

Unit Order 44 - Mentally Ill Suspects

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Station Order is to establish guidelines when dealing with people suspected of being mentally ill.

SCOPE:

This directive applies to all assigned station personnel.

BACKGROUND:

As the City of West Hollywood is an urban area, there are not any statistically evident locations which produce any recognizable frequent requests for service involving the mentally ill. Many of the contacts involving the mentally ill include dealing with the significant number of homeless people who frequent the area. Although the Veterans Administration Hospital is within the station's jurisdiction, the Federal Police handle the mentally ill who become a law enforcement concern there.

Studies support the idea that mentally ill people are no more likely to commit violent acts than anyone else. In fact, there is data that suggests mentally ill people are less likely to commit violence than would be predicted by their general proportion of the population. Our mission is to effectively deal with the person's behaviors, thereby saving lives and creating an environment that facilitates a de-escalation of rage. Traditional methods of aggressing the person with non lethal devices have proven to escalate the problem and lead to a higher frequency of officer involved shootings.

ORDER:

Although every situation cannot be generalized, the object of handling the mentally ill involves first and foremost recognizing an individual as suffering from a mental illness.

Deputies must take control of the situation. It is important to calm the person and de-escalate the situation. You must make a decision, depending on safety considerations, to let the person walk away, or take action. If you feel the need to physically control the person, you should use the least amount of force possible. When safe, first warn the person, i.e., "We're going to physically grab you."

The concept involves avoiding actions which help push the individual to a physical confrontation which may lead to a fatal conclusion. Techniques such as screaming orders or having more than one person at a time communicate with the individual have proven to be ineffective. Deputies should avoid getting too close to the mentally ill person in order to avert a physical situation.

Extraordinary displays of force can stimulate violence rather than defuse it.

Tactics that involve surrounding or cornering a mentally ill person should be avoided. Do not rush the person. Any attempt to force the issue may quickly backfire in the form of violence. In most cases, the mere presence of several deputies will increase the mentally ill person's anxiety level.

The Mental Evaluation Team should be utilized to provide supplemental crisis intervention techniques to

defuse potentially volatile situations. Often, it may be advisable to try unique tactics, based on the particular psychiatric and physical problems with this individual. The tactic of using other deputies to communicate with an uncooperative individual can sometimes resolve a difficult situation.

The training sergeant shall conduct periodic audits to determine the skill level of all personnel trained in dealing with the mentally ill, in addition to the regular certifications in the use of the arwen and the taser.
