

IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center
LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERACTIONS WITH
CANINES
Model Policy
December 2015

I. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this policy to provide officers with guidance on the proper handling of canines during law enforcement encounters to prevent, mitigate, and reduce the need for the use of deadly force.

II. POLICY

Officers shall take measures identified in this policy to prepare for encounters with canines, mitigate potentially confrontational situations, and minimize the need for and use of deadly force, whenever reasonably possible.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Use of Force

1. During encounters with canines, officers are authorized to use only the degree of force that reasonably appears necessary to protect themselves or others from serious bodily harm.
2. The force options and alternative actions, as identified in this policy, to control canines, protect officers and others, and maintain officer safety should be used whenever reasonably possible before resorting to the use of deadly force. However, not all non-deadly force options need to be exhausted prior to the use of deadly force when it is objectively reasonable to do so.

B. Force Prevention

1. Officers should be aware of the possible presence of canines during routine calls for service, particularly those at residences.
2. Information on the presence of canines may be obtained via
 - a. information collected from the caller by the dispatcher;
 - b. visual sighting or audible barking on the premises; and
 - c. observation of posted warning signs; fenced yards with water and feeding bowls; dog houses and/or chains; and worn paths along the perimeter of fencing.
3. Where fences must be entered to approach a residence or commercial establishment, rattling a chain fence or knocking on a wooden fence may bring a canine out in the open who may not otherwise be visible.
4. When unattended, unsecured canines on the property appear aggressive, officers may remain in their vehicle and contact the residence by phone, or request such contact by the dispatcher in order to direct the owner or occupant to secure the pet.
5. Animal control officers or SPCA personnel may be summoned to assist in containing or controlling a canine when necessary.

6. Before entering a residence, officers should ask if a canine is present and, if so, request that the animal be secured prior to entering.

C. Force Mitigation

1. In spite of precautionary measures that may be taken, canines can be encountered unexpectedly in a variety of situations. In the vast majority of cases, officers can mitigate or defuse potential aggression from a canine by doing the following:
 - a. Assessing the canine's intentions.
A loose and wiggly posture reflects friendliness, while a stiff, rigid, or frozen body stance with closed mouth, lips pushed forward, teeth bared, hackles raised or ears back strongly suggest aggressiveness.
 - b. Dropping their eyes and observing the canine using peripheral vision.
Officers should not stare at the canine, show aggression, or run.
 - c. Rolling their shoulders in a smooth slow motion and turning sideways to the canine.
2. If the foregoing does not appear effective, officers should do the following:
 - a. Say "Stop" in a deep, low, and loud voice.
 - b. If the canine continues to move aggressively, use OC spray to the eyes and mouth. OC spray is extremely effective for stopping and stunning canines.
 - c. Use electronic control weapons fired horizontally and at a distance of less than 10 feet, to ensure the best chances of making contact with the canine's body mass.¹
 - d. If the canine comes within arm's reach, present a target, such as a baton, night stick, or flashlight held sideways, and allow the canine to bite on it while moving away.
 - e. Provide distractions such as food, which may also help by providing time to move away from the canine to a safe location.
 - f. Utilize commonly available items, such as clipboards, to block or redirect an attack.
 - g. Consider the use of any position, location, or physical object that creates a barrier between the officers and the canine.
 - h. Take advantage of the patrol vehicle's fire extinguisher to effectively repel an aggressive canine.

D. Canine Encounters during Vehicle Stops

1. If the driver will be asked to exit the vehicle, officers should first ask him or her to raise the windows to three-quarters height and close the doors upon exiting.
2. If the driver will remain in the vehicle, officers should ask him or her to either leash the canine and hold the leash, or secure the leash by running the seat belt through the leash handle or the canine's collar and locking the seat belt in place.
3. If a canine is unrestrained in a truck bed, officers should use the patrol vehicle's loud speaker to direct the driver or occupants to secure the canine in the bed or place it in the vehicle's cab and raise the windows to three-quarter height.

¹ Officers should be aware that the immobilizing effects of an electronic control weapon are less than that on humans and only last approximately 20 seconds.

E. Canine Encounters when Serving Warrants

1. A pre-search planning check list should be completed before search or arrest warrants are served.² Visual inspection of the residence or other location where the warrant will be served should include any information on the presence of canines.
2. If information suggests the presence of one or more canines, a member of the warrant team shall be assigned to control the animal through the use of a capture net, fire extinguisher, electronic control weapon, OC spray, or similar means. An animal control officer may also be used if a tranquilizer gun is deemed necessary.

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Every effort has been made by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this model policy incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no “model” policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of federal court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities among other factors. This document is not intended to be a national standard.

² The IACP *Model Policy on Executing Search Warrants* includes a sample pre-search planning checklist.