



TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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WEAPONS OTHER THAN FIREARMS

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to provide officers with options to deal with a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm.

The Los Angeles Police Department is guided by the principle of Reverence for Human Life in all investigative, enforcement, and other contacts between officers and members of the public. Unfortunately, dangerous confrontations between suspects armed with weapons other than firearms can sometimes result in serious bodily injury or death. Weapons other than firearms pose a threat to the public and officers and generally fall into two categories: edged weapons and blunt weapons. Edged weapons include any object capable of cutting, slashing, or stabbing. A blunt weapon is any object that can be used to strike a person and inflict serious bodily injury or death.

When dealing with suspects armed with edged weapons, distance **is not** the only factor that must be considered. When confronting a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm, officers must determine the type of weapon and assess the suspect's ability to inflict serious bodily injury or death with that weapon. Resolving the situation safely using de-escalation techniques and proper planning should be primary objectives for officers dealing with suspects armed with weapons other than firearms. Officers should always attempt to resolve the situation with the least force possible; just because lethal force **may** be authorized, it does not have to be used if the situation can be resolved safely with other force options. The guiding principle is preservation and reverence for human life.

PROCEDURES

Communications Division personnel will proactively dispatch a field unit with a Beanbag Shotgun or other available less-lethal munitions and a supervisor to all calls involving any edged weapons. The goal is to pre-position resources so officers have a wide tactical choice of less lethal options when arriving on scene.

Planning

Officers should attempt to arrive at scene with a coordinated approach based upon initial information and any pre-existing knowledge of the suspect(s) or the involved parties. The dynamic nature of most incidents will require tactical plans to be flexible, and officers need to adapt their plan(s) as additional information or factors become known.

Assessment

INITIAL: There is no single solution and every situation will be handled differently based upon the totality of the circumstances. When feasible, officers should consider available options and discuss tactics prior to an encounter with a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm.

Some factors to consider:

- The type of radio call or activity that brings the officers into the situation (e.g., emotionally charged incidents such as domestic violence, a person showing signs of impaired judgment, or a crime in progress)
- Suspect's size, age, and physical condition
- Danger signs (e.g., persons talking to themselves or unprovoked agitation)
- The individual's state of mind (e.g., angry, confused, evasive, threatening)
- The availability of cover and concealment or barriers
- The need to increase the distance from an individual with a weapon
- Access to places where dangerous objects could be concealed such as bags, pockets or bulky clothing
- Remember to always observe the individual's hands

CONTINUOUS: Officers should continually assess the situation as circumstances change and new information is received. If a suspect is failing to comply with orders, officers should attempt to determine whether a suspect's lack of compliance is a deliberate attempt to resist or escape, or an inability to comprehend the situation due to environmental, physical, cognitive, or other conditions. If the suspect is unable to comprehend the situation, other tactical options may be more effective in resolving the situation safely.

Distance + Cover = Time

There is an equation that saves lives: Distance + Cover = Time. Time gives officers options. Time is an essential element of de-escalation as it allows officer the opportunity to communicate with the suspect, refine tactical plans, and, if necessary, call for additional resources.

Entering the suspect's space prematurely may force the suspect to take action, ultimately escalating the situation. Whenever possible, officers should place an object between themselves and the suspect as cover or a barrier. A barrier could be a chain link fence, wrought iron gate, or any similar object that prevents the assailant from reaching the officer.

Due to "lag time, the urgency for officers to create distance between themselves and a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm cannot be overstated. Lag time is the time it takes a person to react to an action. If officers close the distance too quickly before assessing the situation, lag time could put them in danger.

If the suspect is contained and does not pose an immediate threat to officers, the public, or himself/herself, time is our best tool. Time allows more opportunity to communicate with the suspect and calm the situation. A Systemwide Mental Evaluation Assessment Response Team (SMART) can be requested through the Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU) if officers' assessment indicates an individual is suspected of suffering from a mental illness or developmental disability. If the suspect is barricaded or suicidal, the Crisis Negotiation Team can be requested through Metropolitan Division.

Establishing Control

A situation is more likely to have a positive outcome if officers are able to establish control of the situation. The first concern is the safety of the public, which must be balanced with officer safety. Officers should obtain information about the suspect, including the type of weapon involved and anything that could help establish rapport, from family members, witnesses, or bystanders. These measures are crucial to ensure the safety of everyone at the scene.

Officers have several use of force options available if the suspect poses a direct threat to the public or officers. The force used must be appropriate for the actions displayed by the suspect. If a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm is contained and poses no immediate threat to himself/herself, the public, or police officers, officers should attempt to resolve the situation using tactical **de-escalation** techniques to gain voluntary compliance or mitigate the need to use a higher level of force while maintaining control of the situation.

Tactical De-Escalation Techniques

- Planning
- Assessment
- Time
- Redeployment and/or Containment
- Other Resources
- Lines of Communication

Note: Tactical **de-escalation** does not require that an officer compromise his or her safety or increase the risk of physical harm to the public. **De-escalation** techniques should only be used when it is safe and prudent to do so.

Redeployment and/or Containment

Redeployment and/or containment can afford officers the added benefit of time and distance while continuing to maintain control of the situation. The addition of time and distance may give officer an opportunity to re-assess, communicate, request additional resources, or deploy other tactics to reduce the likelihood of injury to both the public and officers while also mitigating any potential ongoing threats. Redeployment, however, should not enable a subject to gain a tactical advantage, arm himself/herself, or flee and pose a greater danger to the public or officers.

Other Resources

Less-Lethal Options: In concert with the Department's value and reverence for human life, officers and incident commanders shall consider the use of less-lethal force options whenever practical. Less-lethal options often offer the most reasonable force option to safely resolve the situation. Some less-lethal options include but are not limited to:

- 40mm Less-Lethal Launcher
- Beanbag Shotgun
- TASER
- OC Spray

In the case of a tense or potentially dangerous encounter, requesting additional resources can provide officers with specialized expertise, personnel and tools to help control and contain an incident.

Communications

Effective communication throughout the incident is vital when dealing with a suspect armed with a weapon other than a firearm. Officers must be flexible in their communication, using the suspect's reactions to determine if the particular line of communication is working. Officers may have to give clear direct orders using command presence, then switch to being a crisis negotiator, and then back to using command presence as the situation evolves. Officers should establish a rapport by treating the individual with respect and using a low, soothing tone of voice. The contact officer should introduce himself/herself by name and ask what is troubling the person. Open-ended questions should be used to get the person talking, such as "what happened today" or "why are you troubled" and "how can I help you?" Talking with a person may defuse the crisis or buy time, thus enabling a peaceful resolution.

Listening skills are essential to identify the individual's problem and provide a possible solution. Repeat the individual's problem back to them and attempt to solve the problem by discussing solutions. Give the person hope that the problem can be solved. Often using active listening skills, paraphrasing, and allowing the suspect to vent frustrations can have a positive impact on the situation.

When dealing with a person who is suspected of suffering from a mental illness and armed with a weapon other than a firearm, communication can be an officer's best tool in resolving the situation. Although communication efforts may seem to be slow and tedious, they frequently result in the de-escalation of the situation. Remember, when an armed individual is also a person with a mental illness, it is important to try to speak in a calm, firm voice. If possible, create a tranquil environment during the contact, speaking slowly can often help improve communications. Individuals who are suspected of suffering from a mental illness may be easily overwhelmed or distressed by too many demands. When communicating, use short sentences and give one order at a time. Officers may have to repeat orders numerous times before the person will

respond. If tactics permit, give more than one option, instead of an ultimatum. It is important not to join in with the person's hallucinations. Effective communication with the suspect can prevent the incident from escalating to a use of force, thus reducing the threat of injury to the officers and the suspect. Communicating with a suspect may slow down the incident, creating time to plan.

All or some of the following tactics may be used in the same incident as time or circumstances allow:

- Verbal warnings
- Persuasion
- Defusing
- Empathy
- Redirecting
- Advisements
- Building rapport
- Asking open ended questions
- Giving clear and direct orders

Note: Officers shall not use deadly force to attempt to disable a suicidal individual who lacks the present ability to cause serious injury or death to anyone other than himself/herself. The use of firearms to attempt to disable a suicidal suspect are generally ineffective and are likely to increase the risk of serious bodily injury or death to the suspect.

CONCLUSION

Officers often come into contact with emotionally charged suspects in situations such as domestic violence, crimes in progress, and people in crisis. With the rise of incidents involving weapons other than firearms, the equation that is most likely to produce a positive outcome is **Distance + Cover = Time** and **Time = Options**. A barrier between officers and the suspect may give them additional time to handle the incident safely. If the suspect is contained and poses no immediate threat to the officers, the public, or himself/herself, officers can use techniques to reduce the intensity of an encounter with a suspect and enable them to have additional options to gain voluntary compliance or mitigate the need to use a higher level of force while maintaining control of the situation.

This Training Bulletin cancels Volume XXXV, Issue 9, Weapons Other Than Firearms, dated May 2003.

Field Training Services Unit
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