

# **COVINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**Subject: ACTIVE THREAT**

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## **I. Purpose**

To provide guidelines for the department's response to an Active Threat of an Active Shooter incident.

## **II. Statement of Policy**

It shall be the policy of the Covington Police Department to respond to active threats/shooters in a manner to minimize loss of life and contain the situation as quickly as possible. These situations require rapid deployment of initial responding law enforcement personnel prior to the arrival of the Emergency Services Unit. In these active threat/shooter cases, delayed deployment could have catastrophic consequences. This directive describes rapid deployment tactics developed to prepare officers to handle these types of situations. These are effective methods for first responders to use, which will minimize the risk of personal injury when responding to an active shooting in progress.

## **III. Definitions**

- A. Active Shooter – An armed person who has used deadly physical force on other persons and aggressively continues to do so while have unrestricted access to additional victims.
- B. Contact Team – An officer or group of officers whose primary mission is to stop the assailant's deadly behavior and prevent escape.
- C. Rapid Deployment – The swift and immediate deployment of law enforcement resources to ongoing, life threatening situations where delayed deployment could otherwise result in death or serious bodily injury to innocent persons.
- D. Rescue Team – A group of officers assigned to locate, recover, and facilitate the evacuation process of victims to safe areas or to medical personnel for treatment.

#### **IV. Characteristics of the Assailant**

The following is a list of characteristics commonly associated with an assailant bent on aggressive deadly behavior. The list is compiled from descriptions of past assailants and is not meant to be all inclusive.

- A. Focused on assaulting persons with whom they have had prior contact. Their intention can be an expression of hatred or rage rather than the commission of a crime.
- B. Engage more than one target and may be intent on killing a number of people as quickly as possible.
- C. Go to locations where there are numerous potential victims, such as schools, theaters, concerts, or shopping malls and/or may even strike at their victims from a distance; much like a sniper. Assailants may have some degree of familiarity with the building they choose to occupy.
- D. Continue their attack despite the arrival of emergency responders. Tactics such as containment and negotiation, normally associated with standoff incidents, may not be adequate in these types of events.
- E. Are better armed than the police and may make use of explosives, booby traps, body armor, and may even employ some type of diversion.
- F. Have planned an attack and is prepared for a sustained confrontation with the police. There have been occasions when these assailants have not attempted to hide their identity or conceal the commission of their attacks. Escape from the police is usually not a priority.
- G. Are suicidal, deciding to die in the course of their actions, either at the hands of others or by a self-inflicted wound.

#### **V. Procedures**

Each crisis situation is unique and dynamic and may go in and out of an “active” status. A suspect may go from an active shooter to a barricaded status with or without access to victims. The following are general response guidelines for ongoing deadly behavior incidents. Since these incidents contain many variables, effectively handling this type of situation cannot be totally reduced to specific procedures. These guidelines are not meant to limit conventional police tactics, which are appropriate to a dynamic situation.

- A. First Responders
  - 1. Upon arrival at the scene where aggressive deadly behavior is ongoing, intelligence may be sparse and fragmented. Information may be obtained “on the run” from fleeing witnesses, spent casings on the ground, observing damage from fired rounds and any information reported by the 911 Center. As soon as practical, the following information should be obtained:
    - a. Who is the assailant?
    - b. Is there more than one assailant?
    - c. What does the assailant look like?

- d. Where is the assailant?
  - e. What weapons(s) does the assailant possess?
  - f. What is known about the assailant's tactical abilities or specialized knowledge?
  - g. What is the assailant's agenda or motive?
2. The first priority is to locate the assailant(s) and STOP the aggressive deadly behavior. First responders must:
- a. Form a Contact Team(s);
  - b. Notify the 911 Center of the Contact Team numbers (Contact Team 1, 2, etc.);
  - c. Communicate a quick overview of the incident while deploying;
  - d. Communicate team movement;
  - e. Proceed to contact the active shooter.

After the initial or appropriate number of Contact Team(s) has been deployed, the senior officer on the scene must assume the role of Incident Commander to facilitate the information gathering and dissemination process to additional responding units. The initial Incident Commander will remain in that role until relieved by a higher ranking individual.

## B. Command and Control

1. An active shooting incident is a complex situation requiring considerable assets for success. Large, unfamiliar locations such as schools, businesses, or other public venues pose serious problems from the command and control aspect. A successful outcome can only be accomplished if command and control is established early; otherwise, it may never be obtained. The Incident Commander must demonstrate clear, expedited and decisive leadership. Furthermore, active shooter incidents challenge the ability of the supervisor to rapidly gain control of an incident, unlike other tactical situations. The Incident Commander should:
- a. Assess the situation;
  - b. Establish communication with the initial Contact Team;
  - c. Coordinate and deploy responding resources;
  - d. Assemble additional Contact and Rescue Teams;
  - e. Broadcast a situation estimate (prioritize):
    - (1) Location and number of suspects and types of weapons involved;

- (2) Estimate size of the crowd and number of casualties and fatalities – if known;
  - (3) Additional assistance needed (fire, EMS, etc.).
- f. Acquire a separate radio channel
- g. Request that the 911 Center assign a dispatcher exclusively to this channel;
- h. Establish Incident Command to coordinate resources and gather/disseminate information:
  - (1) Location of staging area and Incident Command Post;
  - (2) Ingress/egress routes for emergency vehicles.
- i. Request additional resources:
  - (1) Patrol rifles;
  - (2) Specialized resources (ESU, Canine, Bomb Squad);
  - (3) GSP, NCSO, etc.
- j. Establish command and control. The Incident Commander's primary objectives are:
  - (1) Stop the assailant;
  - (2) Rescue victims;
  - (3) Isolate and contain the incident.

C. Deployment and Entry

1. The obvious problems of deployment into large structures are hindered by the fact that the suspect may not be readily identifiable. Additionally, there may be more than one suspect. The suspect has a distinct advantage when lying in wait, while the Contact Team is at a disadvantage in searching for and apprehending the suspect.
2. Depending upon the size of the venue (school, workplace, etc.), officers may encounter anywhere from several to hundreds of innocent victims who are potential targets and/or hostages, as well as dozens of entrances and exits that have to be secured, watched or breached.
3. To give themselves every possible advantage prior to an incident, officers should be familiar with the layout of possible targets, such as schools, government buildings, etc.
4. There will be numerous distractions during entry. These may include, but not limited to carnage, explosive devices, activated fire sprinklers, noise from fire alarms, school bells and people screaming. Victims might be confused and frightened and may become physically aggressive and cling to rescuers, and those hiding may not respond to police directions.

5. If the incident is at a school, teachers may lock the classroom door and have students sit on the floor until they receive police or school official instructions.

D. Contact Teams

1. In an ideal world, a team of 3 or 4 officers would form a Contact Team and make entry to confront an active shooter.
  - a. This allows the team to adhere to standard tactical doctrine and provide an optimum mix of speed of movement, protection, and firepower; however, during the time needed to assemble that team, the active shooter may be killing innocent people, so it will be incumbent upon the first responding officer(s) to make the decision as to whether a smaller team (including a "team" of 1) should make immediate entry.
  - b. The smaller the team, the more difficult it is to provide protection for yourself and the less firepower you can project. Single officer entries are dependent upon the judgment of the officer on the scene. That being said, the officer should generally use a basic decision making matrix.
  - c. If the officer hears gunfire or has other actionable intelligence, the officer is encouraged to go. If not, they are encouraged to breach the door, hold, and see what they can see or hear. If they hear gunfire or see something that they can help with (injured people for example), they should go. If not, they should wait until another officer arrives or the situation changes before pushing into the building.
  - d. The team (whether multiple officer or a single officer) must recognize that they are subject to 360-degree vulnerability upon entry into the facility and will not be responsible for initiating a thorough clearing of the facility at this point in time. They will continue on past victims or harmless distractions in search of the active shooter(s). They may relay the location of victims they come across to the rescue team.
  - e. Responding personnel must keep in mind that their primary role is to protect innocent persons at risk.
2. The primary mission of the Contact Team is to stop the assailant's deadly behavior and prevent escape. Communication is maintained with the Incident Commander and other officers to keep them informed of the Contact Team's progress.
3. The secondary mission is to direct victims out of the crisis site through secured areas to the staging location or to shelter in place. The goal is to save lives by containing the assailant and allowing the safe and orderly evacuation of victims.
4. Contact Team Members should consider the following as priority tasks:
  - a. Locate the assailant;

- b. Stop the assailant's deadly behavior;
  - c. Limit the assailant's movement;
  - d. Prevent the assailant's escape;
  - e. Communicate the team's progress to the Incident Commander and other officers;
5. Notify the Incident Command Post where victims are located so they can be rescued;
  6. Direct ambulatory victims to a safe area and communicate that help is coming.

E. Use of Deadly Force

When a suspect's actions present an immediate defense of life situation to an officer or other persons, it may be appropriate to use lethal force. Officers shall not fire under conditions that would possibly subject bystanders or hostages to accidental death or injury, except to preserve life or prevent serious bodily injury.

F. Cover Fire

1. Cover fire is defined as "controlled and deliberate fire, directed at a life endangering threat, where an officer reasonably believes the threat to be located." It can be utilized when exposed to an immediate life endangering threat in order to protect others and stop the threat.
2. The decision to utilize cover fire should be consistent with the threat and should be considered deadly force. A supporting Contact Team can utilize controlled cover fire to distract the assailant from shooting officers moving to gain a tactical advantage or conduct an officer/victim rescue operation. Prior to using cover fire, the following should be considered:
  - a. All concerned personnel must be alerted that cover fire will be employed prior to its use;
  - b. A safe background;
  - c. Cover fire should not be used when it places innocent persons at a greater risk than the actions of the assailant.

G. Rescue Teams

1. The second set of 3 or 4 officers arriving on the scene will form a rescue team. The priorities for a Rescue Team are to locate, recover, and facilitate the evacuation process of victims to safe areas or to medical personnel for treatment.
2. If there is a non-ambulatory victim who needs medical attention, a rescue team is required to extricate the individual. Victims who are able to walk should be directed to a triage or safe area.

3. The Rescue Team members will proceed providing 360-degree coverage during ingress and egress movement. Rescue Teams should broadcast the location of the suspect, if known. If a Rescue Team encounters the suspect, it should convert to a Contact Team and stop the suspect's deadly behavior. Depending upon the situation, a Rescue Team can follow behind the Contact Team. During that movement, the Rescue Team may encounter multiple victims within the crisis site who are in close proximity. If so, the Rescue Team can establish fields of cover and provide a "safe zone" for the victims. This safe zone may be used to establish triage and/or a subsequent rallying point for additional Rescue Teams. If the victims are scattered, individual rescues may be necessary. After the Rescue Team has reached the victim, one officer will maintain forward security, another will provide rearward cover, and the additional officers will carry the victim out to safety.

#### H. Explosive Devices

Explosive Devices Incidents may occur that involve unexploded improvised explosive devices (bombs). Terrorists are routinely trained on how to make and place booby traps using hand grenades to avoid capture and facilitate their escape.

What to do when a Contact or Rescue Team locates a possible explosive device:

- a. Visually inspect the device;
- b. Consider an alternate route based on condition of the device, i.e. time activated or burning fuse;
- c. Move quickly away from the device;
- d. Do not move or touch the device;
- e. Verbalize location of the device to the rest of the Contact Team;
- f. Report location of the device to the Incident Command Post;
- g. Limit use of radios, cell phones, MCT's or electronic devices;
- h. Move past device quickly and continue search;
- i. Mark location of device to warn others;
- j. Be aware of possible booby traps.

#### I. Zones of Diminishing Threat

1. Like a hazardous materials incident, the scene of an active shooter will be broken up into four zones with diminishing levels of threat to the rescuers. At the scene of an active shooter situation, the police department will be working closely with members of the Covington Fire Department and Newton EMS who will treat the victims. This necessitates the need to define clear areas where there is a reduced threat to rescue personnel.

2. These zones are the Hot Area, Warm Area, Safety Zone and Cold Area. Connecting the Cold Area and passing through the Warm Area is a Safety Corridor, which is the path law enforcement uses to escort EMS personnel to Safety Zone.
3. Firefighters and paramedics will normally enter a Warm Area accompanied by law enforcement personnel, unless there are mitigating circumstances that will then require approval by the Incident Commander with concurrence of a fire department supervisor.
4. Law enforcement personnel assigned to protect EMS personnel will remain with them in the Warm Area and Safety Zone until the situation is resolved. Emergency Medical Services personnel will follow the tactical direction of law enforcement officers.
5. Once escorted to the Safety Zone, EMS personnel will determine the medical severity of the victims and request Rescue Team escort for victims prioritized for immediate evacuation. All Rescue Teams should know the location of the Safety Zone.
6. Rescue Teams should take the injured victims either to the Safety Zone, or a triage location in the Cold Area, whichever is more practical, or as determined by the Incident Commander.

#### ZONE DEFINITIONS

##### Zone: Hot Area Personnel In Area: Contact Teams Description

- An unsecured area where the active shooter may be present.
- Contact Teams will be searching for the suspect.
- Generally, EMS personnel will not enter this area.

##### Zone: Warm Area Personnel In Area: Contact Teams/Rescue Teams Description

- An unsecured area that has been cleared by a Contact Team.
- Rescue Teams are sent for victim evacuation.

##### Zone: Cold Area Personnel In Area: Needed Rescue Personnel Description

- Area where there is little or no threat from the suspect.
- Location of the Command Post, and where personnel are staged.

##### Zone: Safety Zone Personnel In Area: Rescue Teams/EMS Personnel Description

- Zone with the Warm Area that is secured by law enforcement personnel to conduct triage and treat victims.
- Once established, EMS personnel do not leave the Safe Zone without an escort by law enforcement.
- Examples are a cleared and secured room, or a corridor secured by a sufficient number of officers to provide protection for EMS personnel.

##### Zone: Safety Corridor Personnel In Area: Rescue Teams/EMS Personnel Description

- A path which law enforcement personnel may escort fire fighters, paramedics and perhaps victims from the Cold Area, through the Warm Area to the Safety Zone and back again.

#### **VI. Annual Review of Policy and Training**

At least annually, the Patrol Division Commander will review this policy, all procedures and training, and all incidents which may have occurred to identify any needed revisions. If revisions are necessary, the Patrol Commander will notify the Accreditation Manager to make the appropriate changes.

Training on this SOP will be conducted in conjunction with the annual tactical firearms training.

#### **VII. Public Notification**

The police department may wish to publicize timely information through various social media networks, print media and television stations by the Chief of Police, PIO or designee. Any information released must be approved by the Incident Commander.

#### **VIII. Conclusion**

When officers encounter an incident where immediate action and rapid deployment tactics are needed, time is of the essence. The immediate and swift implementation of "Contact" and "Rescue" teams will increase the likelihood of saving the lives of the people exposed to the active shooter. Through the use of expedited and decisive leadership in implementing these tactics, officers will bring order to chaos, and increase the safety of all those involved.

***This SOP supersedes any SOP previously issued.***

BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:

*Stacey L. Cotton*

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Chief of Police