

Introduction to Patrol Procedures – Officer Safety Concepts

Session Materials

I. ANGLES OF EXPOSURE

A. *Contact/Cover Principle – Area of Responsibility*

- The Contact Officer is responsible for the primary aspects of dealing with the subject(s), or suspect(s), on a particular call. The Contact Officer assesses threats, directs making the scene safe, conducts pat-downs, detains/arrests subjects, and either communicates or directs communication with dispatch. The Contact Officer should ‘handle’ their suspect(s), and request assistance from his/her Cover Officer if and when necessary.
- The Cover Officer is responsible for identifying, prioritizing, and addressing all other potential threats, as well as being aware of the Contact Officer’s assessments and actions. The Cover Officer’s general areas of responsibility are: (1) environment, (2) contact officer safety, and (3) suspect(s). The Cover Officer should assist the Contact Officer in detaining/arresting subject(s) when requested to do so or directed to do so by the Contact Officer.
- Take care of your area of responsibility, but be ready and able to change or adapt your areas of responsibility as the situation dictates or the Contact Officer requests.

According to the originator of the Contact & Cover Principle, Sgt. Steve Albrecht of the San Diego Police Department:

- The Cover Officer is there to protect the Contact Officer.
- The Cover Officer also discourages escape attempts and prevents the destruction of evidence by assuming the best tactical position.
- The officers can reverse roles any time for reasons of expertise or to reinforce the safety of the contact.
- The Contact and Cover officers should use hand signals or radio code language to communicate in ways not understood by the suspect.

“These are not hard and fast rules, however. **One of the advantages of the Contact & Cover principle is its flexibility.** In certain situations, a pair of officers may decide to switch roles during the contact.”

“Just remember as a cover officer, you’ll want to be in the best position possible to protect yourself and the contact officer from any possible assault, or to prevent the destruction of evidence or escape by the suspect.” (*Streetwork: The Way to Police Officer Safety & Survival*, Steve Albrecht, Colorado, Paladin Enterprise Inc., 1992)



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B. Threat Assessment: Identify, Prioritize, and Respond

- You must build a **habit** of identifying immediate and potential threats. On every contact, call, or stop, you should try to identify all potential threats and prioritize those threats in the order they will need to be addressed. **Address immediate threats first, and always reassess the situation, because priorities can change in an instant.**
- Legally, you are not obliged to wait for the suspect's actual attack or resistance. This would create too great of a tactical disadvantage and danger to the officers. Likewise, you are not legally obliged to wait to see and identify the weapon. By the time you see the weapon and identify it, it will be too late to counter its use against you. "Officers do not have to wait for the glint of steel" (People v Benjamin, 22 NY2d 723). We respond to threats.
- The legal and tactical standard is to respond to 'reasonably perceived threats' (Haugen v. Brosseau, U.S. Supreme Court, 2004). Proper threat assessment is based on the following indicators and cues:
 - Types of Movement
 - Contextual
 - Behavioral
 - Spoken
 - Tactile

*Tactically speaking, "A threat is a **capability** to do harm joined by **hostile intent**. Both elements must be present for an individual to present a threat. Threat factors can be categorized as an indicator of either capability or intent. Intent of a subject is the more critical consideration, but recognizing and articulating the intent of someone, particularly prior to an actual assault, often is very difficult. Examples of indicators of intent include aggressive verbal and nonverbal communications, coupled with noncompliance with clear verbal commands of an officer. Capability indicators are easier to recognize because they are more tangible. For example, a possession of, or access to, a weapon (including an officer's weapon), a demonstrated combat ability or skill, size or fitness, or multiple subjects clearly indicate a threat." (Use of force Policy and Training: A reasoned approach, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin - Nov 2002, Thomas D. Petrowski)*

- The law allows for errors in judgment on the part of officers as long as they can be shown to be based on a reasonable belief or perception at the time of the incident (Saucier v. Katz, US Supreme Court, 2001)

C. Maximize Your Angle / Minimize their Angle on You

- One part of threat assessment is to recognize potential threat angles in every situation, no matter who or what you are approaching. Officers should maximize their advantage by controlling or dominating those angles of potential exposure. In close quarters, this means to control the suspect's centerline (line which vertically divides the body in half). In tactical movement, this can mean avoiding angles within the suspect's "inside line", instead utilizing the angles to the outside of their centerline or their rear.



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D. Avoid Crossfire / Know Your Backdrop

- Avoid positioning yourself in your partner's line of sight and be cognizant of your partner's position in relation to you. Remember the Universal Firearms Safety Rules, namely, do not point your weapon at anything you are not willing to shoot and be sure of your target and what is beyond your target.
- The Cover Officer generally should not address the threat until the Contact Officer is clear of the suspect. Officers have been shot and killed by their own cover officers.

E. Use of Available Cover or Concealment

- Cover: Barriers that can stop a bullet.
- Concealment: Barriers that can conceal your body, but are not likely to stop a bullet.

F. 360° Awareness

- Avoid turning your back on threats, especially suspects. Learn to rely on your peripheral vision. Peripheral vision constitutes approximately 95% of your vision and is designed to keep you alive by perceiving movement. Peripheral vision allows for much faster perception and reaction to threats.

II. SUSPECTS

A. Control

- Control should be established from the time you arrive on the scene.
- You must establish control of the subject(s) at ALL times and during the entire contact, whether that be during an interview, frisk, arrest, search, or transport of a suspect(s). Control can be accomplished by various means including command presence, hands-on control techniques, and tools or weapons.



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B. Officer Advantage / Suspect Disadvantage

- **Officer at greatest advantage**

You must give yourself time to observe a threat, orient yourself to the threat, decide how to eliminate that threat, and then eliminate the threat.

Therefore, you must find ways to *habitually* give yourself the mental, physical, and tactical position of advantage. A habit is something you do so regularly that it becomes subconscious. However, establishing this habit takes deliberate and conscious effort. You can maximize your advantage through position, weapons, maintaining constant watch over the suspect's hands, or even taking away the *capability* to launch an attack.

- **Suspect at greatest disadvantage**

You must make it much more difficult for the suspect to assault you. By doing this, you also can lower the suspect's desire or *intent* to assault you. If they think they don't have the *capability* to assault or kill you without getting themselves injured or killed in the process, they probably won't go for it.

- **Think worst-case scenario, but successful outcome: 'Winning Mindset', not 'Fatalistic Mindset'**

If you build the habit of thinking "What is the worst thing that can happen to me, and how can I prevent it or overcome it?" you will practice tactics that allow you to place yourself in a better position to deal with threats. Rehearsing worst case scenarios in your head not only mentally prepares you, but it also conditions your brain so that your mind has a *successful* strategy to refer to in situations of high stress. Every time you do something, that *successful* repetition is recorded in your subconscious.

- **Under stress, you will perform what you have successfully repeated (whether through training or everyday practice)**

You **MUST** set up officer safety habits of a high level on every call. Maintain consistency with your tactics and practice them on every call, even those that are lower risk so that the tactics become habit. Do not fall into the trap of complacency, because calls are repetitive or seem 'routine'. The word 'routine' implies low or no risk and predicts a predetermined end. They are too many examples of officers killed or injured in the line of duty during so-called 'routine' traffic stops.



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C. *OODA Loop*

- **OODA Loop (Developed by Colonel John Boyd, USAF)**
OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. This describes the four steps each human must take before they can start an action. Take advantage of the window of opportunity created when you interrupt the suspect's OODA Loop (thus getting inside of their OODA Loop).
- **Action vs. Reaction**
Action beats reaction every time. The Tempe Study stated that an officer will never outdraw a determined attacker. Therefore, you can use the OODA Loop to your advantage by interrupting the chain of attack of the suspect. If you are within the most common range officers are killed (3-5 feet), you should start by fighting with personal weapons (ie. hands & feet) and *moving* first, then going to weapons second, gaining distance where the weapon becomes an advantage, not a liability. (Albrecht, 1992)

D. *Distance vs. Reaction Time*

- As exemplified in the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, the vast majority of officers killed in a gunfight are killed within 1-10 feet (approximately 75%). Approximately 52% are killed within 5 feet of their attacker, making this appear to be the most dangerous range for officers. Approximately 23% of officers killed are killed within 11 feet of their attacker. The remaining officers killed are at various ranges beyond 11 feet. A simplistic common sense approach would seem to tell us the farther away from the suspect, the safer the officer is.
- Distance, however, is not the real issue. The real issue is what officers are doing within the contact range of 3-5 feet, i.e. conversational range. Greater range may enable an officer to see a threat better or sooner, but it may very well impede your ability to respond effectively.

