

Crowd Management

April 2019

The IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center creates four types of documents: Model Policies, Considerations Documents, Concepts & Issues Papers, and Need to Know one-page summaries. Typically, for each topic, either a Model Policy or a Considerations Document is created, supplemented with a Concepts & Issues Paper. This file contains the following documents:

- **[Model Policy](#)**: Provides police agencies with concrete guidance and directives by describing in sequential format the manner in which actions, tasks, and operations are to be performed.
- **[Concepts & Issues Paper](#)**: Designed to provide context and background information to support a Model Policy or Considerations Document for a deeper understanding of the topic.
- **[Need to Know...](#)**: Synthesizes the key points of the topic into a brief, one-page overview. This document is developed by Policy Center staff following the final approval of the policy and paper.

Model Policy

Updated: April 2019

Crowd Management

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for managing crowds, protecting individual rights, and preserving the peace during demonstrations and civil disturbances.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this agency to protect individual rights related to assembly and free speech; effectively manage crowds to prevent loss of life, injury, or property damage; and minimize disruption to persons who are not involved.

III. DEFINITIONS

- *Civil Disturbance*: A gathering that constitutes a breach of the peace or any assembly of persons where there is a threat of collective violence, destruction of property, or other unlawful acts. Such a gathering may also be referred to as a riot or unlawful assembly.
- *Crowd Control*: Techniques used to address civil disturbances, to include a show of force, crowd containment, dispersal equipment and tactics, and preparations for multiple arrests.
- *Crowd Management*: Techniques used to manage lawful assemblies before, during, and after the event for the purpose of maintaining lawful status through event planning, pre-event contact with event organizers, issuance of permits when applicable, information gathering, personnel training, and other means.
- *Demonstration*: A lawful assembly of persons organized primarily to engage in free speech activity. These may be scheduled events that allow for law enforcement planning. They include, but are not limited to, marches, protests, and other assemblies intended to attract attention. Lawful demonstrations can devolve into civil disturbances that necessitate enforcement action.
- *Impact Projectiles*: Projectiles designed and intended to deliver non-penetrating impact energy from safer than contact range. These may include direct fire or non-direct skip-fired rounds. The latter are projectiles that are discharged toward the ground in front of a target, theoretically delivering the energy to the subject following contact with the ground.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Preparation and Planning¹

1. Every effort should be made to make advance contact with event organizers and to gather the following necessary information about the event to ensure accurate assignment of personnel and resources:
 - a. What type of event is involved?
 - b. When is it planned?
 - c. Will the event coincide with other routine, large-scale events (e.g., sporting events)?
 - d. Is opposition to the event expected?
 - e. How many participants are expected?
 - f. What are the assembly areas and movement routes?
 - g. What actions, activities, or tactics are anticipated, to include use of demonstrator devices designed to thwart arrest?
 - h. What critical infrastructures are in the proximity of the event?
 - i. Have permits been issued?
 - j. Have other agencies such as fire and EMS been notified?
 - k. Is there a need to request mutual aid?
 - l. Has the appropriate level of properly equipped personnel been allocated to ensure safety of bystanders, officers, and demonstrators?
 - m. Will off-duty personnel be required?
 - n. What is the history of conduct at such events?
 - o. Are event organizers cooperative?
 - p. Who are the potential counter-protest groups?
 - q. Is there a history of violence between the group demonstrating and potential counter-protest groups?
2. The incident commander (IC) or a designee, shall prepare a written plan subject to the approval of the chief executive officer or his or her designee. The plan should address the following and be distributed to all participating agencies.
 - a. Command assignments and responsibilities
 - b. Personnel, unit structure, and deployment considerations to include the need for special response teams (i.e., SWAT, emergency medical personnel, and plainclothes officers).
 - c. Regular communication with legal advisors
 - d. Liaison with event planners, to include their legal advisors, where applicable
 - e. Liaison with outside agencies
 - f. Communications plan, to include release of information to the media
 - g. Pre-event intelligence analysis
 - h. Weather and terrain at the event location
 - i. Transportation, support, and relief of personnel

¹ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Small-Scale Special Event Preparedness available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/special-event-preparedness> for a list of additional items to consider when planning such an event.

- j. Staging points for additional resources and equipment
- k. Traffic management, including perimeter security
- l. First aid stations established in coordination with emergency medical service providers
- m. Demonstrator devices, extrication teams, and equipment
- n. Transportation of prisoners
- o. Arrestee processing areas
- p. Any laws, ordinances, or administrative rules specific to the event

B. Management and Organization Principles

1. Government may impose reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner in which persons assemble and engage in free speech activity. This agency shall place only those limitations and restrictions on demonstrations necessary to maintain public safety and order and, to the degree possible, facilitate uninhibited speech, commerce, and freedom of movement.
2. An Incident Command System (ICS) shall be used in crowd management and civil disturbances to ensure control and unified command.²
3. Organization of responsibilities shall be as follows:
 - a. The chief executive officer shall designate an incident commander (IC) responsible for overall control of a demonstration or civil disturbance.³
 - b. The IC shall implement the written plan.
 - c. In the case of a widely dispersed demonstration or disturbance, or event with multiple locations, multiple ICs may be assigned at the discretion of the chief executive officer.
 - d. The IC shall be responsible for preparing operations plans and management details associated with planned demonstrations.
4. The primary objectives of the IC at a civil disturbance are to accomplish the following:
 - a. Protect persons, regardless of their participation in the disturbance.
 - b. Disperse disorderly or threatening crowds in order to eliminate the immediate risks of continued escalation and further violence.
 - c. Arrest law violators, including those responsible for property damage, and remove or isolate persons inciting violent behavior.
5. Officers shall be briefed on what to expect and appropriate responses. They shall be informed that the IC or their designee(s) shall be responsible for ordering any response deemed appropriate.

C. General Crowd Response

1. Officers shall be deployed to monitor crowd activity. Sufficient resources to handle multiple unruly persons should be available, depending on the fluidity of the situation and degree of actual or likely disruption.
2. Uniformed personnel shall wear their badges and nameplates or other identification in a visible location on their person at all times.

² For example, agencies may wish to follow the protocols outlined in the United States' National Incident Management System.

³ Note that, for the purposes of this discussion, the designation of ICs is included. However, agencies may choose to utilize a unified command (UC) function instead. For more discussion on UC, please refer to the IACP Policy Center documents on Special Event Preparedness available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/special-event-preparedness>.

3. Officers shall be positioned in such a manner as to minimize contact with the assembled crowds.
4. Officers should avoid engaging in conversations related to the demonstration with attendees, refrain from reacting in response to comments from demonstrators, and maintain a courteous and neutral demeanor.
5. Persons who reside, are employed, or have emergency business within the area marked off by a police line shall not be prevented from entering the area unless circumstances suggest that their safety would be in jeopardy or their entry would interfere with law enforcement operations.
6. Individuals designated by the IC should establish and maintain communication with event organizers and relay information on crowd mood to the IC.
7. Supervisors should maintain close contact with their assigned officers to ensure compliance with orders, monitor behavior and disposition, and ensure that they are aware of any changes in crowd behavior or intent.
8. Audio and video recording of agency crowd response should be considered for evidentiary purposes.
9. Mass arrests shall be avoided, unless necessary.
10. Officers shall ensure that a means of egress for all individuals is present at all times.

D. Response to Spontaneous Civil Disturbances

1. The first officer to arrive on the scene of a spontaneous civil disturbance should:
 - a. Observe the situation from a safe distance to determine if the gathering is currently or potentially violent;
 - b. Notify communications of the nature and seriousness of the disturbance, particularly the availability of improvised or deadly weapons, the location and estimated number of participants, current activities (e.g., blocking traffic), direction of movement, and ingress and egress routes for emergency vehicles;
 - c. Request the assistance of a supervisor and necessary backup;
 - d. Attempt to identify crowd leaders and agitators engaged in criminal acts; and
 - e. At the first available opportunity, request the crowd to voluntarily disperse.
2. The first officer or supervisor in charge at the scene should:
 - a. Deploy officers at vantage points to report on crowd actions;
 - b. Establish a perimeter sufficient to contain the disturbance and prohibit entrance into the affected area;
 - c. Ensure that, to the degree possible, uninvolved individuals are evacuated from the immediate area of the disturbance;
 - d. Establish a temporary command post;
 - e. Provide ongoing assessment to communications;
 - f. Move and reroute pedestrian and vehicular traffic around the disorder;
 - g. Control unauthorized ingress and egress by participants; and
 - h. Prevent outside attempts to assist or reinforce participants.
3. The IC should also ensure that:
 - a. Adequate security is provided to fire and EMS personnel in the performance of emergency tasks;
 - b. Support and relief for personnel are available;
 - c. A secure staging area for emergency responders and equipment is designated;

- d. Liaison and staging points for media representatives are established and available information is provided as appropriate;
- e. The IC event log is maintained to document activities and actions taken during the course of the incident;
- f. Photographic or video evidence is preserved, in accordance with applicable law and agency policy, of crowd actions and officer response;
- g. Photographs or videos are taken of any injuries sustained by law enforcement officers or the public; and
- h. The need for full mobilization of sworn officers and the recall of off-duty officers are determined.

E. Use of Force

1. Officers should follow their agency's policy on use of force.
2. Unless exigent circumstances justify immediate action, officers shall not independently make arrests or employ force without command authorization.
3. The following restrictions and limitations on the use of force should be observed during demonstrations and civil disturbances. In all cases, weapons should be carried and deployed only by trained and authorized officers.
 - a. Canine teams may respond as backup when appropriate but should not be deployed for crowd control (i.e., containment or dispersal). Canines should remain in patrol vehicles or other secure locations and, whenever reasonably possible, out of the view of the crowd. Canines may be deployed in appropriate circumstances related to bomb detection, pursuit of suspects in buildings, and related situations.
 - b. Horses may be used to contain, control, and direct groups in nonviolent demonstrations as appropriate. They should not be used against passively resistant demonstrators, including those who are sitting or lying down. Unless exigent circumstances exist, horses should not be utilized when the use of chemical agents is anticipated or deployed, or in icy or snowy conditions or when similar lack of footing may jeopardize the animal, rider, or others.
 - c. Motor vehicles may be used to contain, control, and direct persons as appropriate but shall not be intentionally brought into contact with them unless the use of deadly force is authorized.
 - d. Bicycles may be used to control and move persons as appropriate.
 - e. Impact projectiles shall not be fired indiscriminately into crowds.
 - i. Non-direct (skip-fired) projectiles and munitions may be used in civil disturbances where life is in immediate jeopardy or the need to use the devices outweighs the potential risks involved.
 - ii. Direct-fired impact munitions, to include beanbag and related projectiles, may be used during civil disturbances against specific individuals who are engaged in conduct that poses an immediate threat of death or serious injury.
 - iii. A verbal warning should be given prior to the use of impact projectiles, when reasonably possible.
 - f. Electronic control weapons (ECWs) should be used during civil disturbances only for purposes of restraint or arrest of actively resistant individuals when alternative less forceful means of control

are not available or are unsuitable and only when the individual can be accurately targeted. ECWs shall not be fired indiscriminately into crowds.⁴

- g. Aerosol restraint spray, known as oleoresin capsicum (OC), may be used against specific individuals engaged in unlawful conduct or actively resisting arrest, or as necessary in a defensive capacity when appropriate. OC spray shall not be used indiscriminately against groups of people where bystanders would be unreasonably affected, or against passively resistant individuals. High-volume OC delivery systems (such as MK-9 and MK-46) are designed for and may be used in civil disturbances against groups of people engaged in unlawful acts or endangering public safety and security when approved by the IC. Whenever reasonably possible, a verbal warning should be issued prior to the use of these systems.⁵
- h. CS (2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile) chemical agents are primarily offensive weapons that shall be used with the utmost caution. CS may be deployed defensively to prevent injury when lesser force options are either not available or would likely be ineffective. Such munitions shall be deployed at the direction of the IC and only when avenues of egress are available to the crowd. When reasonably possible, their use shall be announced to the crowd in advance. CN (phenacyl chloride) shall not be used in any instance.
- i. A baton or similar device can be used as a defensive weapon; as a means of overcoming resistance (e.g., used in the two-hand horizontal thrust on a police line); to stop, control, or neutralize perceived threatening resistance; as a show of force; or as a means to contain or disperse a crowd.
- j. All uses of force shall be reported and investigated in accordance with agency policy.⁶

F. Crowd Dispersal

1. Before ordering forced dispersal of a civil disturbance, the IC should determine whether lesser alternatives may be effective. These alternatives include the use of containment and dialogue, as follows:
 - a. Establish contact with event organizers or crowd leaders to assess their intentions and motivations and develop a mutually acceptable plan for de-escalation and dispersal.
 - b. Communicate to the participants that their assembly is in violation of the law and that the agency wishes to resolve the incident peacefully, but that acts of violence will be dealt with swiftly and decisively.
 - c. Target specific violent or disruptive individuals for arrest.
2. Prior to issuing dispersal orders, the IC should ensure that all potentially necessary law enforcement, fire, and EMS equipment and personnel are on hand to successfully carry out tactical operations and that logistical needs for making mass arrests are in place.
3. When the IC has made a determination that crowd dispersal is required, he or she shall direct unit commanders, where time and circumstances permit, to issue warnings prior to taking action to disperse the crowd.

⁴ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Electronic Control Weapons available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/electron-ic-control-weapons>.

⁵ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Pepper Aerosol Restraint Spray available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/pepper-aerosol-restraint-spray>.

⁶ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Reporting Use of Force available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/reporting-use-of-force>.

- a. The warning shall consist of an announcement citing the offenses or violations being committed, an order to disperse, and designated dispersal routes.
 - b. A second and third warning should be issued at reasonable time intervals before designated actions are taken to disperse the crowd.
 - c. Where possible, the warnings should be audio or video recorded and the time and the names of the issuing officers recorded in the IC's event log.
4. Specific crowd dispersal tactics should be ordered as necessary where the crowd does not heed warnings. These include, but are not limited to, any one or combination of the following:
- a. Display of forceful presence to include police lines combined with motorcycles, law enforcement vehicles, mounted units, bicycle units, and mobile field forces
 - b. Multiple simultaneous arrests
 - c. Use of aerosol crowd control chemical agents
 - d. Law enforcement formations and the use of batons for forcing crowd movement

G. Mass Arrest

During a civil disturbance, it may be necessary to make arrests of numerous individuals over a relatively short period of time. For this process to be handled efficiently, safely, and legally, the following should be observed:

1. Mass arrests should be conducted by designated squads.
2. An adequate secure area should be designated for holding arrestees after processing and while awaiting transportation to a detention center.
3. Arrest teams should be advised of the basic offenses to be charged in all arrests, and all arrestees shall be advised of these charges.
4. Arrestees who are sitting or lying down but agree to walk shall be escorted to the transportation vehicle for processing. Two or more officers should carry those who refuse to walk.
5. Arrestees shall be searched incident to arrest for weapons, evidence of the crime of arrest, and contraband.
6. Photographs should be taken of the arrestee and any arrestee property, and a field arrest form shall be completed.
7. Transporting officers should not accept arrestees without a properly prepared field arrest form and photographs and shall ensure that all property is properly processed.
8. Anyone who is injured, to include arrestees, shall be provided medical attention. Photographs should be taken of all known injuries.

H. Deactivation

When the disturbance has been brought under control,

1. All personnel engaged in the incident shall be accounted for and an assessment and documentation made of personal injuries.
2. Witnesses, suspects, and others should be interviewed or questioned.
3. All necessary personnel should be debriefed as required.
4. Any equipment utilized by officers should be replaced.

5. All written reports shall be completed as soon as possible after the incident.⁷ Comprehensive documentation should include the basis for the incident and the agency's response to the incident, with a statement of impact to include the costs of equipment, personnel, and related items.

I. Training

1. Officers should receive both initial and ongoing training on appropriate response to crowd control and management. Joint training should also be conducted with all agencies who are involved in crowd management activities.

⁷ For more information, see the IACP Policy Center documents on Small-Scale Special Event Preparedness available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/special-event-preparedness>.

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. 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. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes. Law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions, and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered and should therefore consult their legal advisor before implementing any policy.

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Concepts & Issues

Updated: April 2019

Crowd Management

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of Document

This paper is designed to accompany the Model Policy on Crowd Management established by the IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center. This paper provides essential background material and supporting documentation to provide greater understanding of the developmental philosophy and implementation requirements for the model policy. This material will be of value to law enforcement executives in their efforts to tailor the model to the requirements and circumstances of their communities and their law enforcement agencies.

B. Background

Officers responding to planned rallies, spontaneous crowds, and civil disturbances—and those called upon to assist in these incidents—must follow procedures best designed to protect life, the rights and safety of the persons involved, and property. Peaceful demonstrations can spawn protests and counter-protests that can lead to civil disorder. On a lesser scale, law enforcement agencies have been frequently called upon to manage crowds of political protestors arising from international or national summits and conferences and an array of discontented or angry persons with varying social or political agendas. Sports events, rock concerts, festivals, and celebratory gatherings can, and have, provided opportunities for large-scale disorders and disturbances.

Civil disturbances and demonstrations have changed over the years, as have the tactics and techniques of law enforcement agencies called upon to manage and control them. Demonstrations and public protests are not infrequent, but they have taken on a more systematic, organized nature and have invoked tools that were not available in past decades. Social media is now commonly used to mobilize and manage participants prior to and during demonstrations and civil disturbances. Group demonstration tactics that may serve a self-policing function have also been refined and are now disseminated through “how-to” manuals and field training by certain professional protest groups. In addition, a trend has emerged where out-of-town protestors are increasingly attending events. The anonymity of these participants adds a layer of uncertainty, as event organizers are often unaware of the identities or intent of these individuals, making pre-planning potentially ineffective.

At the same time, law enforcement practices and protocols have undergone transformations. Studies of crowd behavior and law enforcement after-action reports have led to the development of new strategies and tactics for protest policing. Agencies now utilize tactical teams that work within the crowd to identify agitators and provocateurs, protocols that call for arrests only when absolutely necessary, systematic event pre-planning, established command and control, and the use of a variety of non-deadly force options.

Understandably, crowd control and management policy, procedure, and tactics vary somewhat between jurisdictions. Tactics that must be used to protect vital assets, the ability to conduct essential business, and the free movement of critical personnel and equipment in one location will sometimes differ from practices used in other jurisdictions that are not similarly affected. The nature of crowd management and control also varies somewhat by the cultural differences between jurisdictions. It is not within the scope of this document to identify the many differences associated with managing and controlling all possible events. Rather, this document is intended to identify some of the common principles of crowd policing that have been shown to serve the best interest of law enforcement agencies, their communities, and those who participate in peaceful crowds or potentially volatile protests.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Civil Disturbances and Demonstrations

United States Considerations. All persons in the United States have the right to march, demonstrate, protest, or undertake similar activities protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Freedom of speech, association, assembly, and the right to petition the government are subject only to reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of their expression. The content of the speech or message does not provide the basis for imposing limitations on these rights, which incorporate a wide variety of both verbal and non-verbal communication.¹ These protected activities include the use of vigils, distribution of literature, displaying banners and signs, street theatre, and other forms of expression, as long as they are conducted legally. While law enforcement must strive to maintain the peace during events such as those listed above, officers and their agencies must also protect the rights of assembly and free speech guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. By law, jurisdictions can impose reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of public assemblies for expression of First Amendment rights; this provides for some law enforcement discretion.

Definitions. A *civil disturbance* is an unlawful assembly and is usually defined by law. Normally, it is a gathering that constitutes a breach of the peace or any assembly of persons where there is a threat of collective violence, destruction of property, or other unlawful acts. Civil disturbances are often, but not always, spontaneous occurrences that require the emergency mobilization of law enforcement officers and related emergency services. Law enforcement may employ crowd control techniques and tactics to address unlawful public assemblies to include a show of force, crowd containment, dispersal equipment and strategies, and preparation for possible multiple arrests.

A *demonstration* is a legal assembly of persons who have organized primarily to express political or social doctrine or views. These types of events often allow for law enforcement preparation as they are generally planned activities that often involve the procurement of permits. They include, but are not limited to marches, protests, and other assemblies that are largely designed to attract the attention of the public and the media. However, without the control of organizers and the presence of law enforcement, or with the presence of agitators and/or counter-demonstrators, legal demonstrations can evolve into civil disturbances that necessitate law enforcement interaction.

B. Planning²

Management and control of crowds are dependent on many factors including the size and intent of the gathering; propensity for violence or property damage; probability of counter-demonstrations; capabilities of the law enforcement

¹ For instance, see *Snyder v. Phelps*, 526 U.S. 443 (2011).

² For more detailed guidance regarding planning, please refer to the IACP Policy Center document on Small-Scale Special Event Preparedness available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/special-event-preparedness>.

agency; availability of officers from contiguous jurisdictions under mutual aid; and other related factors. Agencies should follow established incident management protocols.³

Law enforcement agencies generally have advance notice of events that will draw significant crowds. The degree of advance notice will, to some extent, govern how much time a law enforcement agency can invest in planning in order to prepare a fully responsive operational plan.⁴ The following are a few of the principal areas of concern that should be addressed given reasonable advance notice.

Information Gathering. Gathering information on the group(s) sponsoring or otherwise participating in the event is the basic starting point for organizational planning and preparation. Law enforcement agencies that have previously dealt with the same groups or organizations can be helpful and can often identify agitators or counter-demonstrators who frequently become involved. Fusion centers should be contacted for assistance in providing information on crowd events, event organizers, social media and other information of value in planning and response.

An effort should be made to identify and make advance contact with event organizers in order to gather information and establish the ground rules for the event. In particular, non-negotiable matters should be specified by the responsible law enforcement agency, with the intention that a common understanding be reached by both parties. Law enforcement agencies may wish to negotiate tentative agreements on force responses to crowd conduct in order to help organizers perform some degree of crowd control and self-management.

The following types of information should be obtained to allow for more responsive planning.

- What type of event is involved?
- When is it planned?
- Will the event coincide with other routine, large-scale events (e.g., sporting events)?
- Is opposition to the event expected?
- How many participants are expected?
- What are the assembly areas and movement routes?
- What actions, activities, or tactics are anticipated, to include use of demonstrator devices designed to thwart arrest?
- What critical infrastructures are in the proximity of the event?
- Have permits been issued?
- Have other agencies such as fire and EMS been notified?
- Is there a need to request mutual aid?
- Has the appropriate level of properly equipped personnel been allocated to ensure safety of officers, demonstrators, and bystanders?
- Will off-duty personnel be required?
- What is the history of conduct at such events?
- Are event organizers cooperative?
- Who are the potential counter-protest groups?
- Is there a history of violence between the group demonstrating and potential counter-protest groups?

³ For example, agencies may wish to follow the protocols outlined in the United States' National Incident Management System. See the IACP Policy Center document on Incident Command available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/incident-command>.

⁴ See the IACP Policy Center document on Small-Scale Special Event Preparedness for a comprehensive discussion of items to be considered when planning an event. The document is available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/special-event-preparedness>.

Agencies should also consider monitoring social media in advance of the event to obtain intelligence regarding the event. This may include information regarding instructions provided by attendees by event organizers or intended participation by opposing groups.

Resources. Many law enforcement agencies are ill-equipped to manage or control large crowds unless their jurisdiction is one that hosts events on a recurring basis or is one of the preferred locations for demonstrations and protests. Whatever the case, nearly all law enforcement and fire services should be party to established multijurisdictional agreements or mutual aid plans that will help meet the material and personnel resources necessary. These resources must be available where and when needed to manage demonstrations and civil unrest. Multijurisdictional agreements provide the basis of individual agency responsibilities, cost reimbursement, and mobilization plans. Joint periodic training must be undertaken to ensure collective understanding of policies, procedures, and rules that must be followed by all officers during crowd management and control operations.⁵ In cases where mutual aid is activated, incoming personnel must understand that they are under the command of the requesting agency and are required to follow its policies and direction.

Information gathering can help provide insight on any crowd management measures that could require mutual aid. Discussions should be held as far in advance as possible with involved jurisdictions to determine their capacity to respond. Staging areas should be identified for resources that may be needed during the event. This should include provisions for food, water, and rest for officers who should be rotated off crowd control assignments on a routine basis.

Full civil disturbance gear and related equipment should be staged at key locations—but should not be issued initially in crowd management situations, as it may escalate tensions and anxiety. Other types of equipment may include but are not limited to the following:

- Mobile command post
- First aid/triage station
- Mass arrest and field booking supplies
- Property and evidence control materials
- Backup vehicles and fuel
- Individual communications equipment
- Barriers, fencing, cutting tools, and containment options
- Arrangements for vehicle removal/towing

Crowd Management Plan. Once information has been gathered regarding the event, a single written plan should be developed. This plan may be referred to as an incident action plan (IAP) or event action plan (EAP). A single plan should be used by all agencies participating in the crowd response. This plan should be developed, reviewed, and approved by representatives from the involved disciplines.

Initial decisions must be made with respect to assignment of incident, operations, and tactical commanders and identification of circumstances in which command and control responsibilities transfer to another level. It is important that supervisors and commanders at the incident scene understand who is authorized to make decisions on selective matters, such as traffic control, resources, and related matters. In general, the chief executive officer shall designate an incident commander (IC) who is responsible for overall control; however, a unified command (UC) approach may be selected instead. Using the UC approach, representatives from the appropriate disciplines, such as law enforcement, fire, EMS, field services, waste management, traffic signals, water, housing, and code enforcement, are involved in the decision-making process. Normally, all decisions related to the use of force should be approved by the IC or UC.

⁵ Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council, *Recommendations for First Amendment-Protected Events for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

The plan should address:

- provisions for command assignments and responsibilities;
- manpower and potential call out requirements, to potentially include special response teams or plainclothes officers unit structure deployment;
- regular communications with agency legal advisors;
- liaison with event leaders, to include their legal advisors, where applicable;
- liaison with outside agencies, to include fire and EMS services;
- communications plan, to include release of information to the media;
- pre-event intelligence analysis;
- weather report and description of terrain at event location;
- transportation, feeding, and relief of personnel;
- traffic management, including perimeter security;
- demonstrator extrication teams and equipment;
- first aid/triage stations;
- transportation of prisoners;
- arrestee processing areas; and
- any laws, ordinances, or administrative rules specific to the event.

When sufficient advance notice is available, law enforcement can effectively leverage federal, state, and local resources to help address crowd management or, in other cases, give advance notice to agencies or departments that may be needed during or following the incident. These include such entities as jails, hospitals, parks and recreation, public works, public transportation, waste management, and utility companies.

The IC or similar authority must also ensure that the following actions are taken:

- Designate a location for and establishment of a single command post and assignment of command responsibilities. Multiple command posts are strongly discouraged.
- Determine the level of force and engagement tactics deemed reasonable to resolve unlawful actions (e.g., mobile field force, multiple simultaneous arrests, and embedded arrest teams).
- Identify egress routes in the event of forced crowd dispersal.
- Authorize arrest as a means of curtailing unlawful actions.
- Designate:
 - A liaison officer to coordinate with other local emergency service providers, as well as government offices, agencies, and departments, as appropriate
 - One individual, such as a public information officer (PIO), to manage information flow to the public through the media;
 - An officer(s) to monitor reports of officer uses of force and misconduct; and
 - A recorder for purposes of documenting crowd actions, responses and overall decision making.

Community Engagement. Officials should inform community members and business owners who are likely to be impacted by the event of the nature of the event and the planned response well in advance. This advance notice should include information regarding areas where access will be restricted. Agencies should also provide updates regarding the event to the public on the day of the event; social media is an excellent tool for distribution of this information.

C. Crowd Management and Control Considerations

Officers in squads or platoons should monitor crowd activity. Sufficient resources to make multiple simultaneous arrests should be available, irrespective of the purported peacefulness of the demonstration. Plans must be in place to deal with counter-demonstrators or hecklers who congregate, before they instigate a physical confrontation.

Officers assigned to duties at demonstrations and disturbances should wear their badges, nameplates, or other personal identification on the outside of their uniforms or on their helmets at all times. Officers should refrain from engaging in conversations related to the demonstration with, or reacting in response to comments from, demonstrators and should maintain a professional, neutral demeanor. Officers should focus on conveying the message that law enforcement is there to protect crowd participants and their right to demonstrate peacefully.⁶

Persons who reside, are employed, or have business of an emergency nature in the area marked off by a police line should not be barred from entering the demonstration area unless circumstances suggest that their safety would be in jeopardy or their entry would interfere with law enforcement operations. This issue can be a difficult one for law enforcement in its attempt to protect the rights of demonstrators and non-demonstrators alike. Non-demonstrators should, where reasonably possible, be given access to locations where demonstrations arise in order to conduct business and access their property. At the same time, such individuals can become caught up among demonstrators making them indistinguishable from those who may be creating disorder and those who are peaceful. Providing access and freedom of movement to and from businesses and residences should be included in the pre-planning stages with event organizers and appropriate law enforcement officials when possible.

Supervisors must maintain close contact with officers under their command to ensure their compliance with orders; monitor their behavior and disposition; and ensure that they are aware of any changes in crowd attitude or actions.

Whenever possible, mass arrests should be avoided. In addition, officers should ensure that a means of egress is available to individuals at all times.

D. Spontaneous Demonstrations and Civil Disturbances

There are instances in which law enforcement agencies have little or no warning to prepare for demonstrations or civil disturbances. Demonstrations or large gatherings of any kind that escalate into civil disturbances should be governed by the policies and regulations concerning crowd management, control, and dispersal identified here with respect to civil disturbances.

The first officer to arrive on the scene of a spontaneous demonstration or civil disturbance has a number of responsibilities, to include the following:

- Observe the situation from a safe distance to determine if the gathering is currently or potentially violent.
- Notify communications personnel of the nature and seriousness of the disturbance, particularly the availability of improvised or deadly weapons; crowd location and estimated number of participants; current activities (such as blocking traffic); direction of movement; and ingress and egress routes for emergency vehicles.
- Request the assistance of a supervisor and any necessary backup.
- Attempt to identify crowd leaders, potential agitators, and anyone engaged in criminal acts.
- At the first available opportunity, request the crowd to voluntarily disperse.

⁶ Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council, *Recommendations for First Amendment-Protected Events for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies*.

The first supervisor in charge at the scene should assess the situation and request sufficient personnel and related resources necessary to perform the following tasks:

- Deploy officers to the best vantage points to observe and report on crowd actions.
- Establish a perimeter sufficient to contain the disturbance and prohibit entrance into the affected area.
- Ensure that, to the degree possible, uninvolved civilians are evacuated from the immediate area of the disturbance.
- Establish a temporary command post based on proximity to the scene, availability of communications, space, and security from crowd participants.
- Continually assess the situation and update communications on the status of the crowd, along with any additional needs.
- Establish surveillance points to identify potential agitators, leaders, and individuals who may be committing crimes.
- Document and report on events as they happen.

When civil disturbances cannot be controlled with available field personnel within a reasonable period of time, the chief executive officer or officer in charge should serve as or appoint an IC to direct operations. The primary objectives of the IC in such circumstances should be to (1) protect persons, including nonparticipants and participants alike; (2) disperse disorderly or threatening crowds in order to eliminate the immediate risks of continued escalation and further violence; and (3) arrest individual law violators, including those responsible for property damage, and remove or isolate those persons inciting violent behavior.

Outside the perimeter, efforts should be made to move and reroute pedestrian and vehicular traffic around the civil disturbance and to control ingress to and egress from the location. In addition, if the circumstances of the incident dictate a need,

- Adequate force security should be provided for fire and EMS personnel in the performance of emergency tasks.
- The feeding and relief requirements of personnel should be addressed.
- The adequacy and security of the incident command post should be ensured.
- A staging area for emergency responders and equipment should be designated.
- A liaison and staging point for media representatives should be established and, to the degree possible, available information should be provided.
- An event log should be created to document activities and actions taken during the course of the incident.
- Photographic or video evidence of crowd actions and officer response should be captured, in accordance with applicable law and agency policy.
- Photographs or videos of any injuries sustained by law enforcement officers or the public should be taken.
- The need for full mobilization of sworn officers; recall of off-duty officers; and/or activation of mutual aid agreements should be determined.

E. Use of Force

Officers should follow their agency's policy on use of force. Unity of action and command and control are key to the effective handling of demonstrations and civil disturbances. Therefore, unless exigent circumstances require immediate action, officers should not independently make arrests or employ force without command authorization.

Prior to deployment, all personnel engaged in crowd management or control should be made aware of the ground rules for the use of force as part of their briefing and any terms that may have been negotiated between law enforcement and demonstration organizers. Officers providing support from other agencies should always be briefed on policies

related to use of force and crowd control. The fact that some individuals in a crowd have engaged in unlawful conduct does not normally provide blanket grounds for use-of-force countermeasures, crowd dispersal, or declaration of an unlawful assembly. When lines of communication have been maintained between event organizers or leaders and a law enforcement liaison, it is sometimes possible to negotiate a resolution to the situation. Given such situations, many crowds tend to become self-enforcing to ensure that they can continue to assemble and convey their message.

Beyond the basic legal and operational requirements for the use of force, there are some restrictions that are generally recognized and are specific to crowd control and management. Individual law enforcement agencies must make independent decisions in this regard based on equipment and personnel availabilities, the severity of the situation, and other related matters. In general, the following are regarded as restrictions and limitations on the use of force that should be observed during demonstrations and civil disturbances. These measures should be addressed in training.

Canines should not normally be deployed for the purposes of crowd control. When their use as backup is deemed necessary and appropriate, canines should remain in patrol vehicles or other secure locations and, whenever reasonably possible, out of the view of the crowd. Canines should not be deployed for crowd control or management of peaceful demonstrations—but may be deployed in isolated circumstances related to bomb detection, pursuit of suspects in buildings, and related situations.

Horses can be a significant asset in controlling and managing crowds and can normally be used to contain, or direct groups in nonviolent demonstrations as appropriate. However, they should not be used against passively resistant demonstrators. This is especially true of individuals who are sitting or lying down. Unless exigent circumstances exist, horses should not be deployed when the use of chemical agents is anticipated or have been deployed or in ice or snow or other conditions where footing is problematic.

Fire hoses are not recommended for crowd containment or dispersal, due to the potential for negative connotations stemming from their inappropriate use in the past.

Motor vehicles under the control of law enforcement officers may be used to contain, control, and direct persons if required. Vehicles can be used to establish containment areas and barriers and to move persons if caution and coordination are employed. However, vehicles should not intentionally be brought into contact with persons unless deadly force is authorized.

Bicycles are an effective form of crowd control and barrier placement in certain situations when used in conjunction with additional ground personnel. Their mobility and ability to quickly deploy into areas accessible only by foot traffic can provide an additional resource to guide or direct a crowd into or away from certain areas. They may be perceived as less threatening than other force options, yet still provide a visible barrier for passage of foot traffic.

Impact projectiles are designed and intended to deliver non-penetrating impact energy from safer than contact range. These may include direct fire or non-direct skip-fired rounds. The latter are projectiles that are discharged toward the ground in front of a target, theoretically delivering the energy to the subject following contact with the ground. Impact projectiles can be used in crowd control situations when officers have had sufficient training and the projectiles are used appropriately based on the totality of circumstances presented.⁷

Skip-fired projectiles and munitions may be used in civil disturbances where life is or is likely to be in jeopardy, while recognizing that their lack of target specific accuracy increases the risk of accidental, unintended targets or body parts being contacted.

Direct-fired impact munitions, to include beanbag and similar munitions, should be deployed in a manner that recognizes the distinct factors involved, including the potential risk of hitting an unintended target due to officer-subject range and crowd density. Accordingly, direct-fire munitions are generally used against specific individuals who

⁷ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Impact Projectiles available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/impact-projectiles>.

are engaged in conduct that poses an immediate threat of death or serious injury or significant levels of property damage. A verbal warning should be given prior to the use of impact munitions when reasonably possible.

Electronic control weapons (ECWs) should be used during civil disturbances only for purposes of restraint or arrest of noncompliant and resistant individuals where proper target acquisition is possible and when alternative lesser means of control are not available.⁸

Aerosol restraint spray oleoresin capsicum (OC) is best used in crowd control situations against specific individuals who are engaged in unlawful acts or actively resisting arrest. OC may also be appropriate for defensive use when other alternatives are inadequate, unreasonable, or unavailable. OC should not be used indiscriminately against groups of people; in demonstrations or crowds where bystanders or other officers would be unreasonably affected; or against passively resistant individuals. High-volume OC delivery systems (such as MK-9 and MK-46) are designed for and can be used in civil disturbances against groups of people engaged in unlawful acts or endangering public safety and security, with approval of the IC. A warning should be issued prior to the use of these systems, whenever reasonably possible.⁹

CS (2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile) chemical agents in the “hot gas” configuration should be used with caution, as uncontrolled use can have negative consequences with respect to efforts to control, manage, or disperse crowds. In addition, they are subject to being thrown back and may escalate violence in some situations. Such munitions should be carried and deployed only by trained and authorized officers at the direction of the IC or his or her designee. The crowd should be warned prior to CS deployment and provided with avenues of egress. CN (phenacyl chloride) gas should never be used.

The *riot baton* can be used primarily as a defensive weapon or as a means of overcoming resistance when it is used in the two-hand horizontal thrust on a police line; to stop, control, or neutralize perceived threatening resistance; as a show of force; or as a means to contain or disperse a crowd.

F. Mass Arrest

During the course of civil disturbances, it may be necessary to make arrests of numerous individuals over a relatively short period of time. In order for this process to be handled efficiently, safely, and legally, a number of actions and procedures should be observed.

The IC should designate officers to perform mass or directed arrests and should be advised of the basic charges to be recorded in all arrests. Persons who appear to be the leading agitators for confrontation or who are inciting crowd violence should be identified and removed. Passive subjects who are sitting or lying down, but who agree to walk, should be escorted to the transportation vehicles for processing. Two or more officers should be designated to carry each individual who refuses to walk. If it is required, a designated secure area should be identified for holding arrestees after their initial field booking and while awaiting transportation. All arrestees should be advised of the charges and searched for weapons, evidence, and contraband.

Digital photographs should be taken of the arrestee with the arresting officer and of the arrestee and any property that is turned over to the transporting officer. Transporting officers should not accept arrestees without a properly prepared field arrest form and assurance that photographs have been taken. They should also ensure that all arrestee property is placed in a container that is legibly marked with the arrest form number. At the detention or processing facility, the transporting officer should deliver the arrestee together with the arrest form and personal property.

All injured arrestees should be provided medical attention prior to being transported to the detention facility; photographs or videos should be taken of all known injuries.

⁸ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Electronic Control Weapons available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/electronic-control-weapons>.

⁹ See the IACP Policy Center documents on Pepper Aerosol Restraint Spray available at <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/pepper-aerosol-restraint-spray>.

G. Crowd Dispersal

When the need for crowd dispersal becomes a possibility, the IC may have time to consider whether lesser alternatives may be effective, such as continued dialogue. In order to make this determination, the intention and motivation of leaders should be established along with exploring a mutually acceptable plan for de-escalation and dispersal of the crowd. Another option is to communicate to the participants that their assembly is in violation of the law and that the agency wishes to resolve the incident peacefully, but that acts of violence will be dealt with swiftly and decisively. The IC may also opt to de-escalate violence by targeting and arresting specific individuals who are engaged in violence or inciting violence.

All potentially necessary equipment and personnel, such as law enforcement, fire, and EMS, should be on hand to successfully carry out tactical requirements and contingencies if dispersal of the crowd is required. This should also include logistical requirements related to the potential for making mass arrests. The IC should direct unit commander(s) to issue warnings prior to taking physical actions to disperse the crowd whenever this is reasonably possible. A warning should be issued loudly and often enough to be heard by the entire crowd. The warning should consist of an announcement citing the offenses or violations being committed; an order to disperse; and the designation of dispersal routes. A second and a third warning should be issued at reasonable time intervals if time permits before actions are taken to disperse the crowd. To ensure the warnings have been heard throughout the crowd, it is recommended that at least two officers go to the rear of the crowd to verify the warnings are audible. When practical, the warnings should be audio recorded at a location in the rear of the crowd. In addition, the time and the names of the issuing officers should be noted in the IC's event log.

Law enforcement agencies may employ several options when a crowd does not heed their warnings. These include, but are not limited to, any one or any combination of the following: Note that a means of egress for all individuals must be present at all times.

- Display of forceful presence, which can include police lines combined with motorcycles, law enforcement vehicles, and mobile field forces
- Multiple simultaneous arrests
- Use of aerosol crowd control chemical agents
- Law enforcement formations and use of batons for forcing crowd movement

H. Use-of-Force Reporting and Investigation

Use-of-force reporting requirements apply equally to policing demonstrations and civil disturbances. It is very important for law enforcement agencies to document and investigate uses of force during these events, not only for managerial and accountability reasons, but also to respond effectively to potential complaints alleging excessive force following an event.

However, reporting, documenting, and recording uses of force in the context of civil disturbances can be hampered by logistical and safety concerns. As such, the agency's internal affairs (IA) or designated managerial personnel may wish to have alternative protocols in place for these instances.

A member(s) of the agency's designated managerial personnel trained and equipped to investigate use-of-force incidents should be assigned to the command post of the IC during a declared civil disturbance to coordinate and record force-related information and complaints. This individual, or his or her equivalent, should be prepared to deploy quickly to a serious use-of-force incident and should complete a comprehensive use-of-force after-action report. However, only serious uses of force, as defined by the agency, should be investigated during the course of the civil disturbance. Events should be video recorded and photographed for the purposes of after-action reporting and as evidence for possible defense in future litigation or other legal inquiries.

I. Deactivation

When the demonstration or civil disturbance has concluded, all law enforcement officers engaged in the incident should be accounted for; and any personnel injuries should be assessed and documented. Officers should interview or question all witnesses, suspects, and others. In addition, all involved personnel should be debriefed, as required, and any equipment that has been used during the event, such as handcuffs or OC spray, should be replaced. This is particularly important for any standard equipment that is carried by officers in a patrol capacity.

All written reports should be completed as soon as possible after the event. They should provide comprehensive documentation of any incidents that occurred; any assessments to explain the origin(s) or basis for the incident; the agency's response; and a statement of impact and outcomes, to include the costs of equipment, personnel, continuing effects, and other related items or issues. These reports and the overall response to the event should be analyzed in an effort to develop best practices and to ensure that adequate training is provided to officers responding to similar events in the future.

J. Training

Officers should receive both initial and ongoing training related to crowd control and management. Training considerations should include the following:

- Training for all personnel, including new officers, to respond to crowd control events
- Periodic refresher training on a quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis as appropriate for the agency
- Specialty units training together, such as bike units and mounted patrol, special response teams, crowd management teams, aircraft operations, and mobile response teams
- Joint training exercises with other agencies that will likely work together during major events, which should include reviewing the written plan and the incident command system
- Use of force training to ensure all members understand current case law, best practices, and latest trends
- Incorporating training in the use of less-lethal munitions and chemical agent deployment training during periodic training, joint training, or use-of-force training
- Initial and refresher incident management training for supervisors and team leaders

III. CONCLUSION

Wherever possible, law enforcement agencies should work with crowd event organizers to develop a written plan that outlines the response to planned gatherings of large numbers of individuals. By establishing open lines of communication with organizers, agencies can establish ground rules prior to the event and respond quickly to any items of concern during the event. However, in some instances, peaceful gatherings may devolve into civil disturbances. In these situations, law enforcement agencies must be prepared to respond to crowds in a way that protects individual rights related to assembly and free speech; prevents loss of life, injury, or property damage; and minimizes disruption to persons who are not involved.

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Need to Know ...

Updated: April 2019

Crowd Management

When encountering crowds, law enforcement efforts should focus on protecting individual rights related to assembly and free speech; preventing loss of life, injury, or property damage; and minimizing disruption to persons who are not involved.

- The **primary goal** of all law enforcement crowd response should be to protect individuals and their associated rights, including, but not limited to, those associated with assembly and free speech.
- Whenever possible, law enforcement agencies should attempt to make **advance contact** with event organizers to gather information about the event to ensure accurate assignment of personnel and resources. By establishing positive communication channels and working relationships in advance, law enforcement can help mitigate possible confusion and negative outcomes during the event.
- An **incident command system (ICS)** should be utilized in crowd management and civil disturbances to ensure control and unified command. In the United States, this may include the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- Agencies should develop an **event action plan (EAP)** prior to any event involving large gatherings of individuals. The EAP should address items such as command assignments and responsibilities, need for special response teams, staging points, traffic management, and communications plans.
- Officers should be deployed to **monitor crowd activity**. These officers should wear their badges, nameplates, or other personal identification on their uniforms or helmets in a manner that is clearly visible at all times and should refrain from engaging in contentious conversations with participants.
- **Mass arrests** in crowd situations should be avoided unless necessary.
- A **means of egress** must be available to all individuals at all times.
- In crowd situations, officers should be permitted to use only the **level of force** that is objectively reasonable to protect themselves or others from physical harm; to restrain or subdue a resistant individual; or to bring an unlawful situation safely and effectively under control.
- In situations where a demonstration or civil disturbance occurs **spontaneously**, the first officer on the scene should observe the situation from a safe distance, notify communications, request assistance from a supervisor, and attempt to identify any crowd leaders. Once additional resources are available, the goal should be to disperse the disorderly or threatening crowd in order to eliminate the immediate risks of continued escalation and further violence.
- In some situations, **crowd dispersal** techniques may be necessary. However, all potentially necessary equipment and personnel, such as law enforcement, fire, and EMS, should be on hand prior to beginning the dispersal.



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