



LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT
TACTICAL CONCEPTS
Tactics Training Overview

Tactical Concept No. 5.1

June 2025

UNDERCOVER AND SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Tactical Concepts – Tactics Training Overview is to provide operational planning guidelines when conducting undercover (UC) or surveillance operations and clearly define the roles of assigned officers. Department personnel assigned to these duties shall have met the Department’s training standards and conform to the safety equipment guidelines for their specific assignment, mission, or operation.

PROCEDURES

Undercover Operations

An undercover operation is an investigation that requires the use of UC operators to obtain evidence, gather intelligence, and establish relationships for the purpose of accomplishing their mission.

Supervisors shall be notified of, and oversee, all UC operations. When overseeing a UC operation, supervisors shall ensure a written operation plan has been developed and communicated to all participants and support personnel, including members of the uniformed arrest or chase team (when applicable).

Tactical Considerations

- Be aware of UC/surveillance roles and responsibilities
- Monitor tactical/base radio frequencies
- Wear body armor
- Carry required safety equipment
- Utilize uniformed arrest teams
- Consider the perceptions of responding personnel
- Don raid jacket or tactical vest for ID, when necessary

Notifications shall be made to the Los Angeles Clearing House (LA CLEAR) Unit officer-in-charge (OIC), Area watch commander (when applicable), watch commander of location of operation, Communications Division, and any involved outside agency.

Surveillance Operations

Surveillance is the sum of covert activities and operations employed to obtain intelligence, identify suspects, locate residences and places of employment, monitor criminal activity, identify co-conspirators and associates, corroborate informant information, identify assets, establish daily patterns, and build probable cause for an

arrest or search warrant.

Note: Surveillance operations may require the use of UC operators. Officers acting as UC operators should be identified in the operational plan.

There are two basic types of surveillance: mobile and static. The tactics and notifications may vary between the two. Supervisors shall be notified of, and oversee, all surveillance operations, both mobile and static.

Static vs. Mobile Surveillance

Static surveillance is when the incident and UC operation are stationary and being primarily observed from, or at, the same location (i.e., an observation post). Mobile surveillance is when the operation is generally moving with surveillance officers rotating duties depending on their position in the mobile surveillance. A mobile surveillance can become temporarily static for short or long periods of time if the suspect stops.

An **observation post** (OP) is a fixed-post position (e.g., car, building, etc.) intended to be stationary for a period of time, wherein the officers gather intelligence or observe a suspect's actions and coordinate law enforcement actions.

Notifications shall be made to LA CLEAR regarding information known at the start of the operation (e.g., suspect, location, vehicle). If the operation is **static**, notification shall also be made to the Area watch commander (when applicable), watch commander of location of operation, Communications Division, and any involved outside agency. When receiving notification of an operation, a watch commander shall document the notification in the Watch Commander's Log. The supervisor in charge of the operation shall determine when a mobile surveillance has become static and initiate the appropriate notifications.

Notifications for both UC and surveillance operations shall specify who is conducting the operation, the nature of the operation's mission, length of the operation, resources (e.g., plain clothes with uniformed chase) and how to contact the officer in charge of the operation. The name and serial number of the person notified shall be documented on the written operation plan.

Note: On a case-by-case basis, the supervisor in charge may deviate from the notifications only when such notifications could compromise a confidential investigation. Commanding Officer (C/O) approval is required and the approval shall be documented on the written operation plan.

The supervisor and officers should be trained and familiar with all the roles in an undercover or surveillance operation, as these operations are dynamic and need to be flexible. Although an officer may initially be assigned to a specific role in the operation plan, the officer may be called upon to change roles during the operation to ensure officer

safety or maintain the integrity of the investigation. While supervisors often delegate tasks or responsibilities, they are ultimately responsible for command and control of the operation regardless of roles.

Written Operation Plans

An operation plan is a written or unwritten plan developed for a limited operational period for the execution of a specific tactical operation. Written operation plans shall incorporate the current Department forms. Any additional written operation plans, and surveillance forms shall be consistent with the requirements of the current Department forms.

All UC and surveillance operations shall be documented on a written operation plan. The written operation plan must be approved by the C/O of the responsible Area/Division or their designee (a telephonic briefing and approval is acceptable when a physical review is not feasible), and such approval **shall** be documented in the plan.

Exception: In the case of critical, time-sensitive incidents or any crime needing immediate attention, a verbal operation plan may be communicated to all involved assets to expedite their response. **However, a written operation plan shall be completed as soon as feasible after the scene is safe and after the conclusion of the incident.**

Written operation plans **shall** include at minimum:

- Location of activity and type of crime;
- Radio frequency;
- Location information (security bars, dogs, children, or other officer safety issues);
- Suspect(s) information (e.g., criminal history, prior violent behavior, access to weapons, drug use, and picture if available);
- Personnel assigned to the operation (include their roles and duties - communications, less lethal, arrest team, etc.). In a mobile surveillance, it is understood that duties may rotate due to their position at the time;
- Required/exempted equipment for operation. If an exemption is granted for required equipment, the C/O or acting C/O who grants the exemption **shall** be documented in the written plan or, if the plan is verbal, noted on the supervisor's log;
- Brief summary, including a description of what information led to the operation; and,
- Any information gained from **scouting**.

The goal of **scouting** is to conduct an initial assessment of a location to determine if a surveillance operation is warranted. Scouting can also be utilized to assess a location for the service of a search or arrest warrant. If the objectives of scouting can not be met in a limited time frame, a surveillance operation would be required. A Department supervisor should make the determination if scouting is appropriate.

Note: If an officer did not attend the briefing (e.g., was in court) and later joins the UC operation, the UC supervisor shall ensure that the officer is briefed on the plan and their assigned role prior to joining the operation.

Radio Communications

Radio communications are a critical part of officer safety and mission execution. Supervisors should ensure that one radio is kept on base frequency and one radio is on the designated tactical frequency for the operation.

Although UC operators are exempt from carrying a standard Department radio, close cover officers, operation support officers, and surveillance officers **should** carry a Department radio or have one immediately available to them in the field when feasible to do so.

During operations where UC operators, close cover officers, operation support officers, and surveillance officers have no access to radio communications, assigned supervisors **shall** account for the safety of their personnel and ensure that support and assistance are available and requested when necessary.

Plainclothes, Undercover Operations, and Surveillance Operations — Defined

Department personnel are assigned to a wide variety of plainclothes assignments ranging from specialized detectives to community engagement. The personnel assigned to these duties shall be aware of and conform to the Department's equipment requirements specific to their assignment.

Plainclothes Assignment: A plainclothes assignment is a non-uniformed assignment where the officer's role and identity as a sworn officer is not intended to be confidential or clandestine. These assignments include geographic or specialized detectives, personnel assigned to training, recruitment, community relations, or other permanent or temporary assignments where a uniform is not required.

Note: Plainclothes personnel **shall** wear body armor or a tactical vest with ballistic protection when they are involved in a tactical operation involving one or more suspects or when they are deployed in the field and subject to responding to radio calls, requests for assistance, or to effect arrests.

Undercover Operator: An undercover operator, is an officer assigned to either an undercover or surveillance operation to obtain evidence, gather intelligence, and establish relationships that requires concealing the operator's identity as a police officer to accomplish the mission.

Undercover Supervisor: A supervisor or officer in the field who is assigned to oversee the undercover operation with responsibility for safety and operational management of the incident. Unless exigent circumstances require an immediate response, the UC supervisor should not have any other role other than supervisory.

Close Cover Officer: Officers or supervisors whose primary purpose is the personal protection and safety of the UC operator. A close cover officer attempts to stay in close proximity to the UC operator to render immediate aid.

Operation Support Officer: Officers or supervisors assigned to support the UC operators. These officers may participate in an arrest team, during which time their proper and immediate identification (raid jacket or tactical vest) as a police officer would be critical to officer safety.

Surveillance Officer: Officers or supervisors assigned to covertly monitor a suspect or a location to obtain intelligence or evidence of criminal activity.

Shadow Team Operator: An officer assigned to a non-uniformed operation who proactively seeks to establish a relationship or to make contact with a subject or group to gather evidence or intelligence while concealing their identity as a police officer.

Required Equipment

UC, Surveillance, Shadow Team Operation Required Equipment				
Assignment	Body Armor	Raid Jacket/ Tac Vest	Radio	Minimum Equipment
UC Operator	Not required	Not required	Not required	Not required
Close Cover	Required unless specifically exempt	Have available in the field	Should when feasible	Required unless specifically exempt
Operation Support	Required unless specifically exempt	Have available in the field	Should when feasible	Required
Surveillance Personnel	Immediately accessible	Have available in the field	Should when feasible	Required
Shadow Team Operator	Not required	Not required	Minimum one per squad	Individual: Dept. approved firearm, badge and ID, cellular phone Per Squad: handcuff with key, radio

It is understood that there may be crossover from one role to another during an operation. When an officer's role changes during an operation the required equipment may also change. Undercover operators are exempt from carrying police safety equipment during undercover operations. It is otherwise expected that safety equipment and minimum equipment requirements be met.

Note: Minimum equipment consists of one fully loaded magazine; Department badge; Department identification card; handcuffs and key; pen or pencil; and Department-approved firearm.

Body Armor

Personnel assigned to undercover operations (with the exception of officers assigned as UC operators, Shadow Team Operators, and surveillance personnel) are required to wear Department-approved body armor unless wearing the body armor would directly compromise the covert nature of the operation. The written operation plan must set forth why wearing body armor would compromise the operation.

Reminder

Personnel that are assigned to a plainclothes detail (e.g., Narcotics Enforcement Detail, Area detectives) who are conducting field enforcement or activity where they are likely to have contact with one or more suspects **shall** wear body armor or tactical vest with ballistic protection.

Note: Any exemption to the wearing of body armor shall be approved by a C/O and only on a case-by-case basis. Prior to granting approval for the exemption, the C/O shall review the plan and carefully balance the officer safety risks involved. Critical to this review is ensuring that operation support personnel have the necessary safety equipment to fulfill their anticipated role in protecting the UC Operator during a deadly encounter.

Identifying Police Attire

A raid jacket or tactical vest with Department-required lettering and markings **shall** be donned when identification as a police officer is important to officer safety and when such use would not interfere with the effectiveness of the operation.

A **Tactical Vest** is a Department-approved ballistic vest for use during tactical operations that readily identifies the wearer as a police officer.

Although personnel assigned as UC operators are exempt from wearing and carrying Department-approved raid jackets or tactical vests while engaged in undercover operations, they **shall** have them available when feasible for post-operation tactical incidents, search warrants, etc. Unless specifically except, all personnel **not** designated as UC operators **shall** have a raid jacket or tactical vest available to them in the field during all tactical operations.

When officers are unable to don a Department raid jacket or tactical vest because of an exigent circumstance, they **shall** attempt to display a Department badge or identification card in an area that is clearly visible.

Use of Uniformed Arrest Teams

When involved in any tactical operation where an arrest or multiple arrests are anticipated or likely, personnel assigned as UC operators, UC support and surveillance should avoid suspect contact and allow a uniformed arrest or chase team to pursue, contain, detain, and/or arrest the suspect when possible. In circumstances when a uniformed arrest or chase team is not available or practical, UC support or surveillance personnel may be used with the approval of the supervisor in charge of the operation. If officers attempt to take a suspect into custody, absent exigent circumstances (immediate and life-threatening), they **shall** be:

- Identifiable as police officers; and,
- Wearing body armor.

Interactions between Uniformed and Non-Uniformed Officers

Personnel assigned to undercover and surveillance operations should consider and anticipate the perceptions of uniform and non-uniform personnel who may respond to the area when an incident occurs. The display of a Department badge or identification card may not provide sufficient identifiers to responding units; therefore, personnel assigned to undercover and surveillance operations should never assume that they will be recognized by law enforcement personnel responding to the scene.

If detained, personnel assigned to UC or surveillance operations should immediately identify themselves and cooperate with any direction given by the uniformed officers and calmly explain the situation to the officers while continuing to **follow instructions and commands**. Most importantly, personnel assigned to UC or surveillance operations should avoid making any sudden movements, which includes reaching for police identification. Such movements could easily be mistaken for a threatening gesture. In the interest of safety, personnel assigned to UC or surveillance operations should make an effort to remain calm and cooperative in order to de-escalate a potentially volatile confrontation.

EXEMPTIONS

The Chief of Police may designate certain Department entities or personnel that may operate under guidelines that deviate from this Tactical Concept. The designation by the Chief of Police **shall** be documented in the plan or UC supervisor's daily log. The guidelines for Department entities so designated by the Chief of Police **shall** be maintained on file with Critical Incident Review Division.

Important Reminder

Deviations from these basic concepts sometimes occur due to the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of law enforcement encounters and the environment in which they occur. Deviations may range from minor, typically procedural or technical, to those which substantially deviate from Department tactical training. Any deviations are to be explained by the involved officer(s), and the justification for substantial deviations from Department tactical training shall be articulated.

**This Tactical Concepts – Tactics Training Overview cancels and supersedes
Tactical Concepts – Tactics Training Overview No. 5, Undercover and
Surveillance Operations, April 2023**

Field Training Services Unit
Police Training and Education

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