



# TRAINING MODULE: FOOT PURSUITS

**PURPOSE:** To provide an overview of the safety hazards inherent with foot pursuits and what can be done to address them.

**TIME:** 20 Minutes

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- Become familiar with how officers are getting injured in foot pursuits
- Identify the contributing factors to injuries during foot pursuits
- Learn about the benefits of having a foot pursuit policy and continued training
- Become familiar with the IACP's model policy on foot pursuits

## **PARTICIPANTS MATERIALS:**

- Participant Manual

## **TRAINER MATERIALS:**

- Training Manual
- PowerPoint Presentation

# Foot Pursuits



***Zero Officers Killed or Injured***

Introduction:

# Foot Pursuits

## Alexandria, Virginia

A plain clothes officer was on foot in the courtyard of an apartment complex looking for a wanted subject. Once spotted, the suspect fled on foot. The officer pursued the suspect and was closing the gap when he hit a knee high chain that was set up between two posts to restrict vehicle traffic. All of the arteries in the officer's leg were severed. He underwent several surgeries to try and save his leg but unfortunately none were successful. The officer's right leg was amputated as a result of the injury.

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# Foot Pursuits

## **Dekalb County, Georgia**

Officers attempted to stop a vehicle after witnessing an apparent drug deal. The suspect pulled behind a building and fled on foot. The officers pursued the suspect and lost sight of him as he turned a corner. As the officers came around the same corner, the suspect opened fire striking one of the officers in between the side panels of his ballistic vest fatally wounding him.

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# Foot Pursuits

## Portland, Oregon

Officers pursued a wanted suspect who fled on foot in a residential neighborhood. They gave chase into the overgrown backyard of the residence where they became separated by a hedge. The victim officer was shot at close range with a .380 caliber semiautomatic handgun in the hand, leg and fatally in the sternum just above the collar of his protective vest.

Read Example:

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## Foot Pursuits

- Reading, Pennsylvania

Officers responded to a fight in progress call with possible gunshots fired. The victim officer located the suspect and after a brief conversation, the suspect fled on foot. The officer pursued. As the officer was about to tackle him, the suspect, while running, turned and fired four shots from a .40 caliber semi-automatic handgun fatally wounding the officer.

### **READ EXAMPLE:**

Reading, Pennsylvania

Officers responded to a fight in progress call with possible gunshots fired. The victim officer located the suspect and after a brief conversation, the suspect fled on foot and the officer pursued. As the officer was about to tackle him, the suspect, while running, turned and fired four shots from a .40 caliber semi-automatic handgun fatally wounding the officer.

**These are just some examples of the tragedy that can transpire during a foot pursuit. In fact, 20% of the summarized felonious deaths from the 2006 Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) data occurred during foot pursuits.**

# Foot Pursuits

## ■ Defining the Problem:

- Officers become complacent about the dangers inherent in chasing suspects on foot and develop a false sense of security
- Officers fail to develop a plan of action other than arresting the suspect
- Officers often do not recognize that suspects can turn threatening or be leading them into prearranged traps

- **Injuries:** Independent studies have shown that foot pursuits are the largest driver for worker's compensation losses. While only accounting for a number of the claims, foot pursuits had the highest incurred cost because the injuries were so severe.

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# Foot Pursuits

- Contributing Factors:
  - Lack of departmental training
  - Lack of departmental policies regarding foot pursuits

## **Lack of Training**

Few departments have a policy or conduct in-service training on foot pursuits

In the recent FBI Violent Encounters study, only 10 of the 50 officers included in the study received any foot pursuit training in the academy, consisting of an average of 2 hours. None of the officers received any in-service training.

Realistic, repetitive, scenario based training can help prepare officers to avoid complacency and unguarded pitfalls.



# Foot Pursuits

- IACP Model Policy
  - Officer and public safety must be the overriding consideration in deciding whether or not to initiate or continue a foot pursuit
  - Consider Alternatives
  - Note Risk Factors
  - Identify when not to pursue
  - Tactical Considerations

## **IACP Model Policy**

Officer and public safety shall be the overriding consideration in determining whether a foot pursuit will be initiated or continued

## **Consider Alternatives**

- Aerial Support
- Containment of the area
- Canine Search
- Saturation of the area with Patrol personnel
- Is the suspect identity known allowing for later apprehension

Officer initiating pursuit shall provide unit identifier, reason for pursuit, location and direction of pursuit, number of suspects and description, and whether or not the subject is armed. When alone, officers should try and keep the suspect in sight from a safe distance and coordinate containment.

**Risk Factors:**

- Acting alone
- Area Familiarity
- Area Hostility
- Armed Suspect
- Multiple Suspects
- Available Backup
- Officer Fitness Level
- Communications
- Weather and Darkness

**When not to pursue:**

- Danger to officers or public outweighs necessity of immediate apprehension
- Into buildings, structures, confined spaces or otherwise isolated areas without backup (time is on your side, set up a perimeter and contain)
- Officer loses possession of firearm
- Officer loses communications with dispatch
- Officer loses sight of the suspect
- Officer is unsure of his or her own location or direction of travel
- Officer or third party is injured and requires immediate medical assistance

**Tactical Considerations**

- Follow the suspect's path to avoid hidden objects or traps except when pursuing into tunnels or alleys when a parallel path should be utilized
- Assess, select, and move from cover to cover
- Use distance from suspect as a protective barrier and increase/decrease it as needed
- Don't follow suspect's immediate path over fences or walls realizing he/she may be laying in wait.
- Take wide sweeping turns around corners allowing an officer to gain an advantage and more reaction time.

# Foot Pursuits

## ■ Supervisor Responsibilities

- Monitor field performance, ensure foot pursuits are within policy using good judgment
- Terminate foot pursuits where it is deemed that the danger to the officer or public outweigh the necessity for immediate apprehension
- Debrief officers and provide appropriate realistic training on identified issues

## Supervisor Responsibilities

- Monitor field performance; ensure pursuits are within policy and/or using good judgment in regards to safety.
- Terminate foot pursuits where it is deemed that the danger to the officers or public outweigh the necessity for immediate apprehension of the suspect
- Debrief officers and provide appropriate realistic training on identified issues.

# Foot Pursuits

## ■ Collinwood Case Study

- Created a Foot Pursuit Policy
- Implemented bi-annual training on foot pursuits for all officers
- Results:
  - Immediate difference in how officers handled foot pursuits
  - Reduction in officer injuries

## **Collinwood Case Study**

In 1997, the Collinwood Police Department in New Jersey noticed the number one factor in officer injuries was foot pursuits. In conjunction with this, officers were realizing that drug dealers were also setting traps for them during the pursuits.

They created a policy for foot pursuits where officers take into account danger to self and others.

The department based its policy on factors that officers must consider before they initiate a foot pursuit to include:

- The nature of the offense or call
- The location and surrounding area involved
- The type and availability of communication
- The presence of physical danger
- The physical condition and abilities of the officers involved
- The safety of the officers and general public

The department wanted its officers to base their decision to pursue a fleeing subject on the degree of risk to themselves or others and specifically defined when not to pursue:

- into vacant or occupied buildings/structures/confined spaces/wooded-isolated locations without using the team concept or supervisor approval except in extreme situations when there is an immediate threat to the safety of the general public or officers
- If they believe that the danger to the officers or public outweigh the necessity for immediate apprehension
- If they lose contact with their fellow officers or the communications center
- If they lose visual contact with the suspect and become unsure of the suspect's whereabouts or continued direction of travel.

All pursuits were to be reviewed to see if they were within policy

Established Bi-annual training on foot pursuits for all officers

Noticed immediate difference in how officers handled pursuits and a decrease in officer injuries.

**The policy brought to light the hazards of foot pursuits and showed that officers must temper their instinctive reaction of chasing fleeing suspects and consider the potentially life-threatening consequences of rashly running into danger.**

Several departments have since followed in their footsteps

# Foot Pursuits

## ■ **Tips for Surviving Foot Pursuits**

- Always radio dispatchers and advise of location, reason for pursuing, and direction of the chase
- Ensure suspects who flee from vehicles do not have accomplices in the car who may attack from behind
- Take vehicle keys with them to avoid having the suspect circle back and steal the car

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## ■ **Tips for Surviving Foot Pursuits**

- Wait for backup if it is believed the suspect is armed
- Try to follow in the same general path as the suspects so that the suspects discover any hidden obstacles
- Remain cautious, in control, and alert for additional threats and other changes in the situation

## **Tips for Surviving Foot Pursuits**

- Wait for backup especially if it is believed the suspect is armed
- Try to follow in the same general path as the suspects so that the suspects discover any hidden obstacles such as clotheslines, wires, cables, holes, and sprinkler heads
- Remain cautious, in control, and alert for additional threats and other changes in the situation

## **Utilize Training and Tactics:**

### **EXAMPLE:**

An officer pursued a suspected gang member into a local neighborhood. The suspect jumped over a fence and the officer stopped to look over. Not seeing him, the officer continued into the yard but was slow and cautious with his movements. The officer refrained from entering the next yard until he heard the suspect go over the next fence. This continued until the suspect scaled his fourth fence, which the officer noted he did in a different manner. The officer noted that the suspect went over head first, which he thought was peculiar. Using good tactics, the officer went down 20-30 feet and peered into the yard. He observed the suspect had a gun and was lying on the ground watching the fence. The officer picked another location to go over the fence and was able to sneak up behind the suspect and take him into custody without incident. During an interview, the suspect told detectives he had set up in three different locations during the pursuit to ambush the officer. Clearly in this example, the officer's preparation, plan of action, and recognition that the suspect could be leading him into traps saved his life.

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

**IACP Model Policy, Foot Pursuits** (February 2003)

**IACP Concepts and Issues Paper, Foot Pursuits** (February 2003)

**Establishing a Foot Pursuit Policy: Running Into Danger.** FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Vol. 69 (#5), pgs. 10-15. Bohrer, Shannon; Davis, Edward F.; and , Garrity, Thomas J., Jr., (May 2000).