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# **GUIDELINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**

## **OFFICER SAFETY**

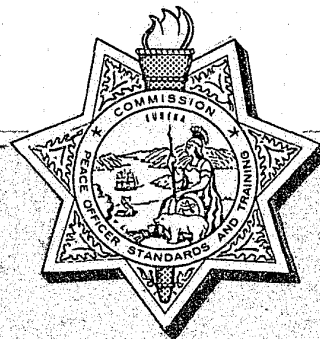
**Resulting from the Study of  
California Peace Officers Killed in the Line of Duty**

**1990-93**

**NCJRS**

**FEB 15 1995**

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**THE COMMISSION  
ON PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

# **GUIDELINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER SAFETY**

## **Resulting from the Study of California Peace Officers Killed in the Line of Duty 1990-93**

**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice**

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Telecourse, "Violence Against California Peace Officers"  
contact:

POST Training Program Services Bureau  
1601 Alhambra Boulevard  
Sacramento, CA 95816-7083  
(916) 227-4889

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## FOREWARD

Officer Safety has long been a concern of individual peace officers and their departments. The profession has a certain unique degree of risk associated with it. However, training and experience are great teachers in keeping risk to a minimum while still effectively doing the job.

The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) has studied California peace officers killed in the line of duty for three time periods: 1980 through 1986, 1987 through 1989, and 1990 through 1993. POST developed guidelines for each study period. These guidelines have been used by agency administrators and trainers to improve operating policies, to develop training, to justify training, and to update tactics and procedures. The goal has been to reduce the risk of serious injury or death to California peace officers.

This report has been compiled in conjunction with the development of a two-hour POST telecourse, *Violence Against California Peace Officers*, as well as with the publication of the 1990-93 *California Peace Officers Killed in the Line of Duty Study*. The telecourse airs on November 10, 1994. The full written study is scheduled for completion and distribution early next year.

The Commission is grateful for the cooperation and assistance provided by the participating law enforcement agencies that made this research possible. POST especially commends the members of the *Center for Officer Safety Research Advisory Committee* for their exhaustive efforts.

NORMAN C. BOEHM  
Executive Director

November 10, 1994

## CENTER FOR OFFICER SAFETY RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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## INTRODUCTION

POST has been studying the circumstances surrounding the on-duty deaths of California peace officers since 1980. The purpose of this research is to establish an information base from which training curriculum, policies, and procedures can be developed or enhanced to curtail the injury and death of California peace officers.

Law enforcement recognizes that protecting lives and property, apprehending criminals, and keeping the public peace is inherently hazardous, and that not all tragedies can be prevented. The profession also recognizes that training impacts a peace officer's effectiveness while maintaining maximum personal safety.

These *Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officer Safety* are based upon the specific findings of the study of peace officers killed in the line of duty between 1990 and 1993. They are not intended to represent a complete summary of all possible safety issues. The guidelines are conclusions reached from the research and study of on-duty deaths identified in this study period.

The telecourse, *Violence Against California Peace Officers*, was made in conjunction with these guidelines. The telecourse was designed to enhance the information presented in these guidelines. Copies of the telecourse, which aired on November 10, 1994, can be requested by contacting the Training Program Services Bureau at (916) 227-4889.

The *Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officer Safety* and the *Violence Against California Peace Officers* telecourse are primarily resources for training presenters and agency administrators. They have been developed for updating and validating current curriculum and operations policies and procedures.



## **PART I: GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The following guidelines are universal and transcend all law enforcement contacts. These basic guidelines are familiar in that they are consistent with officer safety guidelines found in the POST Basic Course Curriculum and in previous versions of this report. In fact, the study of the details that led to 23 felonious murders of California peace officers during the first four years of this decade show that certain training issues never change.

### **Guideline #1 - MASTER THE BASICS**

**Finding:** One of the most dangerous issues facing officers today is the attitude that develops with routine tasks. Seventy percent of the on-duty officer murders came during traditional calls and stops (traffic and pedestrian contacts, prisoner transports, domestic violence, disturbance calls, etc.).

**Recommendation:** The key to surviving sudden and deadly attacks is approaching EVERY contact, no matter how repetitious, with officer safety basics in mind. The basics include awareness of cover, watching and controlling suspect's hands, safe vehicle positioning, clear and accurate radio communications, keying and responding to danger signs, calling for back up, and working together as a team when additional assistance is present.

### **Guideline #2 - HANDS**

**Finding:** In all of the 1990-93 California Peace Officer murders, the suspect used their strong hand to arm themselves and kill the officer.

**Recommendation:** Awareness and control of the hands continues to be a universal safety point.

### **Guideline #3 - COVER**

**Finding:** In over 82% of the study incidents, cover was either available but not utilized or abandoned by the victim officer. Thirty six percent of the officers shot by suspects were able to return fire. None of those peace officers were behind cover when they returned fire.

**Recommendation:** Be aware of cover. Use, be ready to use, and/or move to cover when necessary. The use of available cover continues to be a basic tactical consideration on all contacts.

#### **Guideline #4 - POSITIONING**

**Finding:** Positioning was a primary factor in the death of 20 of the 23 officers and deputies murdered in California from 1990-93. The most common deadly factors include:

- ♦ the officer was too close to the suspect;
- ♦ requesting, yet not waiting for assistance;
- ♦ abandoning a safe location before back up arrives;
- ♦ poor view of suspect;
- ♦ stopping the patrol vehicle either too close or in front of the suspect. (NOTE: Vehicle positioning as the peace officer arrived was a **primary factor** in **five** different subject areas; vehicle pullovers, crimes in progress, pedestrian approach, domestic violence, and in one off duty incident.)

**Recommendation:** Be aware of the dangers with poor vehicle and personal positioning. Identify, plan, then move to positions that are advantageous when making law enforcement contacts. If assistance is called, normally don't abandon a safe location or get in a hurry; wait for assistance.

#### **Guideline #5 - COMMUNICATIONS (Radio)**

**Finding:** Inaccurate, unmade, and incomplete radio broadcasts were primary factors in **nine** peace officer deaths from 1990-93.

**Recommendation:** It is important to use and understand the limitations of the agency communications systems.

#### **Guideline #6 - WEAK HAND SHOOTING**

**Finding:** In two study incidents, the initial shot to the victim officer disabled the strong arm. In both cases, the officer was not able to draw and/or use the primary gun.

**Recommendation:** Officers need to know how to draw, accurately fire, and reload their primary firearm with their weak hand. Weak hand drawing and shooting needs to be part of the basic academy training and regular range qualifications for in-service officers. Also, the carrying of a second weapon that is accessible to the weak hand is an option to consider.

**Guideline #7 - SAFETY EQUIPMENT: BODY ARMOR**

**Finding:** Three deaths can be attributed to either not wearing body armor (two) or wearing body armor that was too small (one). The activities included one drunk driver contact, one crime in progress response, and one disturbance call. Only three of the 20 officers murdered while on duty were **not** wearing body armor. Four of the murdered officers were shot and their body armor stopped some of the rounds.

**Recommendation:** Each officer should recognize the need to utilize proper safety equipment when performing any and all patrol activities and when responding to any potential high risk incident. **Body armor** is the single most effective piece of passive safety equipment that an officer can utilize.

(NOTE: Although body armor greatly enhances an officer's survivability in a lethal confrontation, it should never replace proper tactics when handling any high risk incidents.)

## PART II: FIELD/PATROL ACTIVITIES

Field/Patrol activities include the traditional everyday contacts that California peace officers are involved in on a regular basis. These activities include public assists, traffic accident investigations, pedestrian stops, vehicle pullovers, response to disturbance calls, and investigation of other minor violations.

### VEHICLE PULLOVERS

Vehicle pullovers continue to be one of the primary contacts where California peace officers are murdered. The person stopped may be guilty of an equipment violation, or he/she may be a wanted felon planning/waiting for the officer to get close enough to attack and kill. The fact is, the sheer number of similar contacts causes officers to relax and treat the traffic pullovers as "routine." Peace officers are compromising officer safety and ignoring danger signs in order to:

- ♦ Catch the traffic violator and issue the citation;
- ♦ Complete the contact quickly and get back into service;
- ♦ Preserve evidence.

Basic officer safety procedures need to be every officer's highest priority during the apparent "routine" vehicle pullover.

**California peace officers need to realize there has been an alarming trend in sudden and deliberate attacks by suspects, especially in the area of routine vehicle pullover contacts.** Eighteen of the 23 officers murdered from 1990-93, which includes all five vehicle pullover murders, were either attacked as they approached, were set up and deliberately attacked, or attacked as soon as they momentarily let their guard down.

The following guidelines were developed after reviewing the details of the cases where California peace officers were murdered during vehicle pullover contacts.

#### **Guideline #1 - CRIMINALS CARRY GUNS**

**Finding:** Five California peace officers were murdered in four vehicle pullover incidents during the study period, 1990-93. All suspects in these incidents were armed with handguns.

**Recommendation:** Assume the person being stopped may be armed. The key is finding that balance between acting and being too cautious, and being effective, yet safe. The fact is, a patrol deputy/officer can still perform regular tasks without compromising officer safety.

#### **Guideline #2 - CALL IN CONTACTS**

**Finding:** Four of the five officers killed making traffic stops did not call their stops into dispatch. This may not have prevented all of the attacks, but it would have increased the opportunity to catch their killers. In two of the study incidents, backup officers were close and may have chosen to "roll by" if the contact had been called in.

**Recommendation:** Regardless of assignment, dispatch should be notified of all contacts, including the nature and location of the stop.

#### **Guideline #3 - POSITION OF ADVANTAGE**

**Finding:** In all vehicle pullover cases, the peace officer was not able to gain or was not able to maintain a position of advantage.

**Recommendation:** As mentioned in "General Guidelines", peace officers need to identify, plan, then move to a position that is advantageous. Then, avoid abandoning that position.

#### **Guideline #4 - VEHICLE APPROACH CONSIDERATIONS**

**Finding:** All of the officers killed in this study during vehicle pullover contacts made driver's side vehicle approaches.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that officers consider varying their approach tactics. A passenger side approach is one alternative that has been adopted by a number of agencies.

## PEDESTRIAN CONTACTS

There were two incidents involving pedestrian contacts. The officer safety issues are similar to the guidelines and recommendations found in vehicle pullover contacts.

### **Guideline #5 - APPROACHING SUSPECTS**

**Finding:** Self-initiated field activity for minor violations (one drinking-in-public incident and one traffic accident investigation that turned into a foot pursuit) resulted in two California peace officers being suddenly and deliberately murdered by suspects from 1990-93.

**Recommendation:** Approaching a suspect from a position of advantage on pedestrian contacts continues to be a primary safety factor. Officers should carefully evaluate the options of either approaching or directing the pedestrian to the safest position for contact.

### **Guideline #6 - MAKING THE ARREST**

**Finding:** In both pedestrian approach contacts, the suspect was deliberate in the setting up of, and in the attack and murder of the peace officer. In one case, the officer tried to make the arrest alone.

**Recommendation:** Regardless of the violation, officers should have assistance once the decision is made to make an arrest.

### **Guideline #7 - FOOT PURSUITS ARE DANGEROUS**

**Finding:** There was one incident where a peace officer was murdered by the suspect. For a variety of reasons, **foot pursuits are dangerous.**

**Recommendation:** Officers should consider the totality of the circumstances before initiating a foot pursuit. If at all possible, wait for assistance before attempting to look for and/or apprehending a suspect who has fled on foot.

## **DOMESTIC DISPUTES/DISTURBANCE CALLS**

Domestic disputes and disturbance calls rank as the most dangerous law enforcement contact. Six peace officers were killed during 1990-93 while responding to domestic dispute/violence and other disturbance calls. The study specifically identified the tactical issues of proper approach, good communication, and the control of a suspect's hands as being the most critical issues in officer safety when handling these types of calls.

### **Guideline #8 - EMOTIONAL RESPONSE**

**Finding:** The study determined that **half (three)** of the officers killed by suspects involved in domestic violence and/or disturbance calls were murdered by suspects that appeared completely calm and were not perceived as a threat.

**Recommendation:** Officers need to recognize and be ready to deal with the high emotions and extreme volatility, including the inherent dangers, that may accompany domestic violence and disturbance calls.

### **Guideline #9 - TACTICAL APPROACH**

**Finding:** In all domestic violence and disturbance study cases, the suspects were armed or had access to a firearm before the peace officer made the initial contact.

**Recommendation:** Officers should understand the increased dangers involved in handling domestic violence and disturbance cases. Basic tactics need to be reinforced. Officers should approach these types of calls as they would any crime in progress call.

## PART III:

### HIGH RISK CALLS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS

There has been a sharp reduction in the number of officers killed in cases where peace officers knew when responding to the call that they were facing an armed and dangerous suspect. On the other hand, special operations (undercover operations, warrant team services, etc.) continue to be one of the most hazardous type of law enforcement activity.

### CRIMES IN PROGRESS

#### Guideline #1 - TRAINING

**Finding(s):** Improvements in training and the application of proven tactics and techniques has resulted in fewer officer deaths when responding to known high risk situations. However, criminals are reacting to law enforcement tactics with counter-measures of their own to negate the effectiveness of the law enforcement response. These counter-measures include:

- ♦ monitoring law enforcement radio frequencies;
- ♦ using portable communication (radios, cellular phones, etc.) to maintain contact with each other during the commission of a crime;
- ♦ multiple suspects in differing roles (entry, "lay off," surveillance, transportation, etc.);
- ♦ suspects arming themselves with multiple and more sophisticated weapons such as high capacity handguns and assault rifles, tactical shotguns, submachine guns, etc.;
- ♦ suspects utilizing body armor for protection;
- ♦ suspects using distraction techniques such as reporting false calls at other locations;
- ♦ suspects using unreported stolen vehicles to commit the crime and quickly transferring to safe vehicles.



**Recommendation:** Although fewer officers have been killed or seriously injured when responding to and handling crimes in progress, continual evaluation of law enforcement tactics and frequent recurrent training are critical in overcoming complacency and minimizing the number of officers injured or killed.

#### **Guideline #2 - HIGH RISK CRIME RESPONSES**

**Finding:** The following proven tactics were **not** utilized or were contributing factors in the murder of two peace officers during crimes in progress:

- ♦ waiting for backup officers to arrive;
- ♦ proper positioning of patrol vehicles and officers;
- ♦ deployment of officers through planning, teamwork and effective communication;
- ♦ use of cover/concealment;
- ♦ containment of the scene;
- ♦ safe apprehension of the suspect(s).

**Recommendation:** Every peace officer needs to recognize the importance of utilizing proven officer safety tactics when responding to in-progress and serious crime calls.

#### **Guideline #3 - MENTAL PREPARATION**

**Finding:** There was one study incident where an officer pulled in front of a robbery in progress. He was murdered by one of the fleeing suspects. It appeared the officer made the assumption that the call was a false alarm.

**Recommendation:** Be aware of complacency and/or overconfidence. Mental preparedness can help a peace officer avoid unnecessary dangers. The importance of using proper tactics and techniques in handling crimes in progress can not be overstated. Continued training, mental awareness, teamwork, proper planning, effective communication and preparing for a "worst case scenario," can reduce the inherent risks involved with crimes in progress.

## BUILDING SEARCH/ENTRY

Even with superior training, proper equipment, and proven tactics, an entry team must remain flexible and responsive to the changing risk environment. Team safety, officer injury, shots fired, and/or a barricaded suspect can dictate a change in tactics from dynamic to deliberate, or necessitate a tactical retreat. In any law enforcement operation, the single most important consideration must be officer safety.

### Guideline #4 - SPECIAL OPERATIONS ARE DANGEROUS

**Finding:** Four peace officers were murdered by armed suspects during special operations such as warrant services, undercover drug operations, and building entry team searches from 1990-93. These types of operations are inherently dangerous.

**Recommendation:** Each officer must acknowledge that evidence preservation, recovery of narcotics, and/or the arrest of a suspect should never take priority over officer safety.

### Guideline #5 - TACTICAL TEAM TRAINING

**Finding:** In all building entry case studies, the variance from the basic tactics plan contributed to the officer's death.

Utilization of a standing, well trained, properly equipped tactical team provides an additional margin of safety in carrying out high risk building entries. There is an increased likelihood of officer injury or death resulting from the employment of ill equipped and/or poorly trained entry teams in these high risk situations.

**Recommendation:** Tactical teams need to have:

- ♦ frequent team training in high risk tactics;
- ♦ proper evaluation and utilization of each team member's capabilities and an overall evaluation of the team's capabilities;
- ♦ proper utilization of appropriate tactical equipment;
- ♦ accurate intelligence information and an improved assessment process of potential threats;
- ♦ tactical rehearsals to increase the likelihood of a successful resolution;
- ♦ a heightened level of officer safety awareness.

## PART IV: OFF-DUTY INCIDENTS

Three officers were murdered in off-duty incidents during 1990-93. The following are considerations when faced with a potential law enforcement contact while off-duty.

### Guideline #1 - GOOD JUDGMENT

**Finding:** Of the three off-duty peace officer murders, two cases involved peace officers who made the decision to take action.

**Recommendation:** Good judgment is critical to the outcome of an off-duty incident. Unless there is no other option, the best plan is to be a cooperative victim and a good witness.

### Guideline #2 - WEIGH POTENTIAL FOR INJURIES

**Finding:** Two of the three off-duty incidents involved family members and friends.

**Recommendation:** Peace officers need to weigh the potential of injury or death to others when facing a potential law enforcement contact off-duty.

- ♦ Educate loved ones regarding the dangers of law enforcement contacts when off-duty.
- ♦ Develop an off-duty response plan.

Officers need to be reminded that many times the choice to become involved in an off-duty incident places not only the officer against the suspect(s), but the officer, his/her loved ones, and others against the suspect(s). Officers should be advised that they may be placing others who may be with them at the time of the off-duty incident in the same danger as themselves.

### **Guideline #3 - EQUIPMENT**

Peace officers who are forced to take action or choose to become involved in an off-duty law enforcement incident need to realize that they will most likely take action without most of the following:

- ♦ Equipment: body armor/vest, primary handgun, extra ammunition, cuffs, flashlight, and impact weapons;
- ♦ Communication abilities to call in the incident or to request back up;
- ♦ The ability to properly identify oneself to suspects, citizens and other law enforcement officers.

### **Guideline #4 - CONTACT THE LOCAL AGENCY**

**Recommendation:** A peace officer should contact the local law enforcement agency any time there is an off-duty action taken.

## Final Thoughts

California peace officers face countless citizen contacts every day. Most contacts are "routine," some are hazardous, and a few are potentially deadly. Unfortunately, officers can't always determine which type of contact they are about to face. California peace officers must use all senses, knowledge, and training every minute of every day. The single most important consideration must be officer safety.

Sgt. John Kramer  
Fairfield Police Department  
(1980-86 Project Manager)