

# DANGERS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT



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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## The High Cost of Policing Riots

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As Portland continues to simmer, Minneapolis braced for chaos, and U.S. Capitol Police reconstructs the failures of the January 6th attack, the reality of preparing for worst-case scenarios can be measured in taxpayer dollars.

Crowd control is not to stop large groups from gathering, but. A law enforcement presence is for the safety of the crowd, whether it is an entertainment event or a protest. But when a crowd is agitated, the results can be disastrous and even deadly. Protests aren't the only crowds where violence and vandalism can simmer. Sporting events, concerts, and parades can become riotous.

For agencies with enough officers available to respond to a crowd, the right protective equipment and response gear is essential. The first hurdle is personnel. Even in a large department, the number of available officers on a shift is often far less than the public realizes. If there is advance anticipation of a potential disturbance, police leaders can plan for staffing, but those plans can fall apart very quickly. Coordination of mutual aid contingencies, planning assignments, and reshuffling daily duty rosters. Overtime and leave cancelations will create a payroll and staffing debt that will create future workforce shortages or budget-busting payouts.

A police presence, even if not enough to handle a major collapse of order, is intended to give a signal that there

may be consequences to those who further foment a crowd. Officers, however, can be quickly overwhelmed. Management of violent or increasingly agitated crowds involves strategies to break the crowd into smaller groups and diverting them, remove primary agitators, and stop advancement into areas vulnerable to damage, looting, or occupation. These can be high-value commercial areas or government offices with symbolic value. This takes coordination and staffing at strategic locations, made complex by changing conditions.

As additional help can hopefully create a line of some depth to resist hostile advancing crowds. Despite media narratives of spontaneous riots, and peaceful protests turning violent because of police presence, many unruly crowds are planned and involve trained agitators and often paid operatives. Weapons sneaked into the crowd or hidden in advance in the area can include bricks, bottles of frozen water, containers of bleach or urine, pepper spray.

The reason that police officers wear helmets, facemasks, gasmasks, shin guards, and carry shields is the same reason firefighters wear helmets and bunker gear – to protect them from dangerous elements they expect in their workplace. Obtaining and stockpiling this equipment is expensive and, as many agencies have discovered over the past year, the equipment can degrade. Out-of-date munitions, brittle shields, and crumbling padding on shin guards were discovered as gear was brought out of storage. Training on many of these items was rusty as well.

Another important component of responding to violent outbreaks is the armored vehicle. Among the critics who decry protective gear for officers because it looks too military, the armored vehicles are a prime target. These rescue and response vehicles are irreplaceable for moving assets into areas under attack. They are particularly essential for rescuing persons inside an area actively under attack.

Many agencies use military surplus armored vehicles because of the low cost of acquisition. These are an alternative to the much better commercially available response vehicles. The vehicles that are custom-made for law enforcement are very expensive. Most are obtained by grant funding. Both the federal grants and military surplus vehicles are targeted for removal by the current administration. The Capitol Police and other responding agencies were criticized for their poor planning and failure to use the very assets that anti-police antagonists want to be removed from police use.

Barricades are used to limit crowd movements. In reality, unless they are immovable objects like permanent fencing with razor wire, or concrete barriers, the portable gates, and wooden or plastic sawhorse barriers are only psychological boundaries to persons willing to respect them. The Capitol attack is an example of how easily overcome are these barriers, even when staffed by officers.

As repugnant as the concrete and razor wire are in a free country, the real necessity lies in the hearts of the citizenry to decide whether to respect due process or mob rule. No one likes the image of a phalanx of armed

government agents in robotic-looking gear on the streets of America. If we are to be a nation of laws and mutual respect, we can leave all of that gear behind. If we are going to refuse to allow mobs to rule, then defending the innocent from their terror will require the expense, training, and maintenance of the tools for doing so. It also requires the fortitude of leaders to support that defense, rather than merely castigating failures and deflecting blame from themselves.



## The Naked Truth About the Unclothed

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Ever since Adam and Eve looked down and realized they were naked and that was somehow not quite right, most of humanity has insisted on covering up. When law enforcement officers encounter a nude individual, the presumption is that there is something very wrong.

How much clothing is the subject of cultural debate, but pure nakedness is generally universally deemed a legitimate taboo. Americans criticize the cultures requiring the covering of the body and the face, such as the Islamic burqa, but in the history of Jewish, Christian, and Hindu, head coverings from hats to hijabs have been symbols of modesty.

Anyone who perused National Geographic magazines in 7th grade knows that covering the genitals is typical but covering the female breast is optional in a lot of places. (I read the NG for the articles, just FYI). Europe's nude beaches and bare breasts and buttocks on the telly are often tittered about by travelers from North America. Tourists are either embarrassed or join in with the natives, in either case often becoming red in the cheeks.

A federal judge in Colorado ruled in a 2017 case that police could no longer enforce ordinances that banned the baring of breasts. The case came from the city of Ft. Collins which defended their ordinance but lost in what became known as the "free the nipple" case, despite concerns about the possibility of exposure to children, at places of worship, and in businesses.

When it comes to American law enforcement, police are often called to reports of indecent exposure. These may be as innocent as a person relieving themselves somewhere before their bowel or bladder erupts in an emergency. One prosecutor in a college town stopped prosecuting students for urinating in the alley in a section of downtown with many bars because he did not want an indecent exposure charge on their criminal record. Police started citing the offenders for littering instead.

But other cases of indecent exposure, for the male population at least, are indicators of illegal sexual behavior that can become dangerous. Sex offenders are predatory. Their behavior typically increases in frequency and severity as they learn what boundaries they can push. If they can leave their zipper down while walking around a store and, if caught, just act embarrassed and apologize, they have learned something about what they can get away with. Campus police are alert for “stack peepers” who stalk targets in college libraries, peeking through bookshelves to take photographs or masturbate.

While not all minor sex offenses lead to sexual assault, most rapists started with these “testing the waters” behaviors, learning how to disguise their behavior, justify it, or get away with it.

A major concern with those who disrobe in public in erratic ways is their mental status. Especially in younger persons, removing clothing may indicate a developmental delay or regressive behavior inconsistent with their chronological age such as autism

where the awareness of the social taboo of nudism is not present.

Elderly persons with Alzheimer's may disrobe because they are uncomfortable and can't communicate that to caregivers, due to hallucinations that it's time for bed or that bugs are on them, or to fondle themselves while unaware of their surroundings. Disrobing or sexually acting out in public can also be a manifestation of schizophrenia seen in a small minority of those diagnosed. Drug use, often accompanied by mental illness in addition to substance abuse disorder, can result in hallucinations and erratic public behavior.

While most disrobing due to mental illness is not committed by dangerously violent persons, their state of mind may make it impossible for them to recognize and comply with law enforcement officers. If such a person needs to be redirected or taken into protective custody, they may fight out of confusion or panic, creating a real challenge for officers to get them to help without getting themselves or the citizen hurt. In Chicago, a police officer is now recovering from being run over by a woman laying naked in the street whom the officer had stopped to check on. The woman stole the officer's patrol car and struck the officer while fleeing.

The most dangerous naked person that attracts the attention of law enforcement is the person in a condition of Excited Delirium. Although some researchers deny that such a thing exists, police officers, ambulance personnel, and hospital emergency departments will certainly attest to its reality. The

condition, usually associated with illegal substances but may be a metabolic disorder. It manifests with erratic behavior, high body temperature (thus the disrobing), and loss of pain response. The superhuman capacity to resist police and emergency medical workers who must restrain the patient in order to get immediate medical help to avoid a fatal result comes from a sense of panic.

Officers often have to get multiple helpers to restrain the person for emergency medical treatment and are thus accused of excessive force by bystanders ignorant of the fact that the patient's life is at stake without advanced medical treatment. What may cause the average citizen a chuckle when seeing a naked man directing traffic on the roadway could present a life-threatening situation to the naked person and their rescuers.

## Hidden Dangers of “Routine” Calls

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A walk through the archives of the [Officer Down Memorial Page](#) shows the unpredictability of lethal encounters. Officers responding to routine calls for service can find their lives at risk over the most unexpected calls. Although every officer is trained to expect the unexpected and be ready to respond to any situation, it is only human to have a higher level of caution responding to a robbery call than assisting a person with a flat tire. Both can be lethal.

A 40-year law enforcement veteran and highly respected Sheriff, [John Williams](#), often got personal calls from constituents who knew and trusted him. He got such a call from a convenience store owner in Alabama. The owner wanted a gathering of people moved from the parking lot for playing loud music. While the Sheriff was talking to the owner of a truck that had been playing loud music, a male shot him dead.

Arizona Trooper [James Edenhofer](#) responded to a report of a person throwing things at cars on Interstate 10. The subject was located and Edenhofer and assisting officers placed him under arrest. The suspect violently resisted and was able to use one of the officers' duty weapons to murder the trooper.

Suspicious persons calls are another routine type of call that is often unfounded. Municipal police officer [Darrin Reed](#) of Arizona responded to such a call at a local motel. A man fled upon Reed's arrival which led to a foot chase

during which the suspect produced a handgun and killed the officer.

Lt. [Patrick Weatherford](#) of Arkansas took another routine report of a non-violent property crime. A vehicle had been broken into in broad daylight. While checking out the general area, Weatherford observed a male flee. He and two other officers followed the man who turned and fired a weapon, killing the Lieutenant.

California Police Officer [Dan Walters](#) was checking on another officer who was checking on a vehicle blocking a roadway. A man standing near the vehicle pulled a firearm and shot Walters causing him to fall into traffic resulting in further injuries. Walters remained paralyzed for over 15 years, succumbing to his injuries, dying in 2020.

Police Officer [Natalie Corona](#) was shot and killed after responding to a report of a three-car vehicle crash. A man on a bicycle rode up to the scene, shot Officer Corona multiple times, then fled and later committed suicide.

Duty at festivals and concerts can be mostly a matter of remaining visible and making friendly contacts with those enjoying the day. At a jazz festival in Denver, Police Officer [Celena Hollis](#) saw a fight and was shot dead as she attempted to intervene.

It is a myth that criminals return to the scene of their crimes, but an arson suspect did just that. Deputy [Brent Holloway](#) was assigned to guard a crime scene in rural Colorado where a suspicious fire had burned a home.

The perpetrator returned to the scene, snuck up on the deputy and shot him in the back of the head. The killer stole Holloway's firearm and committed suicide with it.

These brief accounts of officer deaths do not tell the full story of the risks of routine activities of police officers. Officers who are wounded but survive, and officers who are able to counter the attack and stop the assault before being physically injured seldom make news. An example is from a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri where Officer Police Officer Brendan McGahan stopped to assist a stranded motorist near Interstate 44. When McGahan approached the passenger side of the vehicle he was met with gunshots from inside the car. McGahan survived the attack and was able to return fire, killing his attacker.

We are often casual about the saying that officers put their lives on the line every day. But many times we think that this means they have the potential of being called to a dramatic and dangerous event that will make the news. The reality is that even the simplest call for service, and the everyday act of kindness in assisting others, can erupt into nightmarish violence. Everyday, the risk is very real.

## Watch Their Hands, Your Partner's Six and Your Language

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A Cincinnati Police Officer was recently fired for using the N-word on duty and recorded on her body-worn camera in a moment of frustration. She may appeal the decision, but in these volatile times, the firing is likely to be upheld.

A recent article in Sports Illustrated reports that NBA basketball players are being more frequently fined for using foul language on the court, especially when directed toward the crowd. The article quotes research that indicates a lot of people are not bothered by coarse language, but the league wants to create a better image that includes more gentlemanly conduct by its players.

Racial epithets and insults are a special category of bad language. These derogatory remarks used in a way that uses race to assign malignant characteristics to a person are hurtful and incite anger or even rage. Ordinary swearing is scaled well below racial slurs on the offense scale according to Professor Ben Bergen, professor of cognitive science at UC San Diego. In Bergen's survey of students – typically younger, more liberal, and less religious than the general population – the “F” word may not even break the top ten of bad words and the “S” word ranks at the bottom of the top fifty, if that.

Other research and commentary claim that cursing can increase the effectiveness of an argument, reduce feelings of pain, and that even chimpanzees do it. Mark Twain opined that Americans were the best at it. “When



it comes down to pure ornamental cursing, the native American is gifted above the sons of men.” One count claims that Americans say 80-90 curse words a day. The emotional relief reportedly provided by swearing even has a scientific word: Lalochezia.

Should police officers be allowed the benefits of lalochezia? After all, words have meaning to the hearer. A citizen hearing a police officer swear, especially at another citizen, appears to take offense. The citizen may suffer a moral injury, cognitive dissonance, and disappointment that the perception held by most that police officers should be better than that. With the arrival of nearly constant video surveillance of police officers as they go through their day, the pressure of always having to say the right thing and perform flawlessly is an impossible burden.

But words do have meaning. When directed at another person in anger or frustration the hearer, especially in an already tense situation, can feel deeply insulted. They can also become very aware of the seriousness of the officer. They might even feel relieved that the officer is human and relates to them at a basic level.

Sensibilities have changed since the movie censors allowed the word damn to be in *Gone With the Wind*. There are no boundaries in today’s television entertainment that includes streaming of non-network media, and fewer even in the archaic concept of prime time designed to the suitability of the whole family watching together.

One of the ways that police officers can maintain the aura of professionalism is still the absence of routine foul language. Most police agencies take complaints of cursing by officers with a degree of seriousness and maintain a policy, whether formal or by generally accepted practice, of disciplining officers for their speech as well as their conduct with the public. It is often argued by officers that swearing has a certain utility, but it is still something that juries may not want to hear. One could argue that the loud and stern command to an arrestee to get on the ground is made no more effective by saying get on the F-ing ground, but it does seem to punctuate the command.

One could hardly commend the use of swearing. Discipline in moments of anger and frustration is a hallmark of self-control that should be practiced by a police officer. It is a good practice to rehearse silence or less offensive language to be used when ordinary citizens would show no such restraint. Racial terms and disrespect have no place in the officer's communication toolbox. But a little grace to officers who are in tense moments and let slip some salty language is not an unreasonable ask of the public and supervisors. As Mark Twain advised, "When angry count four; when very angry, swear."

## Police in the Living Room – Dealing with Domestic Violence Calls

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It's the call most law enforcement officers hate the most. It has killed three officers thus far in 2023. Police officers dealing with violence in the family are confronting volatile emotions, unknown psychodynamics, the presence of weapons, uncooperative victims, and various cultural norms that complicate the response to domestic violence (DV). Most police officers have a story of a victim who turns on the officer, posts bail for their abuser demands the dropping of charges, or returns to the attacker.

About a third of the states in the US have mandatory arrest laws removing discretion from police officers in handling DV calls. The impetus for requiring arrests comes from a famous Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment that was conducted in the early 1980s. In the experiment, police officers were randomly assigned a disposition on selected (misdemeanor) assaults that involved a spouse or partner. Officers were to make a custodial arrest, provide on-scene counseling, or require separation for at least eight hours. Based on follow-up interviews, the findings of the 330 DV calls in the experiment indicated that an arrest was most likely to prevent another reported incident within six months of the police contact.

The study influenced legislation and policy by encouraging more directed law enforcement intervention in DV calls. However, the results of that study have not been replicated to validate the result.

With greater political pressure to take action on crimes against women, legislatures passed mandatory arrest laws and mandated law enforcement training then largely moved on to other hot issues thinking they'd solved the problem.

By sheer numbers alone, the problem of domestic violence demands attention. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), an agency of the federal government, approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men 18 years of age or older experience domestic violence (DV) affecting as many as one in four women and one in nine men as victims of domestic violence. Annually, domestic violence is responsible for over 1500 deaths in the United States.

The human toll is immeasurable, but research cited by the NIH shows that children who are victims or witness domestic and family violence may believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve a conflict. Males who learn that females are not equally respected are more likely to abuse females in adulthood. Females who witness domestic violence as children are more likely to be victimized by their spouses. While females are often the victim of domestic violence, gender roles can be reversed. Substance abuse and other family crimes like elder abuse and child abuse are associated with DV.

Intervention by arrest may have the advantage of eventual court-ordered anger management therapy, substance abuse treatment, and restraining order protections, but can add major stresses to a family unit. When a victim calls 911 for police intervention, they mainly want the immediate abuse to stop. The level of

commitment and resources that a victim must devote to following through with making formal statements, testifying at hearings, and possibly seeking alternate living arrangements discourages many from pursuing prosecution.

Even where prosecutors carry through with charges where there is a non-cooperative victim, the victim can suffer from the after-effects of police intervention. Mandatory jail for a breadwinner until a hearing is held may mean loss of a day's pay or even loss of a job. Costs for an attorney or compliance with court-ordered counseling or treatment can be a financial burden. An abuser who returns to the home may make it very clear that calling the police again will be met with threats, violence, or abandonment.

The answer to the problem of domestic violence isn't simple and no one thinks it is. This is one of those areas where the police have been the answer – at least temporarily – and are expected to be a major part of dealing with DV. It also holds a compelling argument for social workers to be responders to family disputes. The problem with that, as with all proposals to send non-law enforcement to incidents, is the boiling pot of violence so associated with family disturbance calls. Hundreds of officers have been killed or injured at such calls, ranking the DV response as more dangerous than an armed robbery in progress call.

For now, it falls on the police officer to bring peace to a volatile, complex, and dangerous situation.

## Age in Policing Matters

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Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, so quotes the Good Book. In the world of police work, the man or woman who lays down their life for their community is likely to be in the prime of their life.

The average age of an officer who dies in the line of duty is 41, with the most frequent age group being the 30s. This is in no way to discount the deaths of older officers, some of whom are still serving in their 40th year of law enforcement. But, as in war, it is the young who are placed most at risk.

Bearing in mind that murders of officers can take many forms, we will use murder by firearm for our comparison by age. Of the 35 officers killed by gunfire in 2023 at the time of this writing, at least 21 were under age 40 and nearly half under 30. They include 33-year-old Kevin Cram, 29-year-old Jonah Oswald, 23-year-old Jake Wallin, 26-year-old Tye Browne, 29-year-old Jay Rougeau, 31-year-old Chris Wagner, 37-year-old Cory Maynard, 35-year-old Caleb Conley, 39-year-old Josh Clouse, 27-year-old Bobby Shisler, 29-year-old Kaitie Leising, 24-year-old Aréanah M. Preston, 34-year-old Trevor Abney, 23-year-old Timothy Scheel, 32-year-old Emily Ann Breidenbach, 34-year-old Mason Griffith, 32-year-old Andres M. Vasquez Lasso, 31-year-old Christopher D. Fitzgerald, 32-year-old Sean L. Sluganski, 24-year-old Gonzalo Carrasco, Jr., and 30-year-old Darnell Calhoun.

That list of young officers includes military veterans, diverse cultural backgrounds, men and women. Some had achieved promotions to rank with over a decade of service. The shortest tenure of a murdered officer was five days. These lost heroes leave at least fifteen spouses or fiancés, and at least thirty children including at least three unborn at the time of their father's death.

Younger officers may share traits that make them more likely to succumb to the fatal hazards of the job. They may be more likely to engage more quickly with a situation and be more active than a more seasoned officer. They may be more likely to be assigned to uniformed patrol which is the most frequent assignment of murdered officers. Perhaps they are less aware of their mortality than the officer with retirement in sight. They are more likely to have the midnight and weekend shifts are more dangerous and less desirable to most older officers who have enough seniority to choose better working hours. Officers with seniority may have the opportunity to get a job behind the desk, or at least off of routine patrol where the greater risk of death and injury exists.

None of this commentary should take away from the dedication and motivation held by most veteran officers. Policing is a terror on the body, though. Police officers' expected lifespan is 57 years compared to 69 for the average citizen. Police officers have higher rates of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and obesity than the general population. The average age of a police officer suffering a heart attack is 46 compared to the civilian population at 65 years old.

Among the general population, a heart attack suffered between the ages of 55-59 is fatal to 1.5% while a heart attack among police officers in the same age range is lethal more than 56% of the time. These health concerns along with cumulative injury and disability reduce the number of persons over 40 in the law enforcement workforce. In addition, there are incentives for officers to retire before they get to AARP age with retirement benefits historically somewhat more generous than other occupations.

Even active older officers will likely confess that police work is a young person's game. Veteran officers are vital for the training and experience they offer to younger officers. The main challenge is enabling young officers to become old ones.



## The Taser – A Dangerous Threat to Officers

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There are two items that were added to my duty belt during my career for which I was very grateful. One was pepper spray, the other was a TASER. Before that, the only tools I had were my revolver, my nightstick, tear gas spray, and my hands.

There are limitations with every weapon that is designed to protect the officer and bystanders from a resisting suspect, and to coerce compliance when someone would rather fight than lawfully submit to an arrest as the statutes require. The firearm obviously is the most lethal and reserved for those times when a suspect presents an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

The baton (nightstick) can be used to strike locations on the body that can stun and temporarily slow or disable an adversary's movements, or cause them to drop a weapon. A baton can also be used to lock up joints for escorting an arrestee more safely using the added leverage from the device. Modern versions of the baton are expandable to fit more easily on the tool belt and have the added benefit of a dramatic presentation that gives a clear warning to the suspect that they have chosen to elevate the situation.

The limits of the baton are that an officer has to be dangerously close to a resisting subject in order to apply the techniques of control effectively. Another is that the officer must be as careful as possible in the middle of a scuffle to avoid doing serious injury to the neck, head,

and joints, which are “red zones” in training that the officer is taught are not appropriate targets. Another risk, as with all of the officer’s equipment, is that if the baton is taken from the officer, the offender will have no such restraint in using it to assault and escape.

The old tear gas, before pepper spray came around, popularly called Mace after a brand name that became a generic term, could be effective if used in the right circumstances. Officers had to know which way the wind was blowing to avoid getting sprayed themselves and had to be aware of the location of other officers who might get doused. Tear gas is made of small particulates suspended in a liquid under pressure. For the substance to be effective, the spray was aimed at the chest so that the irritant would waft its way up into the mouth, nose, and eyes as an irritant that caused pain and distraction.

While it often took the fight out of a person, the dried remains of the irritant easily contaminated everyone in the area and anyone who had subsequent contact with the arrested person against whom it had been applied. Nearly every officer ended up teary-eyed to some degree. It also took a few moments for its effects to be felt by a suspect, particularly one less sensitive to pain in the middle of the adrenaline rush of fighting. That gave the suspect too much time to keep resisting.

When OC spray (oleoresin capsicum), better known as pepper spray from the main irritating ingredient, came along after the FBI studied and approved it, there were several advantages. One is that OC is not just an irritant but constricts the airway and eyes creating a virtually instant focus of the arrestee on breathing and pain.

Many suspects have continued to fight through an OC application, but less effectively. OC, unlike tear gas, is applied directly to the face and is stickier and less likely to spread to bystanders and other officers, although it often affects the users as well.

Of course, officers must retain possession and not let any of their weapons, including the less lethal ones, be used against them. This is especially true of the TASER.

Electronic Control Weapons (ECW), the market for which is dominated by the name brand TASER, operates by administering a surge of electric current that is the same frequency as the human nervous system. This essentially locks the body's muscles, causing the person to become rigid and immobile. Although many believe that the effect of an ECW is to cause pain and therefore compel compliance, pain is merely a byproduct of the ECW.

The trained ECW user knows that the barbed wires that are shot from the often pistol-shaped weapon must have a certain spread from one another for an effective shock to be delivered. This means that very close shots can be ineffective and merely cause pain rather than immobilizing a suspect and that heavy clothing can interfere with the barbs. The professional user also fastidiously avoids the head and neck as targets, limits the length of the shock application, gets control of the suspect, and renders aid quickly.

Police have been criticized for using the firearm as a defense against a person who has gained control or is attempting to gain control of the officer's TASER,

reasoning that it isn't a fair fight to use lethal force against a tool that is specifically designed to be less lethal. The same arguments can be made for a suspect's control of a baton or OC. One of the reasons officers are trained to maintain distance during a contact is to increase their ability to keep control of the equipment on their person.

But if a resisting suspect gains control of an ECW, the officer is at great risk. The criminal will give no consideration to the restraint that a trained user must use. For an officer to be immobilized, blinded, or given painful shocks, puts them in a deadly confrontation of vulnerability where deadly force remains their only option for survival. Critics ignore the fact that once immobilized or seriously distracted, an officer can end up losing their other weapons and equipment which can also be used against them or other citizens.

## Anatomy of an Ambush

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Recent statistics indicate that ambushes against police officers have increased dramatically (over 90% in one study) in the past few years. Shootings of all kinds of police are up at least 20% this year and non-fatal injuries are not often included in such reports.

Police officers are well aware of the dangers when responding to calls involving fights and weapons. They know the statistical dangers of making car stops, responding to assist other officers calling for backup, and crimes in progress. Increasingly they have to maintain the same posture of vigilance just sitting in their patrol cars, responding to fires, and grabbing a bite to eat.

Ambushes are either an entrapment or spontaneous. Entrapment ambushes are planned by the perpetrator to lure officers into a surprise attack. Spontaneous ambushes are crimes of opportunity where a person has a predisposition and the means to attack a police officer who has the misfortune of encountering a killer with no warning.

In one of many cases where police were fired upon while in their cars a Federal Way, Washington officer in a marked patrol car was fired on from another vehicle while stopped at a traffic signal in September of 2021.

In February, Phoenix police were at the scene of a domestic disturbance and were invited into the apartment when suddenly shot by the resident who had

shot a female. At one point an infant was placed outside the doorway of an apartment. When officers approached to rescue the child from the incident, shots again rang out. Nine officers were hurt in the incident.

The summer months have been dangerous this year.

In an attempt to serve a protection order on a domestic violence suspect in eastern Kentucky in June. Three Kentucky law enforcement officers were killed with the suspect fired from inside the home.

In June, two police officers from El Monte, a suburb of Los Angeles, were shot and killed while responding to a motel disturbance. The attacker fired on officers from a balcony into the parking lot as the officers approached.

Also in June, a Naperville Police officer was on a traffic stop when a man unrelated to the contact approached the officer to attack him with a hatchet. Fortunately, in this case, the man was shot by the officer before he was able to complete his attempted murder.

In July of this year, Rochester New York officers were fired on while sitting in an unmarked car in a plainclothes assignment. "Officer Mazurkiewicz and his partner, Officer Sino Seng, were attacked in a cowardly ambush and fell victim to the very violence in our community that we are trying to combat", said Rochester Police Chief David Smith. Mazurkiewicz died in the attack.

In Chicago in July, officers were getting ready to exit an elevator to check on a disturbance call and were

immediately met by gunfire. One Chicago police officer was critically wounded. Also in July a Detroit officer was shot and killed through an upstairs window while arriving at a call before he even got out of his patrol car.

Three officers were shot responding to a call at a residence in HALTOM CITY, Texas in July. While still down the block approaching the home of a man suspected of shooting a neighbor, the suspect fired, spraying bullets in the officers' direction and leaving bullet holes in homes and cars in the area.

Other infamous cases include four officers murdered while meeting over paperwork at a restaurant in Lakewood, Washington in 2009. In 2014 NYPD officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos were sitting in the patrol car when a man who had traveled to the city with the specific intent of killing police officers stepped up to the passenger side window and began shooting. Five Dallas police officers were murdered and nine others were injured at a protest march where officers were providing protection for the event.

The reality for today's law enforcement officers is that there are few safe places. In a patrol car, stopping for coffee, helping change a motorist's flat tire, and even in the driveways of their own homes and parking lots of their police station have all been opportunities for killers to attempt to kill. A constant alert is the only path to survival.

## The Resistance Factor

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Cops have always had the “do you know who I am” folks, the “I pay your salary” folks, and the “why aren’t you out arresting real criminals” folks. They’ve always had the runners, the fighters, and the too drunk to know what they’re even doing. There are also the extremists who do not recognize civil authority, who feel no need for driver’s licenses or plates, will issue “warrants” for officers’ arrests, and some will talk only to the High Sheriff.

There is no veteran officer who has seen the frequency of resistance and arguing so high in comparison to years past. It is not only mentally exhausting to officers, but non-compliance (required by law, by the way) ratchets up the tension in a contact. Bystanders are also more likely to get involved with police contacts. These curbside critics only add danger to the situation.

A hallmark of these encounters is the amazing professional control that officers maintain. In Phoenix, a suspect in the wounding of a Phoenix police officer by gunfire was arrested after a stand-off. Despite expectations from police antagonists who think cops look for opportunities to shoot people, this violent suspect, and would-be cop killer was taken into custody without being shot by police.

Officers go to great lengths to avoid lethal force. A Glendale, Arizona officer deployed a K9 to take down a suicidal subject who had shot at officers. The suspect, in this case, was shot and killed by police, but only after



fleeing and the police officers' attempt to apprehend him using non-lethal means, and after he shot the K9 handler.

Wichita, Kansas Officer Kyle Mellard was attempting to arrest a man hold up in a shed, urging the man to surrender peacefully as recorded on officers' body-worn cameras. Mellard's patience was rewarded by the suspect shooting the officer, who is still recovering from his wounds to his face and legs. The suspect was killed by police after he had already fired 18 rifle rounds at officers.

Chapin, Illinois Chief of Police Steven Helmich responded to assist in a lengthy police chase that ended in the suspect crashing his car. On arrival "I got out of my car and gave (the suspect) some commands to exit his vehicle. He came out and started shooting." "I got out of my car and gave (Payne) some commands to exit his vehicle. He came out and started shooting." The suspect was lawfully apprehended and lived to appear in court for attempted murder.

A careful and factual review of the vast majority of deadly force incidents involving police will show that suspects made the choices that led to the exercise of force by officers. Violent criminals must assume not only the risk but the responsibility of being held accountable for their actions. Even law-abiding citizens, in situations where the police have information that leads them to reasonably believe a person must be taken into custody, have a legal and common-sense responsibility to submit to the lawful commands of police officers.

If a person flees from police by vehicle or on foot, officers know that other citizens are at risk. The police will pursue, where the law and policy allow, to safely apprehend a fleeing suspect who presents a danger to the public. Even a cursory look at the percentage of arrests that are made with no force, much less lethal force, gives a clear picture that officers use many tactics to avoid an officer-involved shooting response even in hazardous conditions.

Even in mental health cases, where police have been criticized for using force instead of de-escalation, research shows that the use of force against the mentally ill by police is actually less than use of force within mental health facilities by staff!

There is no “shoot first, ask questions later” culture in law enforcement, only in the misperceptions of uninformed police critics.

## It's Not Just Guns and Knives

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We know how many officers are killed in the line of duty but we don't really know how many are assaulted and wounded in other ways. The image of police officers being wounded and assaulted is that they are dodging bullets, knives, and fists. That is still true, but recent headlines show that cop haters are limitless in their methods of harassing and hurting police officers.

In Philadelphia, officers were investigating an abandoned dirt bike at a gas station, preparing to impound it. Surveillance video from the business shows a marked patrol car being surrounded by ATVs and dirt bikes circling the officers, throwing bricks and bottles. The patrol car's windshield was broken and the car was dented by repeated kicks. The chaos was not unique as reports of hordes of ATVs and dirt bikes running traffic lights and driving on sidewalks.

Attacks that use vehicles as weapons are typically reported only when an officer fires shots at the tons of metal speeding toward them and gets criticized for doing so. In New York City, mirroring national trends of an increase in violent carjackings, an officer approached a vehicle she suspected of being stolen. The driver accelerated away, mowing down the officer as the stolen vehicle's occupants escaped. The stolen car was crashed not far away but the occupants fled and were at large at the time of the report. The officer suffered wounds to her leg and was listed in stable condition.

A South Fulton, Georgia officer near Atlanta responded to a report of a street takeover (where drag racers or partiers claim a section of street and block traffic, often with property damage). The call was a report of vehicles doing donuts, driving recklessly, and doing stunts in the early hours of the morning. As the officer arrived, at least one person jumped onto the hood of the patrol car while another began beating the side of the car with a speed limit sign. Fireworks were shot toward the officer as well. No officers were hurt and they managed to arrest ten persons and impound their vehicles.

In Longmeadow, Massachusetts, the Hampden County Sheriff's office arrived to serve an eviction notice on Alton King Jr at his \$1.5 million residence. Mr. King was not at home, but Rorie Woods, age 55, drove up in her van which held several hives of bees. Woods, clad in her beekeeping suit, intentionally opened the hives, shaking doors and agitating the bees which naturally began attacking officers, some of whom were allergic. Wood resisted arrest but was finally taken into custody. When told that some of the officers stung were allergic to bee stings, her response was "Good." Woods faces felony assault charges. One official was hospitalized and several others suffered painful stings.

A Gainesville, Georgia officer approached a suspect wanted for eluding officers in a previous pursuit. The suspect, Alexander Perez, was putting gas in a stolen car when the officer approached and asked him for identification. Perez then fled while the gas nozzle was still in the car, causing the nozzle and hose to "clothesline" the officer, striking him on the neck. Officers were able to pursue Perez who was arrested

along with a passenger after crashing the car and was in possession of methamphetamine and synthetic marijuana.

These incidents all occurred within a few weeks in one month. Throughout an officer's life of service, they face threats from baseball bats, concrete blocks, boards, being pushed from high ground, garden tools, explosives, hot beverages, burning cigarettes, arrows, and anything else within a fighter's reach. Even childish weapons like a handful of sand can temporarily disable an officer and put them at risk. Minor injuries can accumulate over the years to become chronically painful and disabling. It's bad enough that law enforcement officers have to avoid the knife and gun club, they have to realize they are never far from a weapon that can be used against them.

## About The Author

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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.