms deployed, personnel should assume alternative roles: arrest team, less lethal force options, pedestrian and vehicle control, communication, crime scene management, etc. In addition, even after a firearm is initially deployed, nothing precludes an officer from returning a firearm to their vehicle or switching out a firearm for another, if time and resources allow for it.

FIREARM TYPES

Firearms are deadly weapons that are designed and engineered for different purposes. Understanding a firearm's capabilities and limitations is critically important in deciding which firearm is suitable for an incident. Firearms covered in this Bulletin include Department-authorized handguns, shotguns (with either buck shot or slug ammunition), and rifles.

Handgun

Advantages

A handgun is characterized by being familiar, readily available, small, and versatile. All officers are equipped with a handgun and are required to meet qualification standards. As such, officers may be most familiar and comfortable with the handgun. Due to its smaller size, it is readily available to draw from the holster and conversely, when it is no

longer needed, it can easily be re-holstered. This allows officers with flexibility when the need arises to transition to less-lethal force options, non-lethal force options, or handcuffing.

Limitations

For standard qualification, officers typically qualify with a handgun at a maximum of 51 feet. While a handgun remains accurate beyond 51 feet, the anticipated standoff distance between the officer and the suspect should be considered when possible.

Bottom Line - The handgun is ideal for close, immediate, defensive actions as it fits most environments and is readily available.

Shotgun (Buckshot)

Advantages

The shotgun with buckshot ammunition offers increased incapacitation in close to medium range situations. The simultaneous firing of nine pellets provides a significant advantage in fire superiority and incapacitation over most other firearm options. The incremental spread of the pellets also increases the likelihood of striking the target. A shotgun with buckshot can prove beneficial for building searches where no innocent civilians are known to be inside and high-risk vehicle stops with clear backgrounds.

Limitations

Conversely, when a precision shot may be necessary due to a hostage situation or a crowded background, buckshot may not be the best option. Additionally, even with a sling, it can be difficult to transition from a shotgun to a non-lethal (hands on) force option or handcuffing technique if the incident calls for it. In low-light situations, a shotgun can be difficult to manipulate while utilizing a flashlight, if the shotgun is not equipped with a weapon mounted lighting system.

Bottom Line – In most situations, the shotgun with buckshot ammunition can provide a significant advantage with its increased incapacitation, but is less versatile than the handgun and less precise than the slug shotgun or rifle.

Shotgun (Slug)

Advantages

A shotgun with slug ammunition offers enhanced range and precision over a shotgun with buckshot ammunition. A shotgun with slug ammunition has the greatest ballistic penetration and incapacitation of any firearm available to front-line personnel.

A shotgun with slug ammunition can be a good option when officers are confronted with ongoing aggressive deadly behavior such as a mass casualty attack or active shooter. Additionally, a shotgun with slug ammunition can be a good option in situations where officers are confronting suspects who are using superior weapon systems, wearing body armor, or in a fortified or tactically superior position.

Limitations

Like a shotgun with buckshot ammunition, a shotgun with slug ammunition is not as versatile as the handgun and can be difficult to manipulate in low-light circumstances without a weapon mounted lighting system. Additionally, a slug round from a shotgun can over-penetrate objects such as walls and therefore present an increased risk of harm to persons other than the intended target in certain situations.

Bottom Line – The shotgun with slug ammunition provides incapacitation in conjunction with precision from longer distances. However, like the shotgun with buckshot ammunition, it is less versatile than the handgun.

Rifle

Advantages

A rifle is a precision weapon system that provides accuracy at greater distances. This can allow for increased standoff distances from threats without loss of lethal cover. Additional enhancements for rifles such as scopes, collapsible stocks, tripods, and lighting systems can also enhance the precision, versatility, and manipulation of the rifle. A rifle is the only firearm that can penetrate soft body armor.

A rifle can be a good option when officers are confronted with ongoing aggressive deadly behavior such as a mass casualty attack or active shooter. Additionally, a rifle can be a good option in situations where officers are confronting suspects with superior weapon systems, who are wearing body armor, or are in a fortified or tactically superior position.

Limitations

Similar to a shotgun, a rifle with a sling can be difficult to transition to a non-lethal (hands on) force option or handcuffing technique. In low-light situations, a rifle can be difficult to manipulate while utilizing a flashlight, if the rifle is not equipped with a weapon mounted lighting system. A rifle round from a patrol rifle may lack the ability to penetrate objects such as walls and glass. All rounds can pose a threat to unintended persons if accuracy is compromised, but the rifle can pose a threat at a much greater distance than other rounds if accuracy is compromised.

Bottom Line – The patrol rifle offers precision from longer distances and is the only firearm that can penetrate soft body armor. However, like a shotgun, it is less versatile than the handgun.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FIREARM SELECTION

In addition to the specific strengths and limitations of each weapon system, there are general factors that officers should consider when selecting a firearm. These factors include:

- Physical Environment
 - Indoor or outdoor setting;
 - Physical space (open areas vs. tight spaces);
 - Lighting conditions;
 - Physical barriers
- Anticipated distance of the suspect
- Presence of potential hostages
- Potential background considerations
 - If accuracy is compromised, all rounds can pose a threat to unintended persons, but the rifle round can pose a threat at a further distance than other rounds.
- Individual familiarity, confidence, and proficiency with each weapon system
- Optional accessories on each available firearm and their impact
 - Sling (e.g. ability to transition to less-lethal or non-lethal options);
 - Tactical Lighting System (better weapon manipulation in low-light settings);
 - Optical Sighting Systems (better precision at greater distances);
 - Bipod (better stability and precision, prevents fatigue during lengthy deployments);
 - Collapsible Stock/Shorter barrel length (better manipulation in cramped quarters);
 - Foregrips

It is impossible to anticipate every contingency since some or all of these potential factors could change at any point during an incident. However, awareness of the environmental factors and each weapon's capabilities, along with the anticipation of the potential for sudden change, will greatly aid in firearm selection.

CONCLUSION

With every firearm deployment comes the expectation that the involved officer will be called upon to explain his or her rationale for the firearm selected. Unnecessarily or prematurely drawing or exhibiting a firearm limits an officer's alternatives in controlling a situation, creates unnecessary anxiety on the part of citizens, and may result in an unwarranted or accidental discharge of the firearm.

When involved, approaching, or planning for an incident, and the deployment of a firearm is appropriate, personnel should select, designate, or assign the firearm(s) that best addresses the situation. In addition, personnel at scene should continue to assess the incident and consider time and resources available as well as changes to the tactical situation that may require the reassessment of the most appropriate tools to safely handle the incident. In doing so, personnel will minimize the potential for injury to uninvolved persons and better ensure the safety of fellow personnel at scene.

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