Issue areas

The COPS Office and CNA’s assessment of LVMPD operations with respect to OISs focuses on policy, training, and accountability systems. Those are the primary mechanisms through which the department establishes and reinforces its standards of conduct and organizational culture. They form a cycle of continuous improvement that will ultimately help the department reduce the number of OISs and the number of persons killed as a result.

The focus of the COPS Office/CNA review centered on LVMPD deadly force issue areas involving: 1) policy and procedures; 2) training and tactics; 3) investigation and documentation; and 4) incident review.

Specifically, CNA examined the department’s Use of Force Policy, which defines the standard of conduct for all sworn personnel. We identified six types of training that relate to OISs and assessed these programs, providing recommendations for improvement. We reviewed the relevant internal and external accountability systems. Internally, accountability consists of LVMPD’s Force Investigation Team, Critical Incident Review Team, and Use of Force Review Board. External accountability consists of the District Attorney’s Office and the Coroner’s Inquest. In addition to these formal mechanisms of accountability and control, we discuss overarching community concerns and LVMPD’s responsiveness to those concerns.

Use of force policy and procedures

A police department’s use of force policy is an important component of preparing officers—it provides the officer, the community, and the accountability bodies with the basis for understanding proper procedure and tactics. The policy will ultimately dictate the way in which officers use force and, therefore, the prevalence of force incidents, including OISs. Use of force policy not only shapes officers’ actions, it can also potentially help shape their understanding of deadly force and, therefore, the organization’s culture as it relates to this issue.

LVMPD recently made substantial revisions to its General Order on use of force to account for the recent finding of the Ninth Circuit Court, the input of internal stakeholders in the department and external stakeholders in the community, and a review of policies from similar sized agencies to determine industry standards. The order not only describes the parameters for using force but also provides a use of force model, standard definitions of terms, and language that adds context and justification for the policy.

The order comprises 11 parts, each covering a topic pertaining to the use of force: policy; definitions; use of force to effect a detention, an arrest, or to conduct a search; a determination of objectively reasonable force; duty to intervene; levels of resistance; levels of control; use of force model; de-escalation; authorized force tools, techniques, and equipment; and reportable force incidents.
Use of force training and tactics

Policy determines the appropriate procedure tactics and their parameters, and training reinforces those concepts, giving officers the technical skills needed to accomplish their goals of public safety and officer safety. Particular techniques and tactics, such as de-escalation, have been known to reduce the need to use force. Police leaders recently acknowledged that improper uses of force are often the result of officers not using the tactics they were trained to use. It stands to reason that an efficient and effective training program is one that reduces the need for officers to use force, including deadly force.


We examined six training modules that can impact the prevalence and nature of OISs: defensive tactics training; crisis intervention team (CIT) training; electronic control device (ECD) training; advanced officer skills training (AOST); reality-based training (RBT); and Use of Force Policy training. Each training component is described below:

- Defensive tactics training consists of hand-to-hand combat skills and is conducted on a quarterly basis for all officers at the rank of sergeant and below.
- CIT training is specialized training for handling mentally ill suspects or those showing signs of excited delirium.
- ECD training entails the parameters of using a department-issued device and tactical exercises aimed at improving drawing, targeting, and decision making.
- AOST is an annual requirement for officers at the rank of sergeant and below, consisting of reality-based decision-making scenarios with both simulated live action and a computer simulation using interactive tools.
- RBT is a newly developed supplemental training program that is to be conducted twice a year. It is both classroom-based and Simunitions®-based (simulated weapons and/or ammunition), focusing on use of force scenarios.
- Revised Use of Force Policy training began in May 2012. LVMPD’s goal of this training is to educate officers on the new elements of the policy.

Use of force investigation and documentation (internal accountability)

LVMPD has three elements in its internal accountability system: LVMPD’s Force Investigation Team (FIT); Critical Incident Review Team (CIRT); and Use of Force Review Board (UoFRB). LVMPD’s FIT is part of the Homicide and Robbery Division and handles the criminal investigations of OISs. CIRT is an administrative review process that focuses on policy, training, and tactical issues of an OIS. The UoFRB serves as an outlet for CIRT investigative findings. It is a voting board of citizens and sworn officers who make rulings on OISs. Taken as a whole, this internal accountability system is a lynchpin for organizational learning as it relates to use of deadly force. With each component functioning efficiently and effectively, LVMPD can leverage what is learned to improve policy, training, and tactics in a way that may reduce the number of avoidable deadly force incidents and enhance officer safety. It is noteworthy that the system is often in flux, as are its components. Roles and responsibilities have been refined and have evolved over time.
Use of force incident review (external accountability)

The external accountability system consists of the DA's review of an incident and the Coroner's Inquest. Traditionally, the Clark County DA's Office would review fatal OIS cases but remain silent regarding its findings in terms of criminality. In practice, this silence implied that the OIS was not criminal, in which case it would proceed to the Coroner's Inquest. The Coroner's Inquest has been Clark County's vehicle for publicly disclosing the facts of an OIS. Like LVMPD's internal review process, the roles and responsibilities of the DA and the Coroner's Inquest have changed over time, but recent reforms have had systemic impacts. We describe these processes, their recent reforms, and their impact later in this report.