

## **HANDLING PRISONERS (LAW ENFORCEMENT)**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Staff will learn the risks and exposure trends when handling prisoners
- Staff will review high-risk policies relating to handling prisoners

All too often, officers become too comfortable with offender contacts and in taking offenders into custody. The intent of this presentation is to educate officers to the risks of and officer fatality trends associated with handling prisoners. Officers that understand the risks of and exposure trends when handling prisoners are better prepared mentally and physical to perform their job in the safest possible manner.

The information contained in this presentation is based on the results of a ten year national study analyzing over 800 officer deaths. The study concluded the following:

- No one single type of crime or arrest was more dangerous to officers; they're all potentially dangerous.
- 80% of the cases involved a single prisoner; the officer thought he/she could handle the situation by themselves.
- 79% of the officers didn't wear a protective vest.
- 64% of the officers were alone. Once the prisoner realized the officer was alone, a plan was quickly devised to kill the officer.
- 42% of the prisoners who killed officers had concealed weapons. This percentage is so high that officers should presume that anyone being arrested is potentially carrying a concealed weapon.
- 27% of the officers were killed while controlling prisoners prior to taking them into custody.
- 22% of the officers were too impatient.
- 19% of the officers likely misjudged the danger associated with the prisoner.

## **FOOT PURSUITS**

The study concluded that foot pursuits are particularly dangerous; 18% of the officers were killed during foot pursuits; however, significantly more officers are assaulted and/or injured during foot pursuits. The study revealed that officers frequently chase down prisoners and either tackle or wrestle them to the ground. For this technique to be effective officers must be capable of physically defeating the prisoner in every case or they risk being killed. This practice has resulted in many officer injuries and deaths throughout the country.

The proper foot pursuit technique is to catch up to the prisoner, and from behind, push the offender hard to the ground. The officer can remain standing and take a tactical posture, deploying any weapon system appropriate for the situation. The worst scenario is for the officer to end up on the ground fighting with the prisoner hand to hand.

## **HANDCUFFING**

Prisoner handcuffing is also dangerous a dangerous process, 24% of the officers were killed while attempting to handcuff a prisoner. As an officer closed in to handcuff, the prisoner attacked the officer. In most cases officers had difficulty retaining their weapon. Officers must be very vigilant when approaching and handcuffing prisoners.

Regardless of the prisoner or charges, don't let your guard down after handcuffed, 46% of the killers waited for an opportunity to attack. Attacks were delayed, prisoners waited until the last possible moment to kill, such as, the office or jail.

In addition, it was noted that many female prisoners were not handcuffed or searched prior to being place in the unit. It may seem rudimentary, but officers must be reminded to carefully search and handcuff all prisoners, regardless of age, sex, or charges.

## **WEAPON RETENTION**

Forty-three percent of the officers were killed with their own weapon. There are hundreds of weapon retention techniques. However, a behavioral study revealed that officers often forget their training in the heat of the moment. Many times officers instinctively tried to pin the prisoner's hand to the weapon (place their hand over the prisoner's hand). If the prisoner is strong the officer may have to use both hands to maintain control of the weapon. Then, officers try to twist or pull away from the prisoner. If that doesn't work, it becomes a dance were the strongest person wins control of the weapon.

The study found that the best weapon retention practice was to administer a swift kick or several kicks to the prisoner's shin or ankle, kicks are very painful and effective in disrupting concentration. This allows an officer to pull away and take a tactical posture.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

The study found that older experienced officers were more likely to be killed by prisoners than younger officers. It is believed that experienced officers have made so many arrests over the years that they become complacent and no longer take precautions when handling prisoners. In addition two study findings may be connected to this phenomenon: 63% of the officers killed fought with their killer and most prisoners were younger than the officer. This information suggested to researchers that the killers assessed the situation and perhaps knew they were younger, stronger, and in better shape than the officer, and therefore made attempt to take the officers.

Once a prisoner is taken into custody, the situation is still dangerous. Almost half (49%) of the officers were killed after the prisoner had been taken into custody. Generally bystanders, particularly drunk bystanders got involved. Alcohol was involved in 27% of the cases; drunks became angry or combative and killed many officers.

## **POLICY**

*Discuss all department policies relating to handling prisoners.*

## **CLOSING**

- *Encourage discussion about applicable policies and the need to consider all prisoners as potentially dangerous.*
- *Encourage discussion about precautions deputies can take to ensure officer safety when handling prisoners.*