



Training Key® #580

Operating Stakeouts

A stakeout is among the most demanding and potentially dangerous of special police operations. Officers who are assigned to such duties should be experienced and have demonstrated tactical knowledge, skills, and abilities in this or related assignments.

A stakeout is the tactical deployment of police officers in anticipation of the commission of a crime at a specific location. The anticipated perpetrators may be known individuals or may be suspects known only by their mode of operation (MO). The stakeout's purpose is to arrest the suspect(s) during the attempted or actual commission of a crime.

Stakeouts almost always involve enforcement actions against armed criminal suspects. Therefore, the safety of officers and bystanders should always be of primary concern. The objectives of criminal arrest should never outweigh the need to protect officers and civilians against unreasonable risks.

Preparation

Prior to conducting a stakeout, officers and supervisors should review individual department policies affecting the operation. Officers must be acutely aware that the use of deadly force is a distinct possibility. If an officer has difficulty in accepting that fact, he or she should not be assigned to the stakeout. Department policy concerning such assignments must be clear and complete, and all officers should review these policies and procedures with supervisory personnel.

Officer selection for the staffing of a stakeout is of the utmost importance. Ideally, only those officers who are mentally and physically fit and who have continually demonstrated superb judgment in high stress situations should be considered. Due to the potential dangers of these operations it is recommended that inexperienced officers should not be considered for selection. Agencies have an absolute responsibility to all concerned parties to staff stakeouts with the most competent officers in their organization. Many agencies of all sizes use specialized units to staff stakeouts. However, if a smaller department feels that they are not properly equipped to handle a stakeout, it is highly recommended that they look into form-

ing mutual aid agreements with other larger local jurisdictions who have the capability. But whatever the staffing procedures, assigned officers should be subject to close evaluation. Officers' actions and reactions in a stakeout environment must be predictable and cannot be left to chance. Maturity coupled with experience, dedication and loyalty are desirable traits of a stakeout officer. Because of the strenuous nature of these assignments, the physical condition of officers should not be overlooked. An out-of-shape officer will tire easily and this will adversely affect his or her ability to react quickly when needed most. Stakeouts involve long hours of tedious waiting punctuated by unpredictable moments of maximum physical demands—an environment in which the most experienced and trained officers are preferred.

The Officer in Charge (OIC) or the detail supervisor of the stakeout operation shall contact all other department entities that may have an on-going operation involving the possible suspects to ensure that any tactical conflicts are resolved. As a rule, any other operation involving the suspects yields to the stakeout operation once it is in place. The OIC shall also ensure that any outside jurisdiction that may be impacted by the stakeout is notified, unless the notification would compromise the operation. Operational security should never be compromised by the need for these notifications. If the notifications may compromise the stakeout operation, then the operation must be put on hold until the issues can be settled.

Equipment

Required stakeout equipment is relatively basic; however, the decision about what to bring should not be subject to individual officer choice. Tactical or soft body armor is a necessity for all officers. Running shoes are preferable, if they are appropriate dress for the stakeout environment and prevailing

weather conditions. In all probability, officers will not be able to take breaks or have a mealtime, so food and drink will need to be carried to the stakeout. If the stakeout is in a restricted area, particular arrangements must be made for relief. Provisions must also be made for restroom facilities even though these will frequently fall short of normally accepted standards.

The officer's primary weapon, back-up weapon and any additional weapons should be inspected to ensure proper operation. Officers shall only be assigned weapons that they have trained and qualified with on a regular basis.

It may not be feasible for an inside team to deploy a shotgun or other shoulder weapon. In most cases, the inside team is not the arrest or "takedown" team, so officers will normally only require handguns. If inside team officers are not concealed, such as when acting as employees in a work area, the officers may not be able to conceal weapons on their person. If an officer's weapon is to be hidden in a desk drawer or other location, the officer must be in immediate proximity to the weapon. Weapons should not be hidden next to cash registers or other commonly known hiding areas. Employees at the location shall be advised not to handle the officer's weapons. Officers who are assigned arrest responsibility should be armed at all times.

Briefings

The briefing or roll call preceding deployment of a stakeout should be in two phases. The first phase of the briefing is the dissemination of information by detective personnel (called the "Investigative Phase"). The detectives in charge of the case should provide the assigned officers with all information concerning the suspect(s) and their MO; this should include photos or composites, suspect armament, and the suspect's potential for violence based on previous crimes. Other issues include the following:

- Is the suspect armed?
- Has the suspect used his or her weapon?
- Has the suspect taken hostages?
- Does the suspect appear in control or is he or she under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
- Does the suspect run after committing the crime or calmly exit the location? Is there a getaway car with a driver? What is the possibility of outside accomplices?
- Does there appear to be inside help?
- Are the suspect(s) "counter jumpers" or do they position or station themselves in a particular area or fashion?

As these and related issues are discussed, one can begin to formulate the tactical actions that officers must take.

The second phase of the briefing, referred to as the "tactical phase," is provided by those officers who surveyed or "advanced" the assigned location. An advance consists of assessing a potential stakeout location, preparing a site plan or map and developing an initial tactical plan. The advance should be the responsibility of the stakeout supervisor or senior officers with stakeout experience. Organization, manpower deployment and related concerns should be the responsibility of supervisors with tactical knowledge.

Manpower

At the conclusion of the briefing, officers should be assigned to their respective stakeout locations, ideally, with a minimum of four officers assigned to each location. If resources preclude this minimum number of officers, the stakeout should not be conducted or other measures should be taken, such as entering into a mutual aid agreement with a

larger jurisdiction. The safety of officers and bystanders is not a factor that can be compromised.

While four officers is the minimum for most stakeouts, manpower requirements increase if more than two suspects are involved. As a general rule, two officers should be used for every suspect. The suspect's weapons should also be considered when determining the number of officers needed, as well as the suspect's history of violence.

Team Planning

Following personnel assignments, individual team meetings should be conducted for the purpose of contingency planning. These meetings should never be conducted at the stakeout location or other public place that might compromise the operation. Officers should be reminded that all material relative to the stakeout is confidential and such material should be under the control of the team leader at all times. Depending on the sensitivity of the detail, this material may be collected at the end of the watch, or at the conclusion of the detail, and sequentially numbered and signed for by each officer.

A senior officer selected by the detail supervisor should conduct the team meeting. This officer is responsible for a single stakeout location and the officers assigned to that location. He or she is also responsible for the specific tactical plan for their team. In planning a stakeout, one must be prepared for the most serious situation that may occur and proceed from that point. For example, the team leader and supervisor must anticipate the possibility that an officer may be involved in a shooting and prepare the tactical response accordingly. With this in mind, one would also need to know the location and shortest distance to the nearest emergency medical facility. It is not advisable to transport an injured officer in a police vehicle, but there have been exceptions. It is also preferable to transport injured officer(s) and injured suspect(s) to different hospitals. Security details should be immediately deployed for injured officers as well as suspects.

Contingency plans should also address appropriate actions to take should the suspects:

- Use side or rear entrances for entry or exit
- Force employees into a storeroom or other location
- Threaten the use of explosives, chemical or biological weapons
- Take hostages
- Create a barricade situation
- Take other unpredicted steps

Contingency planning is the key to conducting a successful stakeout. The overall plan must be flexible and capable of dealing with communications failures, vehicle problems, and numerous other matters that could potentially disrupt or curtail the operation.

Training

Stakeouts are among the most demanding of law enforcement tactical operations. Consequently, it is essential that officers deployed in such operations be professionally trained in the specialized skills necessary to ensure effectiveness and safety. In order to prepare an officer for the potential circumstances in which firearms may be used during actual stakeout conditions, the officer must be trained and qualified with all firearms he or she carries to the greatest degree possible. Engagement of an armed felon who is moving in and out of acceptable background conditions, or proper use of a 12-gauge shotgun with magnum rounds from a prone position,

for example, are skills that must be learned and practiced repeatedly with demonstrated expertise before an officer is assigned to a stakeout operation. There is no substitute for tactical shooting training. Police agencies that do not have in-house access to this type of specialized training should seek outside sources of training assistance prior to conducting a stakeout.

Communications

Communications during stakeout details are totally dependent on the resources of an individual agency. Whenever possible a single tactical frequency should be assigned, reserved, and given appropriate priority. However, if exclusivity is not possible, then the frequency must be able to be cleared at a moment's notice. Officers at a stakeout location should have the authority to dedicate the frequency to their operation if the need arises.

If individual headsets are unavailable, most police radios will accommodate commercially available earplugs. It is vitally important that officers have closed communications inside locations so that radio transmissions do not reveal their position. Extra batteries for hand-held radios are essential. Radio checks should be made every 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the number of locations and the capability of that agency's communication system.

Deployment

Generally a stakeout consists of an inside team and an outside team of two officers each. The outside team is normally designated as the arrest team. Enforcement action should not be taken by the inside team unless a life-threatening situation develops. Once the subjects have exited the stakeout location, the inside team is also responsible for securing the location to ensure that the suspects do not reenter and possibly create a barricade or hostage situation.

While the outside team is normally the arrest team, assignment of this responsibility will ultimately be based on factors associated with the specific stakeout location. For example, normally crowded public stores are not generally the best location for an arrest confrontation. On the other hand, less trafficked locations, such as exclusive jewelry stores that use controlled public access, would be preferable over a busy public street. The detail supervisor should address these and related factors concerning the stakeout location during the stakeout advance and make decisions as to team responsibilities.

The inside team is responsible for briefing employees concerning their actions if a crime occurs. They should ensure that employees do not initiate any independent action and should remove any privately owned weapons. Employees should be reminded to conduct themselves in a normal and inconspicuous manner at all times. They should also be advised to lie prone on the floor should gunfire develop. Employees must understand that they should not inform anyone that police are present, and that they should not seek assistance from the stakeout team for crimes such as shoplifting. If necessary, uniform patrol officers may respond to handle these offenses. Such incidents should be dealt with as quickly as possible and the uniform patrol officers should leave the area once the call for service has been handled.

If the inside team is not going to observe from a concealed position, officers must be inconspicuous in their particular setting. If employees wear a distinctive attire, then so must the inside team. There is always a possibility that the suspects

may inspect a location prior to committing the crime, so it is important that stakeout officers appear to be a part of the local operation. All police equipment must be concealed and radios turned off. Any private security should be dismissed and leave the area. If the absence of private security would be obvious, security personnel may be permitted to stay, but they should not be armed and must be thoroughly briefed as to their limited role.

Employees should be informed that no police action will be taken inside, with the exception of actions necessary to save life, so as to relieve any unnecessary anxiety on their part. Officers should also ensure that there is nothing on the premises, such as a scanner, that would reveal the stakeout operation. If any employee displays obvious signs of stress, serious consideration should be given to removing that employee with the cooperation of the location's management personnel.

If there is any suspicion that an employee may be involved with the suspects, an inside team should not be deployed and no one outside the police agency should be notified of the stakeout operation. In such instances, assigned officers should conduct the stakeout from a covert observation post outside the location.

Officers sometimes overlook the issue of concealing the outside team. Suspects survey prospective target locations from not only the inside, but also frequently survey the surrounding area. Officers assigned to the stakeout detail who do not adhere to good concealment practices risk detection. There is simply no way, for example, that two officers can sit in a vehicle or use the same disguise for an extended period of time without being conspicuous.

Although a sedan is frequently used, it may not be the best available option for the outside team. If a sedan is preferred, however, one officer should sit in the front seat and one in the right rear seat. The officer in the rear seat should be positioned so that he or she has a clear view of activities to the rear of the vehicle. This positioning is necessary because there have been cases in which officers have been fatally wounded while seated together in the front of their vehicle and unable to see suspects approaching from the rear.

Underground parking, carports, and residential driveways also provide concealment and allow officers some freedom of movement. Vans, other businesses, or residences are also frequently used. But whatever the location, the observation post should be selected with the understanding that it could be in place for an extended period of time. If permission is required to utilize a particular location, officers should not disclose the true nature of their presence and instead offer a reasonable and acceptable explanation.

The outside team's response to the stakeout location should be tested by taking into account changing traffic patterns at different times of day. Thirty seconds should be considered the maximum allowable response time for the outside team to get to the stakeout location. To reduce response time, outside teams should not situate themselves on the opposite side of major thoroughfares, and either minimize or eliminate the number of intersections that must be crossed.

Entry and exit of the inside team to the stakeout location is extremely important. All equipment, particularly weapons, must be concealed and officers should not arrive at the location at the same time. Officers must be alert upon entering the location in the event that a crime may already be in progress if the location has opened for business prior to the officers' arrival. Exiting a location is as critical as entry. Officers should

exercise the same caution in leaving the location as they did when entering.

Once inside, the first officer should contact the designated manager or person in charge. Officers should seek a private area to brief the manager on stakeout procedures, and then reevaluate the situation for safety. If circumstances have changed sufficiently since the advance was conducted to affect safety, officers should contact a supervisor immediately, and, if necessary, re-deploy outside the location until the problems can be resolved.

When the use of firearms is necessary, the physical environment of a stakeout can be troublesome. Regardless of whether an officer is deployed inside or outside the location, all officers must visually inspect the entire location with shooting background in mind. For example, floor to ceiling plate glass windows or plasterboard walls are unacceptable background materials should the use of firearms become necessary by the inside team.

Officers should be positioned so that inferior background problems are minimized. A standard procedure is to station one officer under cover, at a point in the facility well above eye level. This positioning provides several advantages. If the use of firearms is required, this officer will be firing downward, thus minimizing or eliminating background problems. It also provides for greater visibility and strategic advantage. With one officer in this position providing cover, the second inside officer can collect the suspect's weapons, and frisk and handcuff the suspect if an arrest must be made inside the stakeout location.

The inside team should alert the arrest team as soon as anything unusual is suspected or has occurred. Radio contact with the arrest team should be maintained as long as possible to describe the suspects and the types of weapons being carried, anticipated exit route, and other pertinent information that would assist the arrest team and promote their safety. Suspicious activities such as persons loitering around the location, the same vehicle observed repeatedly, "out of season" or bulky clothing on an individual, or persons possibly involved in counter surveillance activities observed by either the inside or outside teams should be immediately reported.

Weapon readiness is also an important consideration because there is no time to chamber a round when a weapon is needed instantly in a tactical situation. When shotguns are used, a round should be chambered and the safety on. Shoulder weapons should never be leaned against a wall, table, or other object but laid flat when not being held. Semi-automatic handguns should also be in a ready condition with the safety on. In addition, the safety should be disengaged as quietly as possible. For example, placing a finger on each side of the safety release of a shotgun when disengaging is a good way to ensure silence.

As a stakeout continues, fatigue may become a factor. Officers and supervisors should be alert to signs of fatigue and consider rotating officers if necessary. This is particularly relevant regarding inside team officers whose level of preparedness and stress is greatest. Rotation of officers can help to alleviate this constant tension as well as allow other officers to become knowledgeable about other duties of the stakeout operation.

Use of Force

The potential for the use of deadly force is a part of most stakeouts. This potentiality, however, does not constitute the grounds for an exception to existing shooting policies and pro-

cedures that govern the use of deadly force in individual agencies. The safety of officers and citizens alike and overall reverence for human life remain vitally important. Officers should use deadly force only as governed by department policy.

Should a suspect be shot, he or she should be disarmed and handcuffed immediately. Officers should not diagnose the condition of the suspect to determine whether handcuffs are required because there have been situations where presumably dead or incapacitated suspects have inflicted serious injuries on unsuspecting officers. The suspect's weapons should also be secured. If the officer is not familiar with the suspect's weapon, he or she should handle it only to the degree necessary until it can be rendered safe by qualified personnel who can take custody of the weapon.

Following the arrest, the surrounding area should be checked for accomplices and getaway cars and the immediate area secured as a crime scene. In addition to ambulances, a call should be made for assistance from uniform patrol personnel. Landline or cell phones should be utilized to make these calls because the news media and the public frequently monitor police radio communications.

All plainclothes officers should display proper ID and be easily identified as police officers since responding officers may not be aware that the location was a stakeout. Raid jackets are relatively inexpensive, easily obtainable, and easily recognized.

Once the location is secured, standard procedures for handling a crime scene should be employed. The area should be roped off or isolated, evidence should be preserved, and witnesses should be located and identified. Information to be released should be channeled only to assigned press relations officers. Officers involved in the incident should not be subjected to press interviews and should not make public statements. Officers must be constantly aware that their actions are under observation and act professionally.

Foot Pursuits

If a suspect is able to elude the arrest team, a foot pursuit may ensue. The need for running shoes and loose-fitting clothing in these cases is apparent. Sound tactics for conducting foot pursuits enhance officer safety and increase the chances of capturing the fleeing suspect. Officers should not split up but remain as a team. If there are multiple suspects, the "main player" should already have been identified, and pursuing officers should concentrate on him or her. One should not forget that if the suspect discards one weapon he or she might be carrying a back-up weapon. Officers should not run blindly around the corners of buildings but instead make wide turns to avoid being confronted at the corner by a waiting suspect.

Officers should decide during stakeout planning whether one officer will carry a shoulder weapon should a foot pursuit be necessary. Although shoulder weapons are valuable in these circumstances, they also limit an officer's flexibility when the suspect is overtaken. Knowledge of the area surrounding the stakeout location is an advantage and stakeout teams should study maps of their assigned areas prior to deployment. Both officers should carry portable radios during a foot pursuit. While it is rather difficult to broadcast during a foot pursuit, the radios are necessary for coordinating responding units to establish a perimeter, as well as for personal safety.

Securing the Detail

At the conclusion of the stakeout detail, regardless of whether the suspects were arrested or not, the OIC is responsible for securing the detail. The OIC should ensure that all the paperwork, plans, photos, etc., that were passed out during the detail are retrieved. Those items that are not needed for the After Action Report (AAR) should be destroyed. Any electronic equipment that was deployed at the stakeout site(s) should be recovered and turned in. Any recordings and/or tapes that were made during the course of the detail that are not required for any legal or administrative proceeding should be erased and/or destroyed. Finally, any weapons and other logistics that were issued to officers during the detail should be recovered and logged in. In short, there must be a strict accounting for all things assigned to the stakeout detail.

After Action Report

At the conclusion of the stakeout, the OIC must also complete an AAR. Depending on the events that occurred during the detail, the report might be short and to the point. If the detail had logistical problems, planning flaws, or other tactical problems, then the report may become a training tool for officers to avoid repeat mistakes. All supervising officers should provide input on any issues that need to be addressed for future details, particularly those involving the safety of officers and citizens. The OIC needs to be aware that while this AAR is an “in house” document, it may be subject to legal discovery. If the stakeout detail ended with an officer-involved shooting, injuries or other such serious events, the AAR must be reviewed by legal counsel before submission.

Site plans and the AAR should be securely filed for future reference and training purposes. It is not unusual for officers to return to previously staked out sites, in which case the site plans and AAR on file are a valuable resource in planning the new detail.

Acknowledgement

Sergeant H. G. Dublin (Retired), Metropolitan Division, Los Angeles Police Department, prepared this *Training Key*.

SAMPLE OPERATIONAL PLANNING CHECKLIST

The following is a sample checklist to illustrate preparatory steps for conducting stakeouts. Checklists of this type are a convenient means of ensuring that key operational details are addressed. This list should be modified by departments based on the operational assignment and related needs and capabilities. No checklist can serve as a substitute for diligence, proper preparation, and professional training of officers.

I. Preparation

- Review departmental use-of-force guidelines.
- Select officers based on nature of assignment and officer skills, training, and experience.
- Contact (this done by the OIC) all other entities, inside and outside the department, to resolve any tactical conflicts involving the detail or the suspects.

II. Equipment

- Identify and arrange for the logistical needs for assigned officers.

- Ensure deployment of tactical or soft body armor for all officers.
- Remind all officers to attend to individual provisions.
- Conduct weapon inspection and validate weapons training and qualification.

III. Briefings

Conduct briefing of the detail in two phases, investigative and tactical.

1) Investigative briefing

- Provide all information pertaining to suspect background, MO, and propensity for violence.
- Provide investigative personnel with all additional information necessary to assist the officers assigned to the stakeout.

2) Tactical briefing

Conduct the tactical phase of the briefing by officers who “advanced” the site (s) including but not limited to the following:

- Site plans and the initial tactical plans to assigned officers.
- Map of the immediate area with ground and aerial photos if possible.
- Detailed interior map with emphasis on entries and exits, money locations, employee locations and numbers, and all other pertinent tactical information.
- Assignment by the OIC of a minimum of four officers to each site (if possible).

IV. Team Planning

Conduct individual team meetings, after the briefings, in a controlled environment. At a minimum, ensure coverage of the following topics:

- Contingency planning, such as tactics to resolve hostage situations, lay off suspects, explosives, foot pursuits, officer involved shooting, shooting backgrounds, etc.
- Inside and outside team responsibilities.
- Concealment tactics for outside team.
- Entry and exit tactics for inside team, as well as any instructions for employees at the site.
- Directions to nearest trauma centers.

Moreover, ensure that officers will be easily identifiable in a tactical environment and caution them not to discuss the detail or any related event with anyone outside their immediate chain of command.

V. Communications

- Reserve frequencies for detail.
- Issue extra batteries to officers.
- Initiate a “No Comm.” plan.
- Ensure that headsets are issued if required.
- Establish communication check protocol.

VI. Securing the Detail

The OIC shall retrieve all copies of detail related paperwork, site plans, and other documents; destroy all the above, including audio and videotapes, that are not required for the permanent record or any administrative or legal proceeding; create a file that will contain site map(s) and critiques; and complete an After Action Report reflecting supervisory insight, problem resolutions, and officer input regarding the detail. This report shall be used for future stakeout details and training along with the detail file of site maps.

questions

The following questions are based on information in this *Training Key*. Select the one best answer for each question.

1. In preparation for a stakeout, the OIC should do which of the following?
 - a. Review departmental policies and procedures pertinent to the operation.
 - b. Contact other departments that may have an on-going operation involving the suspects.
 - c. Select officers for assignment based on experience, physical condition, and firearms capabilities.
 - d. All of the above.
2. Which of the following statements is false?
 - a. The team should be briefed in two phases—one investigative and one tactical.
 - b. A minimum of four officers should be assigned to a stakeout location.
 - c. Arrests should normally be made inside the stakeout location.
 - d. Firearms of inside teams should be maintained in a state of readiness with a round chambered and the safety on.
3. Which of the following questions is false?
 - a. If private security is on the premises they should be allowed to remain during conduct of the stakeout.
 - b. Employees at the target site should not be permitted to carry personal firearms.
 - c. The outside team should be able to respond to the location within 30 seconds.
 - d. The outside team should be notified as soon as any suspicious activities or persons are identified within the target location.

answers

1. (d) All of the statements are true.
2. (c) Normally, arrests should be made outside the target location.
3. (a) Normally, private security should not be present at the stakeout location unless their absence would create suspicion of suspects.

have you read...?

“Foot Pursuits” *Training Key* #552, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Alexandria, VA.

This document stresses the high risks involved in and officer safety measures that should be observed in a foot pursuit.

