



County of Santa Cruz

Sheriff-Coroner

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Jim Hart
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PUBLIC INFORMATION RELEASE
April 21, 2017
Serious Incident Review Board:
Findings, Recommendations and Implementation;
Response to Critical Incidents

On November 21, 2016 Sheriff Jim Hart conducted a media conference following the officer-involved shooting of Luke Smith and announced he would form a Serious Incident Review Board (SIRB) to determine if the Sheriff's Office could improve its response to critical incidents: "Following an incident of this magnitude, we must take steps to ensure deputies have all the resources, tools and tactics necessary to safely and successfully resolve violent encounters."

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommends that law enforcement agencies establish a SIRB comprised of sworn staff and community members to review cases involving officer involved shootings to identify any administrative, supervisory, training, tactical, or policy issues that need to be addressed.

The SIRB was led by a senior officer and consisted of three use-of-force instructors and three community members. Board members met four times to review use of force policies, tactics, in-service training and equipment. The SIRB began its review on December 15, 2016 and completed its work on February 21st, 2017, submitting five findings and fifteen recommendations to Sheriff Hart for consideration.

Serious Incident Review Board Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1.0: The Sheriff's Office should improve supervision and coordination at a critical incident.

- Recommendation 1.1: The officer-in-charge at a critical incident should be designated and identified on the radio.
- Recommendation 1.2: A supervisor should respond to a critical incident to assume command and control.
- Recommendation 1.3: Other law enforcement agencies should play a support role when responding to Sheriff's Office requests for assistance.

- Recommendation 1.4: Deputies should respond to assist other law enforcement agencies only when requested.
- Recommendation 1.5: Deputies should play a support role when responding to requests for assistance by other law enforcement agencies.

Finding 2.0: The Sheriff's Office should improve its abilities to manage the use of a canine at a critical incident.

- Recommendation 2.1: Provide training to deputies and supervisors concerning the appropriate use of a canine on persons under the influence of hallucinogens, experiencing a mental health crisis, or armed with a weapon.
- Recommendation 2.2: The officer-in-charge at a critical incident should identify the objective of using a canine and consult with the canine handler prior to deployment whenever there is time to safely do so.

Finding 3.0: The use of the patrol rifle should be monitored by a supervisor.

- Recommendation 3.1: A deputy should announce intent to deploy a patrol rifle and/or less-lethal shotgun on the radio and receive an acknowledgement from dispatch, who will notify the supervisor.

Finding 4.0: Life-saving efforts of injured suspects should not be unnecessarily delayed.

- Recommendation 4.1: Medical personnel should be requested to stage in a safe location near a critical incident that may involve the use of deadly force.
- Recommendation 4.2: The application of restraints should not delay or interfere with life-saving efforts and should be removed if they do.

Finding 5.0: The Sheriff's Office should provide training to improve its abilities to respond to critical incidents.

- Recommendation 5.1: Develop a reality-based use of force training program that includes lecture, scenarios and demonstrated proficiencies to prepare deputies and supervisors to respond to dynamic incidents as a team.
- Recommendation 5.2: Integrate training including arrest and control tactics, chemical spray, impact weapons, less lethal options, deadly force, canine, containment strategies, de-escalation strategies, tactical disengagement, incident supervision and medical care.
- Recommendation 5.3: Deputies and supervisors should train in uniform and use radios to make scenario training as realistic as possible.
- Recommendation 5.4: Include a commitment statement about the duty to preserve life at use of force training.

- Recommendation 5.5: The Training Manager shall conduct an annual assessment of the tools, tactics and training for the Operations Bureau to develop a training plan that reflects best law enforcement practices.

Sheriff Hart is grateful to the SIRB members, particularly citizens Rene Schlaepfer, Tye Watson and Javier Diaz. Other Board members included Sergeants Patrick Dimick, John Habermehl, Chris Shearer and Chief Deputy Craig Wilson.

Sheriff Hart directed staff to implement all recommendations identified by the SIRB and met with deputies, supervisors and managers to emphasize the Sheriff's Office responsibility and commitment to preserve life whenever possible.

In concert with the specific recommendations identified by the SIRB, the Sheriff's Office is developing scenario-based training modeled on the Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) guidelines recently developed by the Police Executive Research Forum. ICAT is a use of force curriculum that trains officers how to respond to volatile situations in which emotionally distressed persons are behaving erratically and often dangerously but do not possess a firearm. Reducing the need to use deadly force, upholding the sanctity of life, building community trust, and protecting officers from physical, emotional, and legal harm are the cornerstones of ICAT. Deputies will receive ICAT training beginning in May.

Deputies respond to more than 200 mental health related calls per month. Data analysis indicates that mental health or substance abuse issues were a factor in 75% of officer-involved shootings that have occurred during the past 30 years in Santa Cruz County. In 2015 the Sheriff's Office and County Mental Health collaborated to develop a local Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program to develop a comprehensive, three-day multidisciplinary training course certified by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training. CIT brings together law enforcement, mental health providers and individuals with mental illness and their families to improve responses to persons in crisis by enhancing communication, identifying mental health resources and ensuring that officers receive training designed to increase the safety of encounters with emotionally distressed persons. CIT training for deputies and police officers began in February and is ongoing.

A full-time Mental Health Liaison (MHL) has been working with the Sheriff's Office to assist deputies with service calls, provide crisis assessment and intervention services, and to make treatment referrals since 2015. Based on workload analysis, a second full-time MHL was assigned to work with the Sheriff's Office earlier this month.

The use of force by a peace officer is always a matter of critical concern to the public and to the law enforcement community. The Sheriff's Office is demonstrating its commitment to do everything possible to avoid the loss of life when responding to unpredictable and often dangerous critical incidents.

Craig Wilson, Chief Deputy