



TRAINING MODULE: RECOGNIZING TRAITS OF ARMED INDIVIDUALS

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of common traits exhibited by persons carrying concealed weapons and the benefits of being able to recognize them.

TIME: 20 Minutes

OBJECTIVES:

- Become familiar with the common physical and behavioral traits exhibited by individuals carrying concealed weapons
- Identify the benefits of enhanced observation skills and the ability to recognize the traits of armed individuals
- Provide an overview of tactical considerations to be evaluated when stopping an armed subject

PARTICIPANTS MATERIALS:

- Participant Manual

TRAINER MATERIALS:

- Training Manual
- PowerPoint Presentation

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals



Zero Officers Killed or Injured

Between 2000 and 2006 a total of 389 officers were feloniously killed in the line of duty. Of those 91%, or 354 officers, were killed by handguns. In a number of these situations, the victim officers were caught by surprise. Only 23% were able to draw and fire their service weapons.

Officers need to be prepared for violent encounters. Reading subtle clues in a person's appearance, demeanor and actions can help officers anticipate that the person they are dealing with is armed and gain a preventative edge in timing and positioning. During a six month gun recovery program in Washington DC, utilization of such observation techniques help detect more than 300 hidden firearms resulting in a 15% decrease in violent crimes in targeted areas.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals



Examples of guns disguised as other objects

Common Traits

Observable Actions: Sworn law enforcement officers carry weapons in a multitude of circumstances, not just in uniform. (detective, plain clothes, off duty) The primary concern is concealment, accessibility and security. This is no different for criminals. By reflecting on their own behaviors, awareness, and training, as well as refining their powers of observations, officers can enhance their skills in detecting armed subjects.

Differences between officers and offenders:

- Offenders tend to use more inventive and devious ways to conceal illegal firearms. One example is a subject who concealed a firearm inside a car.
- Unconventional Firearms
 - “Belly guns” – constructed without sights
 - Handguns disguised as other objects: pens, pagers, cell phones, belt buckles, etc
 - Offenders stated they possess such weapons to specifically use against law enforcement personnel who may overlook them during arrest or transport situations.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Concealment Characteristics

- Clothing indicators
 - Weather Conditions:
 - Do the clothes match the temperature/weather conditions?
 - Is somebody exposing themselves to the elements?
 - Unnecessary Layers of clothing

Concealment Characteristics Officers must consider location, surroundings and circumstances with every encounter. They must ask why a subject is dressed in such a manner, moving in a particular way, or shifting body positions.

Clothing indicators: Specific observations about a persons attire may indicate if he/she is armed

Weather conditions:

Do the clothes match the temperature/weather conditions?

- Particularly observable in warmer months. Extra clothing is often used to conceal weapons.
- Jackets, sweatshirts, rain coats

In cold weather is somebody exposing themselves to the elements?

- Carrying a jacket over the arm instead of wearing it
- Jacket isn't zipped up
- Wearing a hooded jacket or sweatshirt and not utilizing the hood in the rain or snow.
- Several offenders carry a weapon in their jacket hoods.

Layered Clothing

- Is the subject wearing two shirts or a pair of sweatpants over jeans on a hot day?

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Concealment Characteristics

- Unnatural Protrusions/Bulges/Wear Patterns
 - Front waistband, small of back, and crotch
 - Shirts appear rippled or wavy on one side of the body while the other side appears smooth
 - Clothing visibly weighted on one side
 - Loose hanging hoods that appear weighted down.
 - Person wearing a suit but the shirt-tale is un-tucked
 - Mismatched Footwear- Is one shoe larger than the other?

Unnatural Protrusions/Bulges/Wear Patterns

Specifically in the waist, back and crotch areas.

- The majority of offenders who carry guns tuck them into their right front waistband for easy access or the small of their back.
- 70% of offenders in FBI studies stated they purposefully carried their weapons and contraband in their crotch due to inadequate searches of that area.

Shirts appear rippled or wavy on one side of the body while the other side appears smooth

Clothing visibly weighted on one side

Loose hanging hoods that appear weighted down.

Person wearing a suit but the shirt-tale is untucked

Mismatched Footwear- Is one shoe larger than the other?

- A favorite place to hide firearms for bikers is in their boots.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals



Example of a bra holster

Example of a bra holster on a female. Notice with a baggy t-shirt, it is difficult to tell that the gun is there. Also, women realize that male officers are often uncomfortable searching them and try to exploit that.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Concealment Characteristics

- Accessories/Other Items
 - Hand warmers not being used
 - Wearing only one glove
 - Knapsacks, briefcases, gym bags or paper bags that seem out of place.
 - Fanny packs with a wallet visible in the back pocket
 - Belts not worn through the provided belt loops

Accessories/Other Items

- Handwarmers attached to clothing but their hands are not inside or they are wearing gloves
- Wearing only one glove
- Look for knapsacks, briefcases, gym bags or paper bags that seem out of place.
- Fanny packs: if the person visibly has a wallet in their back pocket, why do they need a fanny pack?
- Is the offender wearing a belt but not through the pants loopholes therefore allowing him/her to cinch it tighter?

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Behavioral Characteristics

- Determine the suspect's strong side
 - Wristwatches are typically worn on the weak side
 - First steps are usually taken with the weak leg
 - The strong hand is used for most actions
 - When in doubt, 85-90% of all people are right handed.

Behavioral Traits: Body positioning: the way a person stands, sits, walks, runs, or changes body position can exhibit specific traits indicating that he/she is carrying a firearm. These movements or gestures are often performed without conscious thought. Common traits often become exaggerated and therefore more noticeable by the fact that offenders rarely use holsters. (In the three FBI studies, none of the offenders used holsters and of the 1,300 guns taken off of the street by the gun recovery unit in Washington DC, only 7 had holsters.)

As officers observe a potential suspect, they need to try and **determine the suspect's strong side.**

- Wristwatches are typically worn on the weak side
- First steps are usually taken with the weak leg
- The strong hand is used for most actions
- When in doubt, 85-90% of all people are right handed.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Behavioral Characteristics

- Adjustments
- “Security Feel”
- Protective Body Movement
- Blading the Gun Side Away

Adjustments:

- The gun's uneven weight can cause it to move on its own requiring adjustment. Movement further exacerbates this and can help pinpoint weapons.

“Security Feel” – Periodic touching of the weapon to ensure it is still in place. This can be done consciously and unconsciously.

- Actions become most notable whenever individuals change body positions such as standing, sitting, or exiting a motor vehicle.

Protective Body Movement – the act of holding an arm against the weapon to prevent movement and clamp the gun in place.

- This often occurs when the subject is approached, feels threatened, or is moving.
- Particularly noticeable when the subject is running or moving abruptly.
- May hold the arm against the weapon stiffly or with a restrained swing.
- Even when walking, an offender may have a limp caused by using a shorter stride with the strong side foot to minimize slipping.

Blading the Gun Side Away – Ensures concealment and increases access

- One offender in the FBI Study stated, “If they’re on that side of me, they can’t see it. I can also get to it quicker if I need to. Because they can’t see what I am reaching for, I get that extra second.”

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Behavioral Characteristics

- Facial Expressions
- Female Offender
- Vehicle Stops

Facial Expressions: One's emotional state is reflected in non-verbal cues that can be recognized by the trained observer.

- Scientific studies have shown that carrying a firearm will illicit a change in a criminal's emotional state. Feelings of safety, empowerment and fear.
- These emotions have effects can have powerful influences on someone's appearance. True emotion often "leaks" in fleeting facial micro-expressions which appear on the face for 1/25 of a second. They are beyond conscious control and can be spotted by a trained person.
- TSA is currently using these techniques to scan passengers from involuntary physical and psychological reactions that may indicate stress, fear, or deception.
- Screening of Passengers by Observations Techniques (SPOT)

Female Offender: Officers should never discount a female suspect.

Offenders know that officers tend see females as less threatening.

- Females often carry weapons for male companions.
- Officers remain reluctant to adequately search female suspects.
- Weapon of choice tend to be small framed revolvers and pistols.
- Primary location to carry is in the pocket of outer clothing for quick retrieval.

Vehicle Stops- Shoulder movement

- Up could be an indication of something being removed from the waistband.
- Dipping down could be recognized as a furtive gesture to hide something under or between the seats.
- In the In the Line of Fire Study, 50% of the offenders reported carrying their weapon on their person when traveling in their vehicle.

Recognizing Traits of Armed Individuals

Stopping an Armed Subject

- Considerations
 - Stop location
 - Lighting conditions
 - Available cover
 - Plus 1 rule

Stopping an Armed Subject: These recommendations highlight the safety of the officer and the community along with the adequate and sufficient force necessary to affect a stop of a possibly armed subject.

Stop Location:

- Often within the control of the officer
- Knowledge of the surrounding area is imperative. Officers should think ahead and plan for the worst case scenario.
- Pick a location that affords minimum risk and exposure to themselves and bystanders.
- When offenders fail to stop, realize this may be an attempt to select a location more beneficial to them. Consider options for escape and tactical advantage.

Lighting Conditions: Most line-of-duty deaths and serious injuries occur during hours of darkness.

- Pick a location with optimal available lighting conditions that favor the officer.
- Position yourself to see the offender's hands better
- Maximize artificial light. Consider flashlights, headlights, spotlights, and takedown lights.
- Shine the lights in the suspect's eyes to temporarily blind them.

Available Cover:

- Officers should assess the availability of cover and take advantage of any that exists.
- They should also consider potential cover the suspect may seek.
- Select areas that minimize protection for the suspect and maximize it for themselves.

Plus 1 Rule

- The finding of a weapon should never preclude an officer from continuing to search for additional weapons.
- Approximately 1/3 of the offenders in the Violent Encounters FBI Study reported carrying a back up weapon.
- Officer should always assume that if the person is carrying one weapon, there will likely be a second.

Officers need to increase their awareness of armed subjects and enhance their observation skills. By focusing on behaviors, surroundings and context, officers can use these indicators to articulate reasonable suspicion or probable cause to detain, frisk or search an individual. Officers must consider the totality of the circumstances and realize that no single observation or trait will suffice.

Knowledge, awareness, and finely tuned observation skills can give officers an advantage when confronting armed subjects. If you know what you are looking for, you would be surprised at what a suspect is showing you.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

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