

Preventing The 10 Deadly Errors

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often include officers drawn from different backgrounds. For example, those with military or firearms experience can conduct weapon inspections. Officers with legal expertise can monitor, interpret, and present recent court decisions. Those with first-aid knowledge can review proper first-responder techniques. Senior officers and tactical team members can share their experience on related matters. If everyone briefly speaks on their areas of expertise once or twice a month, all officers will benefit.

2) IMPROPER SEARCH AND USE OF HANDCUFFS

Immediately upon reviewing this deadly error, officers should note that the steps are out of order. Officers always should handcuff first, then search.

April 1975: Deadly Error #2?

A deputy apprehended a young man for burglarizing a service station and placed him in the patrol unit. At this point, the male produced a .22-caliber handgun. During an ensuing struggle, the subject obtained the deputy's .38-caliber service weapon and forced the deputy to drive the vehicle. After a short distance, the male allegedly shot the deputy in the chest and head with the deputy's service weapon. The subject fled the scene in the patrol vehicle. He was taken into custody later, found guilty of murder, and received a life sentence.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Law Enforcement Officers Killed Summary, 1975 (Washington, DC, 1976).

Handcuff Position

Prior to patrol, officers should place their handcuffs in an accessible position on the duty belt. Most use handcuff holders positioned on their support-side hip, which requires them to twist to open the case and remove the handcuffs. This movement, often done while trying to maintain a hold on a suspect, puts officers off-balance and makes them susceptible to being knocked over.

A better position for the handcuffs may be hanging from

the duty belt with a leather strap on the officer's strong side just in front of the firearm, thereby eliminating any interference with the weapon. Officers can access them easily by pulling down on the snap. They never have to shift their bodies and can keep constant, direct contact with the suspect. The leather strap exposes the handcuffs to the elements but makes access much quicker and easier. Of course, officers must remember that the handcuffs may bounce and cause noise, a severe disadvantage when searching for a hidden suspect.

Officers should carry a handcuff key and have one on the key ring of their patrol units. If they employ flexible cuffs, they should carry a cutting device to remove them when necessary.

Handcuff Maintenance

Maintenance of handcuffs is simple. An occasional squirt of a lubricant from the motor pool applied to the single strand, rivet, ratchet area, locking mechanism, and double-lock hole should keep them functioning properly. Exposure to extreme moisture or heat may compromise handcuffs. Also, officers who store their handcuffs near their lower back (or any other position where pressure is applied) may find that the double strands are pushed together and the single strand does not pass through easily.

Handcuff Techniques

Prior to handcuffing (when possible), officers should place subjects on their knees with their ankles crossed and sitting back on their ankles. They should issue these commands from a distance and not approach until the individual complies. Failure to obey should heighten the officer's concern. It is better for the officer to determine compliance from a distance, rather than after making physical contact. The subject in the kneeling position should minimize the risk of assault, including reverse head butts and kicks. However, officers always should have backup when making arrests.

Officers should apply handcuffs behind offenders' backs with their palms open and facing out. In addition, officers always should double lock the handcuffs.⁵

Search Strategies

Officers tend to mentally let down after applying handcuffs. This would rarely happen if they knew the number of assaults that subjects have launched at this point. Motivated suspects train for these encounters. Some repeat offenders store handcuff keys in the small of their

backs, making them accessible after being handcuffed. Subjects schooled in martial arts are just as dangerous with their feet as others are with their hands. Drug-addled suspects can use any available body part to attack a relaxed officer. Relating such incidents to officers during roll call can remind them to always conduct a complete, intrusive search from a position of tactical advantage on all arrested, handcuffed suspects.

Many handcuffed subjects have numerous weapons, including concealed ones and parts of the body (e.g., head butts, body blocks, knees, and feet) at their disposal. In addition, officers must not forget the transmission of bodily fluids. To mitigate this threat, they should conduct the search from the rear with the offender kneeling.

While officers may perform a search in many different ways, they should use a systematic and complete method. Logically, they will start the search in the area immediately accessible to the suspect's hands—the lower back. Officers should check this location not only for weapons but also for handcuff keys or any small metal item that the subject may employ to pick the lock. They should not run their hands along the belt line but, rather, lift the shirt to visually inspect it. Searching officers never should thrust their hands into an area that they cannot visually check first. From a kneeling position, the next most accessible area for a suspect is the ankle and lower leg, a common place for holsters and socks that can hold any type of contraband.

After searching kneeling suspects, officers should have them stand up and again check the lower back area, shaking the pants to see if anything falls out. They should search parts of the body previously inaccessible, including the groin. If two officers are present, both should conduct separate searches prior to placing the suspect in the patrol vehicle.

Finally, officers must overcome any aversion to searching subjects arrested by other officers. This occurs most often when the delivering officer is senior to the receiving one or from another agency. The receiving officer's search is seen as questioning the delivering officer's ability to do one properly. Rather than offend the delivering officer, the receiving officer accepts the prisoner, assuming that a thorough search has been done. This mind-set, however, must change in today's world of violent criminals bent on causing as much harm to law enforcement officers as possible.

When delivering a suspect to another officer, that officer should request the receiving officer to thoroughly search the suspect. This will remove any discomfort the receiving officer may feel. This search will better serve the delivering officer, the receiving officer, and the public.

3) SLEEPY OR ASLEEP

Most officers lead active lives, including remaining physically fit, raising families, and working other jobs. Certain factors endemic to the profession, such as shift work, unscheduled overtime, and court appearances, may disrupt officers' sleep patterns. A number of different schedules allow for 24-hour coverage. Departments should investigate using a different scheduling grid if it means keeping their officers more alert.

Supervisors should remain approachable concerning matters of rest. They should know the number of hours that their officers devote to outside employment. Officers' motivation to work may prove greater than their ability to do so. An exhausted officer may survive a shift only to crash on the way home. A supervisor who believes an officer is overly tired should reconfigure the schedule to allow the officer to ride with a partner for that night.

Officers themselves must monitor their level of tiredness. They must use their sick time judiciously or only when they cannot properly perform their duties. Otherwise, they will find themselves without any when they are exhausted and need a day off to rest.

4) RELAXING TOO SOON

Relaxing too soon is a learned mental process. No recruit graduates from a police academy doing this. Instead, they first observe this indifference and then slowly learn it from senior officers and the supervisors who allow it to continue until it becomes the culture of the department. Analogous to the smart student in high school who, because of peer pressure, begins to slack off, vigilant young officers are teased by their senior counterparts. Oftentimes, they adopt this posture just to fit in.

This mentality manifests itself in many different ways. Prior to patrol, officers may not inspect their equipment or vehicles. They may quit wearing a bulletproof vest and fail to

GREAT COMEBACKS...

A flight attendant for a major airline watched one day as a passenger with overloaded bags tried to stuff his belongings into the overhead bin of the plane. Finally, she informed him that he would have to check the oversized luggage.

"When I fly other airlines," he said irritably, "I don't have this problem."

The flight attendant smiled and replied, "When you fly other airlines, I don't have this problem either."

Hmmmm...

Little Sammy's first grade class was on a field trip to their local police station where they saw pictures tacked to a big bulletin board.

The headline clearly read, "The 10 Most Wanted."

One of the youngsters pointed to a picture and asked if it really was the photo of a wanted person.

"Yes," said the officer, "the detectives want him very badly."

So Little Sammy asked, while tugging on the man's belt, "Ummm, officer, why didn't you keep him when you took his picture?"



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