

POLICE INTERVENTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY



Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D

The National Police Association's free Law Enforcement education series is designed for home school, classroom, or independent learning. As part of our nonprofit educational mission, it prepares you for careers in public safety. This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#)

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Business Relies on Quality Policing

Dateline Portland, August 2021: “Portland business owners frustrated by vandalism, property crime as police say they lack resources” A reporter for Fox 12 news in Portland quotes a Portland Police Bureau lieutenant lamenting that PPB officers barely have time to respond to crimes against persons, and rarely have time to investigate property crimes. Reporter Audrey Weil investigated concerns about the lack of police response to criminal activity that is costing businesses in both property repairs and lost customers who may fear going out at night. When Weil related to the lieutenant that business owners are frustrated that vandals are getting away with their crimes, the official said the police are frustrated about it, too.

One business owner, whose restaurant window was shattered by an angry customer, spent an hour and a half trying to get through to the police on their non-emergency number. She also showed the reporter a surveillance video of a man smashing a car window with a skateboard. Getting something smashed used to be unusual, she said, and now it’s almost a daily occurrence.

Lt. Greg Pashley is quoted in Weil’s report as asking citizens to continue to report property crimes in order to show the need for increased staffing and funding. Pashley recognizes that a loss of trust in the police can result in persons giving up on reporting crime, resulting in a false statistical picture showing a decrease in crime. Crime statistics are almost entirely comprised of crimes reported to the police, so the “shadow” crime rate can

be much higher in areas where citizens lose faith in law enforcement.

Dateline Minneapolis, August 2021: Business owner Ken Sherman says “This city is run by gangs. The only thing a bad guy is afraid of is a badder guy.” Sherman was interviewed by a local business oriented publication Twin Cities Business reporter Adam Platt. Sherman has run several successful businesses in the region for decades. He had already sold property in areas of town where he was losing employees who were simply afraid to be in the parking lots to get to and from work. Even sensing that the downtown area was moving in that sad direction, he invested in a restaurant. After George Floyd’s death, things got worse with the absence of police presence. Even off duty police hired as security would do little to intervene. Sherman now employs his own security detail. When people say they should call the cops, the answer is “what cops?”

Dateline Aurora, CO, July 2021: “It’s very worrying’: Aurora business owners concerned with rising violent crime.” Fox31 news reporter Vicente Arenas spoke with caterer Dan Maranya, who stated that “It’s tremendously concerning. It’s very worrying .I started a new business this year, and we regularly visit some of these places that have really bad violence” including a murder in the parking lot of one of their grocery suppliers. Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman is quoted as attributing the crime problem to Aurora police in this Denver area city. Aurora police have been criticized over several high profile incidents.

Dateline San Francisco, July 2021: San Francisco's Organized Shoplifting Surge Prompts Target to Cut Operating Hours. A change in California law and prosecutorial attitudes has resulted not only in Target's retail operation closing down before dark in San Francisco, but major changes in operation by Walgreens as well. Other retailers are closing their stores completely, or simply moving out of California.

The bottom line to all of these stories, which are just the tip of the iceberg from similar events all over the country, is that property crime matters. When the FBI statistics are released every year the headlines are all about the most serious offenses. These are known as Part 1 crimes and include murder, aggravated assault, sexual assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, arson, and motor vehicle theft. Part 2 crimes garner fewer headlines and include lesser violent crimes and a host of other misdemeanors, including the property crimes noted in this article's accounts.

Property crime affects consumers, homeowners, and businesses. The cost of goods increases with business losses and increased insurance costs. Offenders are emboldened and increase the frequency and severity of their crimes. Many property offenders are violent offenders also. Solving property crime often solves violent crime, which means that property crime that goes without a police response or reasonable investigation is a lost opportunity to stop violence. Politicians and activists who impede law enforcement by resistance, punishment, and cutting off funds are hurting businesses and individuals, and not just their wallets.

Can Local Law Enforcement Prevent Another 9-11?

CNN analyst Philip Mudd was working for the CIA and assigned to the White House when hijacked commercial airliners were driven from the sky into American's minds forever. Watching as the reports unfolded, Mudd remembers his observation repeated by almost every American: "I knew the world would change".

Eventually moving from the CIA to the FBI as an analyst, he noted the difference between dealing with foreign suspects and domestic. Although never in local law enforcement, he recognizes the critical role they play in preventing violence. Speaking to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Mudd is most worried about "a thousand tiny fires" from self-inspired home grown extremists bent on violence against American institutions.

Mudd learned in thousands of daily briefings that there was a transition from the threat of Al Qaeda and ISIS, that as those groups weakened, there was a rise of homegrown threats of violence from individuals radicalized through social media. Ethical and legal questions arise in gathering information about with whom an individual associates and what they say they espouse. Mudd reminded his audience that it is not illegal to be an extremist or radical. What matters is behavior that indicates a plan to use violence.

He reiterated the need to abide by the slogan "see something, say something" in gathering information

about potential attacks. Officers and investigators need to see if financing is realistically available for an attack, whether there is access to weaponry to carry out an attack, and what means of communication is being used. Understanding the communication patterns can uncover any network of persons who are plotting violence.

Mudd used the analogy of cutting off the arm of a starfish compared to destroying a spider web. The starfish will grow a new arm, a destroyed web leaves nothing. As an example, he stated that although getting Bin Laden was important, the real success was in identifying the network and dismantling it. The same is true for drug cartels and gangs, except terrorism is driven by idealism from the top down.

The home grown terrorist stereotyped by the loner clacking away on the internet in the basement will have an emotional attachment to a movement, whereas members of a terrorist group are motivated by idealism and can articulate why they believe what they do that motivates them. The home-grown potential attacker won't be able to clearly explain their beliefs, only that they have the right or obligation to use violence to "take back the country".

In line with the priority to be concerned about behavior rather than speech or group memberships, Mudd advises law enforcement, parents, and school officials to watch for behavior changes in a young persons speech, changes in friends, changes in the way they dress, and increased isolation. Getting small bits of information over time is as important as getting the

name of a ringleader. Like a kaleidoscope, Mudd said by way of metaphor, the picture comes into focus not so much from the big pieces of information but the small grains of sand.

Imminent threats that come to light must obviously be a priority in fighting terror threat. Finding out where operational, rather than ideological, leadership is will better enable law enforcement to intercept a threat. The goal is to stop people from engaging in violent behavior. The message law enforcement must send to the public and political leadership is that their efforts are to stop violent acts, not suppressing adverse political opinion and free speech. Political leaders must be guiding the law enforcement efforts with clear messages of expectation.

Messages from political leaders, Mudd passionately emphasized, is as important as anything in preventing violence. The message should be loud and frequent that violence is not acceptable in a democracy that ensures the right to vote, speak out, and run for public office. He hopes that young people are inspired to citizenship, but fears a lack of consistent ennobling rhetoric from leadership. A plot can be crushed quickly but changing the narrative that people are hearing takes much longer. He worries about messaging that says violence is acceptable.

A message I heard is that the message from political and social leadership to prevent violent uprisings and attacks must be that violence against the government is not acceptable as the first means of making change. Those who speak against law enforcement, and those

who damage law and order by silence or damning by faint praise, are perpetuating the sparks for a thousand tiny fires.

Other Duties as Assigned

Rescuing animals in distress is for animal control. Running into burning buildings is for the fire service. Emergency medical services render aid to the injured. Social workers deal with mental health crises. Jumping into the water is for rescue divers. Even with these vital specialties, the reality is that a police officer is the first one on the scene of trouble in matters beyond the duty to prevent crime and apprehend criminals.

Here are a few recent examples of officers going above and beyond to serve.

In Lawrence, Kansas a man was poised to jump off a bridge over the Kansas River to his intended death. A Lawrence police officer, keeping his distance as promised to the man, kept a compassionate conversation going until a second officer was able to pull the man back from the brink.

In Wisconsin, a bobcat didn't quite make it across the road when hit by a vehicle. The frightened cat was not killed but got caught up inside the grill of the car. Portage County Sheriff's deputies were called and requested assistance from a conservation warden. The cat hissed and swatted at the officer but was eventually freed for observation, then returned to the wild.

An Anne Arundel County police officer was driving through a residential neighborhood in Pasadena, Maryland when he spotted flames and smoke coming from a residence. He pounded on the door and yelled for

the occupants. The homeowner and his dogs were able to get out safely as the flames engulfed the home. In San Antonio officers broke down an apartment door as a fire raced through the complex to rescue a man still inside. The man suffered from smoke inhalation and was treated at the scene.

In Dallas, TX an officer was waiting in the drive-through lane at a McDonald's when he was approached by a frantic woman asking for medical help for her child. The officer rushed over to the child and found the child unresponsive and not breathing. The officer began rescue efforts and was able to get the child's breathing restored. The child was hospitalized for observation but suffered no known health issues from the event.

Alligator sightings in Florida are not unusual, but when a nine-foot gator roamed the streets of Tampa during mating season, several callers notified the police. By the time of their arrival, the creature was angry, growling, and whipping its tail. Officers managed to rope the gator, then one sat on it and the other grabbed its head and sealed its mouth with duct tape, then threw a towel over its eyes to help calm it. Wildlife officers relocated the lusty reptile to a more suitable habitat.

University of New Orleans Police rescued a child from a burning vehicle after the driver wrecked while trying to elude the officers. The vehicle was engulfed in flames when it was located by the UNO police. They were able to pull the child from the backseat and the driver and child were transported to a hospital.

A Weld County, Colorado deputy responded to a fearful disabled veteran who had broken an arm in a fall on her icy driveway. The woman was fearful of going outside and wanted to know if someone could help her. The deputy heard some details of the call and, while en route, stopped at a convenience store to buy some ice-melting salt. The deputy salted the slick driveway and alleviated the resident's fears. "This guy saved my life," the veteran said. "He made me feel safe. He went beyond his job duties."

Water rescues are not unusual before professionally equipped divers arrive. Miami-Dade officers saved a boy trapped in a submerged vehicle while investigating a crash near one of the city's canals. The three-year-old was trapped in his car seat as his father pled for help. Officers made several dives before finally being able to free the child and perform life-saving efforts.

Stories of officers changing flat tires, buying shoes for the homeless, getting a meal or hotel for a stranded motorist, or simply sitting with a heartbroken child for a while pop up in the news or social media from time to time. These are not isolated events. Police officers with compassion, courage, and training step in to prevent all manner of tragedy more frequently than gets attention. Ready to serve, these officers know that their job description always bears the asterisk of "other duties as assigned".

Cops and Fire

There is a usually good-natured rivalry between police officers and firefighters. Police officers say they are glad to serve because firefighters need heroes to look up to. They say that kids dressed as firefighters on Halloween can't go to the door until a kid dressed as a police officer makes sure the scene is safe. All firefighters want to be cops, they just can't pass the police exam. And so it goes.

Despite the jealousy that police might feel for firefighters sleeping, watching television, and cooking at the station, and their adulation from the public, when it comes to converging on a deadly fire, the red and blue are on the same team. Of course, firefighters claim that the police show up because they secretly want to be firefighters!

There are often times when police officers discover a fire in progress or are the first officials on a scene. The mobility of officers on patrol compared to the response of fire equipment from the fire station, no matter how efficient and prompt, transporting a crew, then setting up at the scene takes time. Despite warnings and even some department rules prohibiting it, officers have often entered into the literal hot zone in attempts to rescue persons in flaming structures and vehicles. In that thin zone between courage and foolishness, officers rush in without protective gear unable to bear just standing by waiting for those properly equipped even if just minutes away.

Such a dramatic scene unfolded in July of this year in Old Bridge, New Jersey, when Police Officers Matthew Jaikissoon and Sara Micich arrived at the scene of a fire where black smoke billowed from the door and window of an apartment. The 911 call reported that there were children in the residence. A man on the front lawn was yelling “baby, baby!” and the officers charged into the structure, forced to exit within a minute as smoke made the interior invisible and choked the officers. Outside they immediately saw a man in a bedroom window holding the body of a child. Officer Jaikissoon pulled the child from the window as Officer Vinny Galgano began CPR.

As firefighters arrived on the scene, police officer Nicholas Petrone, having once entered the building and driven out, borrowed a respirator to re-enter the building to carry a female resident to safety. Assistant Fire Chief Vincent Lovallo was able to rescue a baby from the residence and two other children escaped on their own.

Police in Kenosha, Wisconsin in April of this year attempted to stop a vehicle whose flat tire was degraded to the point that the wheel was causing sparks on the pavement. The driver did not stop for the officer’s emergency equipment and the sparks caused the vehicle, a minivan, to catch fire. Still in motion, the vehicle became engulfed in flames, eventually stopping. The Kenosha police officer pulled a disoriented 84-year-old man from the blazing vehicle.

Kenosha seemed to be a hot spot in the summer of 2023, pun intended, as a county deputy responded to a

report of a vehicle crashing into a building. The call was dispatched to the Kenosha City police, but sheriff's Deputy Joseph Thomas happened to be close to the scene as dispatch reported that a person was trapped in the vehicle which was on fire. Thomas forced entry into the burning vehicle, cut the driver's seatbelt, and pulled the driver from the car, then warned the residents of the home. The driver was charged with suspicion of operating while intoxicated.

Another Wisconsin deputy, this time in Washington County in October of this year, responded to a collision in which the female driver reported being trapped in her car with her three children. On arrival, the deputy noticed that the engine compartment of the vehicle was on fire. After unsuccessfully attempting to extinguish the fire, the deputy broke out windows in the car to rescue the occupants. The children were uninjured, and the mother suffered only minor scratches.

Without question, the fire service is the best answer for putting the wet stuff on the red stuff, but their colleagues in blue are willing to step in when seconds count.

Stopping Crazy Drivers

It is a decision every patrol officer must eventually make – to chase or not to chase. A 4,000-pound missile of iron traveling at high speed is a deadly weapon from a millisecond of a poor decision or plain bad luck. If an officer pursues, will a resulting crash be blamed on the police or the wanton, reckless driver? If the officer decides it is wisest not to pursue, will a resulting crash be blamed on the police for failure to intervene?

Most police agencies have severely restricted their pursuit policies because of the inherent dangers of chases. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the danger to the public and the justification of police pursuits, the threat of lawsuits and injury to officers and civilians is beyond the tolerance of risk managers.

In a 2007 matter, the court heard a case involving a reckless, speeding driver pursued by a Georgia deputy sheriff who crashed resulting in severe injury to the suspect driver. The pursuit was stopped by the deputy using a maneuver often referred to as a PIT (Precision Immobilization Technique) or T.V.I. (Tactical Vehicle Intervention). This technique involves the officer choosing a moment when they can use their own car to tap the rear corner of the suspect vehicle, causing it to spin out and stop. It is not always successful and can result in the suspect vehicle's occupants being injured.

The officer must determine if the risk of the PIT, or any other intervention, is less than the potential risk of the driver continuing their dangerous behavior. Other

interventions include firearms, T.D.D., roadblocks, and developing technologies.

In searching for answers to safer termination of pursuits, around 1996 the use of T.D.D. (tire deflation device) began to gain wide acceptance. Noting that officers had been struck by vehicles while deploying T.D.D., the National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Fund through its partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducted a ten-year study of officer safety regarding T.D.D. deployment. The study found that 42 line-of-duty deaths were directly linked to the spike strips between 1996 and 2022.

The devices consist of hollow spikes in a configuration that can be tossed across the roadway before the suspect vehicle passes. The spikes embed in the pursued vehicle's tires and rapidly deflate them. The T.D.D. must be withdrawn before other pursuing law enforcement vehicles pass over them.

Rapid deflation can cause a vehicle to lose control. Suspects sometimes choose to run over the deploying officer to avoid the strips. Sometimes uninvolved drivers are unwittingly confused by the operation and cause injury to the officer. Ideally, the officer is able to deploy the device from a protected position, but that isn't always possible.

New devices such as a magnetic dart with a tracking device can be launched from a patrol car and used to locate the suspect vehicle without being in immediate pursuit. Another device is designed to be lowered from

a patrol car against the rear wheels of a suspect vehicle which gets scooped into netting and slowed. All of these techniques require proximity to the suspect vehicle, increasing the likelihood of a collision.

OnStar, a remote service offered on some car models, will cooperate with law enforcement to cause a confirmed stolen vehicle being pursued to slow to a stop to enable police to apprehend the driver. Other technologies may someday routinely allow police to activate a remote kill switch to stop fleeing drivers, but privacy concerns have outweighed the law enforcement advantages even though most vehicles over the last decade come equipped with the ability to be remotely shut off.

Ultimately, the decision whether to pursue is on par with a decision to use deadly force. The officer must, in the heat of the moment, make countless calculations about speed, traffic density, trajectory, and the possibility of success. The officer must use some everyday knowledge of physics, psychology, and a bit of fortune-telling to make the call.

The Challenge of Domestic Violence Calls

On July 21st of this year Eastland County, Texas, Sheriff's Office Deputy Sheriff David Bosecker, a 21-year law enforcement veteran, was shot and killed while responding to a domestic violence call. As he arrived on the scene a male subject opened fire on him, fatally wounding him. Other responding officers took the subject into custody. The man was charged with capital murder.

Ask any experienced police officer if they would rather go to a bar fight or a family disturbance. They'll take the bar fight every time. In the most recent homicide statistics from the FBI, there were over 2000 family-related murders in 2019, among the killings in which the suspect and their relationship to the victim was known. When other interpersonal relationships are counted, the percentage of persons murdered by those whom they know is over half of all homicides.

Family violence can include abuse and neglect, sexual assault, and violence for intimidation. The definition differs from state to state. Some define domestic violence (DV) only when the parties are in an intimate relationship, others include any family member. Some laws require an assault or credible threat, others include kicking the dog or smashing the computer. If children are present during an act of DV, the perpetrator could be charged with child abuse.

Many states have mandatory arrest laws that require a police officer to take custody of a suspected DV

offender if there is probable cause. Other states favor arrest but do not require it, many still leave the decision to the responding officer's individual discretion. Research initially indicated that arrested perpetrators had lower rates of repeat offending, but those assumptions have been challenged by subsequent research.

One of the challenges of mandatory arrest is that victims often don't want their partner in jail, they just want to assault or abuse to stop. Calling 911 can ignite increased violence in a perpetrator, and having a wage earner in jail for a few days can cramp the budget, not to mention other legal costs. It is not unusual for DV victims to return to the perpetrator hoping that things will change.

The danger to officers on DV calls is well established. In 2022 there were at least 21 officers murdered in a DV-related call, along with thousands injured or assaulted. Rather than being hailed as a rescuer officers are often assaulted by a victim or other family member of the perpetrator.

A court may, on request or automatically after an arrest, issue a restraining order (RO) for the safety of the victim. In some jurisdictions, the orders are always mutual meaning they apply to the victim as well as the perpetrator, while some order only the perpetrator to stay away from the victim. The orders are usually temporary (TRO) for a period of time until a hearing can be held during which each party can make a case for keeping or dropping the RO. In some states, a restrained

person can be barred from their own home, restricted from their banking assets, and denied child custody.

ROs can be just a piece of paper to a restrained person with no concern for the consequences of violating, especially if they expect to go to prison anyway, expect to die, or think they will not be caught. A US Department of Justice (DOJ) victims of DV reported that the act of applying for a civil protection order was associated with helping participants to improve their sense of well-being. In the initial interviews, 72 percent of participants reported that their lives had improved. During follow-up interviews, the proportion reporting life improvement increased to 85 percent, more than 90 percent reported feeling better about themselves, and 80 percent felt safer.

Perpetrators of DV may come from any social strata from the wealthy and influential to the poor, but, according to the DOJ, 65 percent had an arrest history. Researchers noted that many of these men appeared to be career criminals, with more than half having four or more arrests. Charges included violent crimes, drug- and alcohol-related crimes, and property, traffic, and miscellaneous offenses. Of the 129 abusers with any history of violent crime, 43 percent had 3 or more prior arrests for violent crimes other than domestic violence. The implication for police officers' safety on DV calls is that there is a significant possibility that they will be dealing with a repeat offender who has plenty of motive for not going to jail.

When dispatch radios a family disturbance in progress, officers know that this call could be the most challenging of the shift, or a career.

Cops Stopping Suicides

Dealing with a suicidal person is one of the most challenging jobs facing police officers. Even though many agencies are trying to relieve law enforcement from mental health calls, the frequently dangerous circumstances of these calls put police on the front lines of intervention. The need for compassion for a person in a suicidal crisis coexists with the extreme danger of persons in possession of weapons. A person bent on self-harm may or may not be willing to harm others in the process.

There is one completed suicide every 11 minutes in the US. It is one of the leading causes of death and has shown a 30% increase from 2000-2020. Most of the public's concern seems to be aimed at teen suicide, but the highest risk group is age 75 and older. The second highest age group at risk is males aged 25-34. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-14. Males make up 80% of completed suicides. For every completed suicide there are 3 hospitalizations for self-harm, 8 emergency room visits, and 38 self-reported attempts. The number of deaths that appear to be accidental but are intentional overdoses, car crashes, or firearms discharges is unknown.

While the value of human life is beyond definition, those who calculate the economics of death say that the cost of suicide is in the billions when medical costs and loss of productivity are tabulated. Most suicides are isolated affairs where the person completes the fatal act with no audience. The ones that are witnessed or self-reported

come to the attention of first responders, sometimes in the hope of rescue, sometimes in the hope that a police officer will complete the fatal act for them in what is known as suicide by cop, victim precipitated homicide, or law enforcement assisted suicide.

A National Institutes of Health study indicates that 13% of officer use of fatal deadly force (and 11% of non-deadly shootings) are of subjects who present a lethal threat with the intent of being shot and killed by police. On the positive side, hundreds of lives have been saved by the skill and compassion of police officers.

Firearms are the most common method of suicide, followed by hanging/suffocation, then poisoning (by overdose or toxic gas). Other methods include cutting injuries, exposure to vehicle or train traffic, and jumping from heights. There are suicide “hotspots” that develop a reputation for being a suicide site and attract suicidal persons. Studies show that when a hotspot is barricaded or made inaccessible, nearby sites that are just as lethal tend to go unused.

The Golden Gate Bridge spanning the San Francisco Bay as it joins the Pacific Ocean is a notorious hotspot. Since its first suicide jumper just months after its 1937 opening, an estimated 1800 people have attempted to die, with perhaps only 35 known to have survived (all of whom report regretting the act). The time between the decision to consummate the fatal act and the act itself can be as quick as 5-10 minutes. Slowing down the behavior can be life-saving, as one retired California State Highway Patrol Sargent can testify.

Kevin Briggs has been known as the Guardian of the Golden Gate Bridge, credited with successfully interceding in 200 attempts during his assignment to the bridge from 1994 to his retirement in 2013. Briggs typically begins a conversation with someone he believes is posturing for a jump, asking them how they are doing and what their plans are for the next day. He asks if they are there to hurt themselves, then gives them an invitation to make plans for them to do something together the next day and then decide whether to return or not.

Despite the critics' fears that police officers make things worse with mental health cases, there are hundreds of quiet victories every day where compassionate but cautious police officers and other first responders make a difference between a moment of life and the decision to die. A critical moment that can end with a hug or handshake, and another chance at life.

Intoxicated Drivers Increasing Death and Injury

Before the hour hand on your clock moves from one number to the next, three or four traffic fatalities will have happened somewhere in the U.S. One in three of those will be due to an impaired driver. After a historic downward trend, deadly car crashes are on the increase.

Distracted driving (i.e. cell phones) kills nearly 10 people every day, but the main killer is still the intoxicated driver. The increasing use of marijuana and pharmaceuticals are competing with alcohol – or combining with alcohol – to kill many of the expected 32,000 drivers and passengers in crashes this year.

Ideally, drivers would self-regulate and simply not drive if they are possibly impaired. There are charts and graphs that attempt to calculate the type of beverage, whether the drinking was on an empty stomach or not, and the time it takes to clear the alcohol from the body. There are even some devices that are available to consumers to measure alcohol in their system using a test of breath. The problem with all of these measures is that individual metabolism varies widely, and breath samples taken without appropriate safeguards can be unreliable.

The national standard to be considered “legally drunk” is a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08%. At this level, the law presumes that the amount of alcohol in the system results in impaired driving. Many motorists do not realize that lesser levels may not be a presumption

of impairment, but in connection with other factors such as involvement in an accident can result in a drinking-related charge. In other words, the court will presume you are too intoxicated to drive at .08 but can make a case that you are impaired at lower levels.

In addition to the variety of factors that impact BAC such as stomach contents, health, weight, fatigue, emotional condition, time of day, and type of beverage to name just a few, can create impairment with “a couple of beers” within an hour before driving. The use of over-the-counter and prescription medication is an often overlooked cause of impaired judgment when driving. Consumers ignore or downplay the warning on medicine labels, and law enforcement may be unable to detect or measure a particular medication or dosage to prove legal impairment.

Combining medication with alcohol can be lethal, even if separately they seem benign. The irony of alcohol and other medications is that one of the first effects is a reduction in the functioning of the part of the brain that would normally allow the person the realization that they are impaired. There are still people who claim to be better drivers after a few drinks!

Adding to the lethal mix is the increasing presence of marijuana users behind the wheel. Whether legal or not and whether recreational or medicinal, marijuana is a mind-altering substance regardless of the increasing public opinion that it is benign and safe. Whereas alcohol is water soluble and processed in the digestive system and liver to be metabolized to near zero BAC before the next day (although alcohol can be detected in

the urine for up to five days), the THC in marijuana is fat-soluble and therefore remains in the body much longer and can accumulate with each use and can be detectable for up to three months in the urine.

When traffic safety is discussed, the number of dead is always a frightening statistic. Add to that the 7,500 injured every day and multiple billions – yes billions – of dollars in crash-related costs, and it becomes clear that keeping the motoring public safe from impaired drivers is vital. Other driving behavior such as inattention as already mentioned, and speeding which contributes to about 30 fatalities daily, make a compelling case for traffic law enforcement. Misplaced efforts to reduce traffic enforcement by defunding law enforcement or restricting traffic stops and other enforcement efforts can only allow more careless and lethal driving to create bloodshed on the roadways.

Dealing With Explosives

There are two things cops know about bombs. One is that they don't look like an oversized red firecracker. The other is that they don't come attached to a digital countdown clock.

The insidious truth about criminal explosive devices is that they can look like anything. Ted Kaczynski, better known as the infamous Unabomber, killed three and injured nearly two dozen others over twenty years. His creativity is a lesson in the ways that explosives can be hard to identify. One of his bombs was inside a book, another in a 3-ring binder, one was in brown paper wrapped with string, another disguised as a present, and yet another was packaged and left in a parking lot with a return address on it of the intended victim. When a well-meaning person found the package, they delivered it to the person at the return address, which was exactly what the devious Kaczynski intended. In that case, the intended victim reported the package as suspicious and avoided injury, although a security officer to whom it was given was injured in the resulting explosion.

Explosive devices, like the notorious roadside IEDs (improvised explosive devices) of recent wars, are generally simple and constructed for death and injury. Placement of the devices is part of the bomber's plan to increase the damage when detonated.

IEDs or HMEs (homemade explosives) can be set off by a wireless signal, a trip wire, by pressure, and even the old-fashioned lit fuse. They can complicate already

tense situations by being planted in advance of other criminal activity. As a distraction device, they can create noise, fire, and damage to draw attention away from another crime in progress.

In one event this writer experienced, a campus police officer noticed a suspicious bottle of liquid in the parking lot near a football stadium. At the time, there had been a rash of dry ice bombs, which use dry ice placed in plastic bottles, used as pranks or back-yard projects. The device had caused hand and eye injuries. There is also always a risk of bleach or urine in devices to make any injuries worse. Because of the timing and placement of the device which was discovered just as a football game crowd was converging on the parking lot, the area was cordoned off, the fire department was called, and additional assisting law enforcement units arrived.

Was the device intended to injure spectators? Was it a distraction so that a location on the other side of the community could be robbed? Was the device designed to test the response time and capability of emergency services to help in planning a more substantial attack? Was there more than one device? The public was inconvenienced and there was criticism that law enforcement overreacted for such a device, but the potential consequences were too great to treat lightly.

A common misstep in responding to bomb threats in schools and businesses is immediate evacuation. The preferred protocol is to do an assessment of the threat and have those familiar with the premises do a visual search for suspicious devices. This is not because we can

assume that a threat is not real, but because the dangers of evacuation are real. Most bombs that do get placed in schools or businesses are not such that major building collapse will occur, such as the case with the Murrah building at the site of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Most devices are anti-personnel, meaning that they are designed to injure human bodies, not structures. Therefore, protecting in place will most likely provide the protection of walls in classrooms and offices even if a device were to go off.

Since people are often the target of HMEs, they might be placed in locations where evacuees from the building would go, such as in the parking lot or next to exits where they could more easily be placed than inside the building where they might be detected. What if the Murrah building had been evacuated into the parking lot where the massive explosion actually occurred?

Officers responding to drug houses, illegal outdoor marijuana grows, barricaded suspect situations, and school shootings can encounter explosive devices. The risk of so-called secondary explosions may be timed or remotely detonated after the initial emergency response for the specific purpose of harming first responders.

The Aurora, CO theatre shooter had his apartment booby-trapped to harm police officers searching his home after his inevitable arrest or death. In addition to the attack with firearms, the Columbine High School shooters used handheld thrown HMEs and had pre-planted propane bombs disguised in backpacks and gym bags to increase the lethality and impact of their attack.

The presence or suspected presence of explosive devices used by criminals adds complexity and danger to many crime scenes. It is another challenge to the skill and courage of our first responders.

The Barricaded Suspect

In San Jose, California police shot a man armed with a machete who had barricaded himself in a home with others including 2 children. In Oklahoma City police responded to a barricaded murder suspect but were able to take the person into custody after breaching the door. Once inside, police discovered a body inside the residence. A North Little Rock, Arkansas police responded to a disturbance involving a weapon. On arrival they found an injured party and that the suspect had barricaded himself inside the residence. He was arrested several hours later.

Deputies with the Gallatin County, Montana Sheriff's Department responded to a report of a man threatening people with a gun and a report of gunshots. The officers arrived at a mobile home park to look for the suspect, they heard a challenge from inside a mobile home telling officers to leave the area. Deputies report seeing a man holding what appeared to be a gun in the window of the home, then saw a laser light such as those used in sights for guns aimed at them. The suspect eventually agreed to meet with the officers but had to make dinner first.

A suspect in Valinda, CA was found dead by suicide after firing more than 100 rounds at deputies. Neighbors had to be evacuated during the standoff which involved police negotiators, mental health workers, and SWAT officers. Tactical vehicles were deployed to shield neighboring houses from gunfire. The operation lasted from Friday to Sunday.

Those are just a few of the examples retrieved from an internet search of “barricaded suspect” within the last month. Like a grown-up version of tag, those sought by police often retreat to a home base where they feel safe. Some think that the Constitutional right to be free from government intrusion into their homes means that police cannot touch them once they secrete themselves behind the walls of a residence. Most of the time, they are correct.

In 1604 Sir Edward Coke made the famous statement “the house of every one is to him as his Castle and Fortress as well for defence against injury and violence, as for his repose” which has been shortened to “a man’s home is his castle” and articulated the Castle Doctrine which affirmed the right of privacy and protection in one’s home.

Police operations must give due consideration to the principal even in tense situations like a barricaded suspect. In general, police may enter a residence without a search warrant if a person who resides there is the subject of an arrest warrant and is known to be present, or if there are emergency circumstances such as where entry must occur or lives might be lost.

Besides persons who are wanted or who have fled into their homes after committing crimes, the police are often called to do a “welfare check” on persons whose relatives or friends are concerned about. These are voluntary contacts that often result in finding that the person of concern is fine, but also can result in finding a person deceased, injured or ill, or mentally unstable. In one study of the use of deadly force involving a mentally

ill person conducted in a major city, it was found that 95% of the shootings occurred on the person's own property or home territory. Knocking on a door can be deadly.

Whenever possible, even after an emergency entry, law enforcement should seek a warrant. For example if on the property because of a fire, they cannot remain on the property indefinitely without a warrant once the emergency circumstances are over. Suicidal barricaded persons where no one else's life is at risk pose a special concern. The natural inclination of police officers, who value life and have a sense of community caretaking, is to stop the person from harming themselves. There have been successful lawsuits and even criminal charges against police officers who, in their attempt to intervene with a suicidal or mentally ill person, entered their home and injured or killed the subject when they resisted being taken into protective custody.

If the person has committed no other crime, is not in possession of weapons unlawfully, and is no immediate risk to others, police must decide to disengage until a lawful condition is met to make entry into the home or take the person into custody. While there are more instances of law enforcement partnering with mental health or social work co-responders, these personnel are also limited in what they can do to intervene.

Negotiation is a preferred method of dealing with a barricaded person, but that method depends entirely on the barricaded person's willingness and ability to talk. When others may be inside the walls of the barricaded person, every second that ticks by can lead to success or

deadly consequences. Police officers face the danger of attacks both physical and legal when making the complex decision to force entry into a man's castle.

About The Author



This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.