

24-02 Backseat Encounters

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

TRAINING BULLETIN

Field Operations Training Unit



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BACKSEAT ENCOUNTERS

The Department has reviewed a series of use-of-force incidents involving uncooperative subjects being detained in the backseat of patrol vehicles. In many of these cases, there were opportunities to use a different approach to help mitigate the need to use force and prevent injuries to our personnel and the subjects being detained.

It is understandable that despite our best efforts to de-escalate and avoid using force, we are sometimes left with no other alternative but to use force to control the situation. However, we should take all steps to avoid using force whenever feasible. As a reminder, Department policy states:

"Whenever feasible, Department members should endeavor to de-escalate confrontations through tactical communication, crisis intervention, advisements, warnings, verbal persuasion, and other common-sense methods (such as utilizing alternative tactics) which can prevent the need to use force or reduce the amount of force, that is required."

Below are some options to consider when dealing with difficult backseat detention incidents that could result in the use of force.

De-escalate: De-escalation is a proven and effective tactic to reduce the likelihood of using force. When feasible, Deputies should implement de-escalation, strategic communication, and utilize time, distance, or other applicable techniques to minimize the necessity for physical force when placing a subject in the rear of the patrol car. This approach also aims to de-escalate situations, reducing the likelihood of resistance, assaults on our personnel, or vehicle damage. When feasible, Deputies should make all efforts to lower the intensity of the situation with the goal of resolving it without having to resort to using force.

- **Seek Supervisor Assistance:** Whenever feasible, Deputies are advised to seek supervisor assistance if it seems probable that force will be required to place a subject in a vehicle or to manage someone already in the backseat.
- **Lock Handcuffs:** Deputies should double-lock the handcuffs on subjects prior to placing them in the backseat of a patrol car. This technique will prevent the handcuffs from ratcheting tighter, thus

minimizing the contact deputies have with the subject once they are secure in the backseat.

- **Secure with Seatbelts:** It is imperative to consistently secure detained individuals with seatbelts in the backseat of the patrol vehicle as required by policy. Deputies must be aware that the back seatbelts are equipped with a ratcheting system, which can be highly effective in preventing suspects from moving around or attempting to kick the doors/windows by lying on their backs. Additionally, a properly seat-belted subject is significantly less likely to pose a threat by assaulting a deputy.
- **Evaluate Leg Restraint:** Deputies are encouraged to evaluate the reasonable application of a leg restraint (hobble), to immobilize the legs of uncooperative or assaultive individuals before putting the person in the backseat. Using a hobble can effectively reduce the risk of subjects kicking deputies or causing damage to patrol car doors or windows. It's essential to emphasize that individuals placed in a hobble must be continually monitored. Moreover, the use of a hobble must strictly adhere to all Department policies and guidelines.
- **Develop a Plan:** Deputies should develop a plan for effectively placing an assaultive or uncooperative subject in the backseat of a patrol vehicle. Similarly, deputies must carefully consider their options for safely extracting an uncooperative or assaultive subject from the vehicle's backseat. A safe option would be to avoid a subject's feet by approaching and controlling them from behind.
- **Using OC Spray:** The use of OC spray in the backseat of a patrol vehicle is not the preferred method for handling uncooperative or assaultive subjects and is generally discouraged. Department cases suggest that deputies typically resort to OC spray in three main scenarios, namely to prevent subjects from kicking windows and doors, spitting on personnel, or kicking deputies when opening the patrol vehicle door. However, relying solely on OC spray in these situations is generally ineffective and often requires additional physical intervention by our personnel to gain control. Instead, we advocate for using alternative techniques, such as prior planning, seatbelt restraint, hobble application, spit mask usage, control holds, and other appropriate methods, which have proven to be more effective in controlling such situations. Deputies should consider these alternatives before resorting to OC spray in the backseat of a patrol vehicle.

While there may be instances where OC spray would be considered reasonable, deputies should exercise restraint and only use it sparingly. Additionally, deputies should be mindful of the need to decontaminate any affected individuals promptly. If OC spray is deployed in the backseat of a patrol vehicle, whenever feasible, the rear windows should be lowered and the vehicles air conditioner should be activated to enhance ventilation.

- **Provide Medical Assistance:** Providing access to fresh air and flushing the face with water is an appropriate immediate response and may prevent the need for additional medical assistance. It is crucial to promptly provide medical assistance if a person requests it, complains of having difficulty breathing, or appears to be in medical distress (e.g., respiratory distress, including gasping, snorting or gurgling sounds, complaint of chest pain, change in facial color, complaint of extreme heat, sudden quiet or inactivity, loss of consciousness, vomiting, etc.). In such instances, immediate medical aid should be administered, and fire personnel should be requested without delay.
- **Preventing Positional Asphyxia:** Deputies must exercise special caution to avoid, whenever feasible, positioning someone on their chest or stomach or in any other manner that could potentially impair their breathing or lead to positional asphyxia. If they are subject to the Total Appendage Restraint Procedure

("TARP") or otherwise secured and unable to be placed in a seated position, they should be transported via ambulance. Deputies should refer to the TARP policy for additional information and guidelines.

Furthermore, individuals restrained in the rear of a patrol vehicle should be continuously monitored to ensure their well-being and safety. Remember, all deputies bear ultimate responsibility for the care and safety of those under their control.
