



# TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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## DESIGNATED COVER OFFICER

When facing a potentially deadly threat, it is necessary to provide force protection options up to and including deadly force. To fulfill the role of force protection and balance safety concerns, it is necessary to select, assign, or become a Designated Cover Officer. The Designated Cover Officer role is important to maintain safety in a situation where there is a potential or known deadly threat.

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to establish a framework for understanding the duties of a Designated Cover Officer and the expectation that officers should engage in thoughtful decision-making when determining whether to draw and exhibit their firearm. The responsibility of the Designated Cover Officer is to provide protection for all persons and to be prepared to immediately respond to a deadly threat if it reasonably appears necessary to do so. Judiciously managing the number of Designated Cover Officers will help lessen both the number of officers who discharge their firearms and the number of rounds fired while still maintaining sufficient deadly force protection.

**Note:** It is not the intention of this Training Bulletin to limit or inhibit an officer's ability to protect themselves or others from a potential deadly threat. Each officer is responsible for their own contribution toward the de-escalation and the peaceful resolution of any given tactical incident – in keeping with the Department's guiding principle of reverence for human life.

## DEFINITION

**Designated Cover Officer:** The officer with the primary responsibility of deadly force protection for themselves and any other person involved in a situation where there is a potential deadly threat posed by a suspect or any other individual.

## TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Designated Cover Officer gives other officers the ability to perform other roles, functions, and tasks with the benefit of protection against a potential deadly threat.

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These include: searching areas/locations, maintaining lines of communication with the suspect/subject, providing less-lethal force protection, controlling vehicle/pedestrian traffic, maintaining a perimeter and completing evacuations.

The Designated Cover Officer should seek to limit distractions and focus on providing force protection while also ensuring the safe handling of their firearm. The Designated Cover Officer should avoid engaging in lengthy communication with other officers, striving to limit their verbalization to short, tactically significant messages. The Designated Cover Officer should generally not be the person communicating with a suspect or subject.

### **Selection**

In any tactical scenario, when time allows, the senior officer, or any officer on scene who has gained sufficient situational awareness, may establish Command and Control and begin the process of developing a plan of action. A key element of this plan of action is the selection of the Designated Cover Officer(s). The senior officer on scene, or the Incident Commander, should take the following into consideration in determining a reasonable number of Designated Cover Officers during an incident:

- How many suspects/subjects are believed to be involved?
- What type(s) of weapon(s) are known or believed to be involved?
- Is the suspect(s) barricaded inside of a building or structure with multiple sides requiring coverage by multiple tactical teams?
- Is the suspect's location arranged in such a way as to require multiple angles of coverage from officers?
- If the suspect(s) are concealed, what is the nature of concealment? (i.e., a single vehicle with clear windows as compared to a cluttered warehouse.)
- Is the suspect(s) hiding in an open-air environment with multiple areas of concern?

**Note:** At the outset of some tactical incidents it may seem appropriate to an officer to have their firearm drawn. However, as a situation unfolds each officer should continually assess the ongoing need for their firearm to remain drawn. In some situations, officers may take advantage of the stabilization of the incident to holster their firearm once they determine that the role of Designated Cover Officer is appropriately filled and they no longer need to provide lethal cover against a potentially deadly threat.

The Incident Commander or senior officer is expected to designate roles to the officers on scene. By doing so, the Incident Commander or senior officer on scene can ensure that all situational needs are addressed. In addition, by controlling the number of assigned Designated Cover Officers, the Incident Commander or senior officer on

scene will effectively limit the number of officers who can or will fire their weapons should the situation escalate to the point where a deadly force response is necessary. This may require that an Incident Commander direct officers to holster their firearms or return their patrol rifles or shotguns to a secure location in their police vehicles. It is the Department's expectation that the Incident Commander ensure that the number of Designated Cover Officers in any tactical situation is reasonable given the nature of the incident.

### **Other Factors to Consider**

Communication between officers can improve decision-making under tense circumstances and increase the effectiveness of coordinated actions. If an officer intends to transition out of the role of Designated Cover Officer, (e.g., to assist in handcuffing) they should clearly communicate their intentions to their partner or other officers on scene, allowing their Designated Cover Officer role to be assumed by another officer. Typically, the Designated Cover Officer should remain in that role until the potential deadly threat has been adequately addressed and scene safety has been established.

Establishing Designated Cover Officer(s) during a tense and fluid tactical situation can aid in the use of Tactical De-Escalation techniques. This force protection supports command presence, allows officers to safely communicate with potentially armed suspects, and assists with the deployment of less-lethal officers and arrest teams. These roles are established to help reduce the intensity of the encounter, enabling officers 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.

### **CONCLUSION**

Tactical incidents are fluid and can change rapidly and in unexpected ways. It is important that all officers and supervisors on scene remain flexible and maintain constant communication. Taking steps to ensure that there is a reasonable number of Designated Cover Officers will reduce the risk of an undesirable outcome. Officers can provide support in roles that do not involve being the Designated Cover Officer. Coordination and cooperation between officers on scene and the proper and precise designation of roles will greatly contribute to the likelihood of the safest possible outcome for everyone involved.

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