Tactical Concept No. 11 July 2024

WEAPONS OTHER THAN FIREARMS

The purpose of this Tactical Concept 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. Both edged and blunt weapons are objects that can be used to strike a person and inflict serious bodily injury or death. For the purposes of this Tactical Concept, edged weapons include any object capable of cutting, slashing, or stabbing.

When dealing with suspects armed with weapons other than firearms, distance is not the only factor that should be considered. For example, barriers, if available, may inhibit a suspect from getting close enough to harm officers. Additionally, officers should consider 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. In those situations where force is used, officers should always attempt to resolve the situation with reasonable and proportional force. Officers are not required to use lethal force, even though it may be authorized, if they believe the situation can be resolved safely with other force options.

PROCEDURES

Communications Division personnel will proactively dispatch a field unit with available intermediate force options and a supervisor to all calls involving edged weapons – with the goal of pre-positioning resources so officers have multiple tactical options when arriving on scene.

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 attempt to 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 important to attempt to maximize the safety of everyone at scene.

Use of Force and De-escalation

Officers have several use of force options available if the suspect poses an immediate 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 officers, officers should attempt to resolve the situation using tactical de-escalation techniques to gain voluntary compliance, or in an effort to 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.

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: 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 during the **initial** assessment:

- 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 apparent size, age, and physical condition.
- Danger signs (e.g., persons talking to themselves or unprovoked agitation).
- The individual's apparent state of mind (e.g., angry, confused, evasive, threatening).
- The availability of known 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.

- Observations of the individual's hands.

After the initial assessment, officers should conduct a **continuous** assessment of 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 apparent inability to comprehend the situation due to environmental, physical, cognitive, or other conditions. If it appears that the suspect is unable to comprehend the situation, other tactical options may be more effective in resolving the situation safely.

Time: There is an equation that saves lives, Distance + Cover = Time. Time generally gives officers options. Time is an essential element of de-escalation as it generally 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 result in the suspect reacting, which could result in escalating the situation. Whenever possible, officers should place an object/barrier between themselves and the suspect as cover. 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 a suspect is contained and does not pose an immediate threat to officers, the public, or themselves, time is an officer's best tool. In these situations, 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.

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. This includes redeployment to cover and/or concealment, such as physical barriers. The addition of time, distance and cover/concealment may give officers 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: 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. In concert with the Department's guiding principle of reverence for human life, officers and incident commanders shall consider the use of intermediate force options whenever practical. Intermediate force options often offer the most reasonable force option to safely resolve the situation. Some intermediate force options include but are not limited to:

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

Lines of Communication: 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 the communication they are using, monitoring the suspect's reactions to determine if the particular line of communication appears to be working. Officers may have to give clear direct orders using command presence, then switch to acting as a crisis negotiator, and then back to using command presence as the situation evolves. If environmental conditions allow, officers should attempt to establish 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, including:

- "What happened today?"
- "Why are you troubled?"
- "How can I help you?"

Talking with a person may defuse the crisis or buy time, thus increasing the opportunity for 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. 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 slowly in a calm, firm voice to attempt to create a tranquil environment.

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.

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

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. Time generally gives officers 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 in an effort to reduce the intensity of an encounter with a suspect and potentially 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.

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.

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Field Training Services Unit
Police Training and Education

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