

STANDARDIZED ROLL CALL TRAINING PROGRAM

Deployment Period #10-05

LESSON PLAN

TOPIC: Tactics
SUBJECT: Suicide by Cop - Tactical Considerations
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INTRODUCTION

Suicide by cop is an incident where an individual commits suicide by precipitating the use of deadly force by the police. In these incidents, the safety of the officers and the public comes first. The very intent of the individual places the officer at a disadvantage. The individual has it in his mind to force or trap the officer into using deadly force and based on this, there will be instances where shooting of the individual cannot be helped.

TACTICS

As with any tactical situation a plan must be considered for suicide by cop incidents. Your daily routine of discussing “what if” situations must include suicide by cop. You must be prepared to respond to a sudden life threatening confrontation with an individual bent on forcing the police to kill him. For this reason, sound tactics must be practiced as you approach a location and handle what you believe to be a “routine” call for service.

If time and space permit and there is information indicating that this is a possible suicide by cop, the officers may adjust their tactics by using the 5 C's. They are: command, coordination, containment, communication and control.

Scenario

Officers receive a radio call of a domestic dispute. The comments to the call read, “suspect is acting oddly and talking about suicide.” The officers approach the location cautiously and encounter the neighbor who called the police. The neighbor states the suspect has a history of mental illness, has been drinking and has been separated from his wife. Officers, from a position of cover, confront the suspect who is standing on the front porch holding a large butcher knife.

What steps within the 5 C's would you implement?

Command

There must be an officer-in-charge of the situation overseeing the primary plan and the back up plan. It should be the senior officer or a supervisor. Initially, the assigned unit will be in charge, however once these officers begin communicating with the suicidal individual, the first unit arriving on the scene as back up assumes command of the incident.

Coordination

Responding units must be properly utilized. An inner and out perimeter established, designated cover officer identified, back up officers positioned and a crisis negotiator requested. The primary and back up plans must be communicated to all officers on the scene and frequently updated as the situation unfolds. Responding units are reminded to turn off their emergency lights and siren just prior to arriving at the location because these distractions can have a negative effect on a suicidal individual.

Containment

The individual needs to be isolated, yet with enough space to feel comfortable. This space should be large enough to provide officers with cover and sufficient reaction time to respond to an attack and yet be able to communicate with the individual.

Communication

This is the key element for handling the incident. Most suicides by cop occur within 30 minutes of the officers' arrival and therefore everything is over before the negotiator can respond. Officers must be able to communicate with the individual and establish a rapport by treating the individual with respect and using a low, soothing voice. Listening skills are essential in order to identify the individual's problem and provide a possible solution. The contact officer should introduce himself by name and ask what is the problem. Open-ended questions should be used to get the person talking, such as, "what happened today", "you sound troubled" and "how can I help you?" Talking with a person may diffuse the crisis, buy time and reduce the desire of the individual to commit suicide, thus providing a peaceful resolution. Recap what you hear is the individual's problem. Talk about your family, so it demonstrates you are a person as well and can relate to his problems. Attempt to solve the problem by discussing solutions. Give the person hope that his problem can be solved and if he turns himself in you can help him with his problem. Having a family member assist in the negotiations is not recommended and may make matters worse.

Control

Don't press the individual into taking some type of action which he is not ready for because the longer the incident goes, the better the chances for a successful outcome. Outside distractions such as friends, neighbors, the press and the curious must be kept

away from the inner perimeter, so the individual can focus on dealing with the contact officer. If a firearm is not involved, the TASER or the less lethal shotgun will be a useful tool in that it does not require the officers to get in close to the suspect in order to gain control. **If the individual is armed with a firearm, it is essential that all officers maintain cover throughout the incident.** Just because the individual is threatening suicide or harm to someone else, it doesn't mean he cannot simply shoot you or someone else to force police action.

POST SUICIDE BY COP TRAUMA

If the individual is successful in the suicide by cop, this conclusion can have a significant impact on the officer for years to come. Between the media, lawsuits and emotional trauma of the shooting, officers must understand they were not responsible for this death and are the true victims. The officers must remember they were set up and they had no control over the outcome. By understanding what suicide by cop is and obtaining professional help through critical incident debriefs (typically mandated after these situations), officers can deal with the aftermath of the shooting in a positive, healthy manner.

REVIEW

Suicide by cop incidents are very dangerous and require time, space, and information to achieve a successful resolution. Always look for the indicators of a possible suicide by cop. Time and distance are critical factors in dealing with these individuals so that the officer's communications skills can be used to talk the person into surrendering. The utilization of the 5 C's (command, containment, communications, coordination and control) will cover the necessary tactical steps to handle this situation. Lastly, should officers be forced to use deadly force, they must remember they were not responsible for the death of this person and they are the victims of suicide by cop.