



TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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BACKGROUND AWARENESS

Policing in a modern urban environment means, amongst other things, that there are often uninvolved persons in an area where police activity takes place. This means that uninvolved persons may be in the background of police activity at any moment. The ability for an officer to safely and effectively conduct police activity involves many factors ranging from professional appearance, knowledge, empathy and effective communication, to the more dynamic aspects such as tactical movements, environmental factors and the actions of involved and uninvolved persons.

This training bulletin is intended to assist officers by providing potential background considerations so that when a moment arises where action is critical and there is little time for contemplation, an officer is as prepared as possible. Nothing in this training bulletin requires officers to jeopardize their safety or the safety of other persons but active awareness of background as part of an incident can greatly contribute to officer safety and the safety of our community.

DEFINITIONS

Background: Any physical structure, living thing, or terrain feature that lies beyond an officer's intended target. Background can include persons, buildings, objects, or animals.

Foreground: Any physical structure, living thing, or terrain feature that lies between an officer and the officer's intended target.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Background considerations begin with awareness of the environment in which police activity occurs. The environments in which police activity occur can vary dramatically and officers should strive to be aware of their environment at all times. Ideally, this awareness should include who is in the area, how many people are in the area, where involved and uninvolved parties are, and the size and configuration of the environment. An officer should, when feasible, evaluate their environment for what benefits a location

offers or what liabilities it brings to the situation to include cover and/or concealment and elevation.

With environmental awareness in mind and time permitting, where an officer decides to initiate police activity is crucially important and may assist in a safe resolution of the police activity.

Note: Not every situation will allow for an officer to decide the location of the police activity. In such situations, the officer should prioritize the need to act with as much background consideration as possible.

Considerations while conducting investigations:

- The subject may escape
- Community members in the area may become involved or interfere with the investigation
- Uninvolved members of the community may be at-risk

FIREARMS

Firearms are deadly weapons that present a threat of serious bodily injury or death to officers and citizens alike. The Department's guiding principle when using force shall be reverence for human life, including the lives of officers. It is with this principle in mind that officers shall attempt to control an incident by using time, distance, communication, and available resources in an effort to de-escalate the situation, whenever it is safe, feasible and reasonable to do so.

It is the policy of this Department that officers may use deadly force upon another person only when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of circumstances, that such force is necessary for either of the following reasons:

- To defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person; or
- To apprehend a fleeing person for any felony that threatened or resulted in death or serious bodily injury, if the officer reasonably believes that the person will cause death or serious bodily injury to another unless immediately apprehended.

Before discharging a firearm, officers shall, when feasible, consider their surroundings, background, and potential risk to bystanders to the extent reasonable under the circumstances.

Department firearms and ammunition have different ballistic capabilities and it is incumbent upon each officer, through training and education, to understand the limits of their own ability and the limitations and capabilities of their firearms. In situations where

officers have the time and resources to choose among various weapon systems and ammunition, officers should consider potential overpenetration issues and ricochet hazards posed by pistol and rifle bullets, shotgun slugs and shotgun buckshot ammunition.

Officers need to be aware that all rounds can pose a threat to unintended persons and property if accuracy is compromised as rounds can travel far past their intended target. Even if rounds strike the intended target, rounds can exit the target and continue onward until kinetic energy is expended. The trajectory of rounds can be also altered by intermediate barriers such as foliage and glass resulting in terminal impacts different than the intended target. None of these considerations, however, deprive officers of the right to defend their lives or the lives of others.

Firearms Safety Rule Four is “Be Sure of Your Target” and by extension “what is beyond.” Continuous target assessment and discernment is of paramount importance.

Not every situation will present officers with a complete awareness of background. In these situations, officers shall not fire under conditions that would subject bystanders or hostages to death or possible injury, except when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of circumstances, that such force is necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person.

CONCLUSION

Awareness of the environment and anticipation of the potential for change in the environment will aid greatly in background awareness. When time and circumstances permit, background awareness and control can maximize the safety of officers and citizens alike. Force unintentionally applied to an unintended person can degrade the confidence in law enforcement and negatively impact an officer's wellbeing. As police officers, we should always strive to keep our ourselves and our communities safe in all that we do.

Background considerations:

- Location of involved and uninvolved parties
- What is behind the suspect/subject
- Ballistic capabilities of the firearm system selected

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