

# **Felony or High Risk Vehicle Stops**

## **Definition of a High Risk Stop**

Any stop which poses a significant risk to the officer when dealing with the occupants of a motor vehicle. Situations that may fall into this category are known or suspected felons, an armed individual or any potentially dangerous person.

When a police officer has a reasonable belief that a motor vehicle to be stopped contains an individual(s) that fall into this category the officer must employ a set of tactics substantially different from those used in a low/unknown risk stop. The officer's reasonable belief can be based on the officer's observations, official communications (radio broadcast etc) and other sources of reliable information (reliable informant, civilian witness). You should consider the procedures outlined here as a general guideline only. You may at times find it necessary to modify these procedures in order to accommodate your particular and unique situation. If you are forced to modify these procedures think before you act and use logic.

## **Understanding the High Risk Stop**

High Risk Stop Tactics are not to be taken lightly. You are dealing with potentially dangerous individuals who may be determined to kill you. The suspect may see you as the only thing stopping them from freedom or the rest of their life in prison.

In a High Risk Stop the police officer is facing potentially dangerous individuals. The Suspect(s) also need to know that he/she is facing danger if he/she does not follow the officer's orders. The officer makes this danger known to the suspect(s) through the use of command presence, immediate direction of firepower and verbal commands.

## **Initial Communications**

Immediately notify the dispatcher of your intentions to perform a High Risk Stop. This leaves no doubt in anyone's mind as to what you are intending to do and what resources you are going to need. At this time do not attempt to position yourself, close the distance to confirm the vehicle or extensively plan your stop.

Notify dispatch of your location and direction of travel and broadcast a description of the vehicle (including the license plate if available) and its occupants. Remember to include any unique descriptors in your broadcast. Do not close the distance to obtain any information that you may not currently have. Advise dispatch as to the nature of the stop and request assistance. A minimum of three officers is needed to effectively perform a High Risk Stop with the optimal number being around seven (which includes one supervisor). Officers in excess of seven can help, but could also complicate the stop.

## **Pre-Stop Period**

The majority of High Risk Stops do not afford the officer a great deal of time to work out an elaborate plan for the stop. Usually this time is very short, so be quick and concise in your communications. Being thoroughly familiar with the tactics listed in this text will assist officers in knowing exactly what resources and tactics are needed to perform a safe and effective High Risk Stop.

## **Surveillance**

Maintain a safe surveillance distance. The suspect(s) may think that you are not on to him. Watch for furtive movements on the part of the driver and any occupants. Look for closed windows or sunroofs being opened, passengers staring at your police vehicle, items being tossed from the vehicle, the vehicle slowing down with doors being opened for possible "bailout" situation or any other unusual activities on the part of the driver or any passenger.

## **Pre-Plan Stop Location**

Choose an area that affords you the tactical advantage if at all possible. Stay away from intersections, hillcrests and areas that offer escape routes to the suspect(s). Try to pick an area that has good visibility and lighting with a safe backdrop for shooting if necessary. Stay away from hostile environments where other individuals may attempt to interfere in the stop. Try to choose a less populated area to perform the stop to avoid any danger to innocent bystanders.

**NOTE:** You may have little choice in where the suspect's vehicle stops. You will have to accept the disadvantages and deal with them. Being aware of these disadvantages will help in trying to minimize their effect on the stop.

## **Coordinate With Cover**

Advise the cover officer of the location where you plan to stop the vehicle and where you want them to deploy. All officers need to know their positions so there is no confusion once the stop has been initiated. All officers involved in the stop should confirm over the radio exactly which role/position that they will be taking in the stop, with each officer involved.

## **Preparation**

Put the windows down on your police vehicle and unlock the doors. This is done so that other officers arriving on the scene will have access to your vehicle for equipment and/or cover. Remember to undo your seatbelt just prior to initiation the stop.

## **The Stop**

Distance: Close the surveillance distance just before the stop. Maintain a safe distance between your police vehicle and the suspect's vehicle while moving. This is done to avoid a rear end collision or stopping too close to the suspect should he/she stop suddenly. Gang members have been known to stop their vehicle abruptly and then reverse into your patrol vehicle in attempts to deploy the airbags which may aid in their escape. Depending on the location you want to be a minimum of 25' – 35' (1½ - 2½ car lengths) behind the suspect's vehicle when you stop. Remembering that distance is our ally, the more distance, the safer you will be. However, you do not want to be too far back because you won't be able to control the scene. Most urban areas will require that you be closer to the minimum recommended distance. Remember to use your best judgment for the situation you are in.

Command Presence: Remember Command Presence. Take control of the stop, you are in charge. Activate all of your emergency lights including your takedown lights and spotlights. Illuminate the suspect's vehicle as much as possible. Activate all lights in the daytime as well. Your over-head wigwags will somewhat disorient the suspect even in daylight hours. Activate your siren. It is suggested that you do several short bursts of the siren switching back in between the siren mode and the PA mode. This will condition you to have the PA system on before you exit your vehicle. There is nothing more distracting or tiring than trying to shout over a siren. Also leaving the siren on during the stop makes radio communications harder to comprehend.

## **Vehicle Positioning**

**NOTE:** This text will address “one-man units” so adjust accordingly if you occupy a “two-man unit”.

The officer initiation the stop is the contact officer or *Primary Unit*. The second officer to arrive is the *First Cover Unit*. The third officer to arrive on the scene is the *Second Cover Unit*. If additional units are available they will assume a position to the rear of the first three vehicles, or take up positions to stop traffic from entering dangerous areas involved in the stop.

High Risk Stops are too dangerous and too difficult to be performed by a single officer, especially if the suspect vehicle contains more than one occupant. For this reason it is recommended that a minimum of three officers are needed to effectively perform a High Risk Stop, a Contact Officer and two Cover Officers. The recommended three officers is a minimum. More officers on the scene of a potentially dangerous encounter are always better. However there comes a point where too many officers could become dangerous if the possibility of a crossfire situation exists. There is also the problem of role/function duplication when too many officers are present. If the minimum of three officers is not present then the primary unit should maintain surveillance and keep dispatch informed until assistance can respond and the High Risk Stop can be effectively performed. If a lone officer is forced to make the stop then he should wait until

additional officers arrive before initiating any further tactics. The officer will want to contain and isolate the suspect(s) in the vehicle until backup arrives. Your *Verbal Commands* will establish contact and control over the suspects.

#### Primary Unit:

The Primary Unit is the unit that initiated the stop or the first unit to arrive on the scene. The Primary Unit officer is the Contact officer initially. This Contact Officer role will interchange with the First Cover Unit officer. The Primary or Contact officer takes up a position behind the driver's side door with his handgun and should be a minimum of 25' – 35' (1½ - 2½ car lengths) behind the suspect vehicle. This position is recommended because of the vehicle's lights are properly directed at the suspect's vehicle (an offset position would allow the right side of the vehicle to be shadowed). The in line position also allows the officer better visibility into the interior of the suspect's vehicle (this is different than standard vehicle stops in which you offset to the left). The primary reason that this officer should utilize his handgun due to the fact that it is too difficult to operate the PA system while trying to aim a shoulder fired weapon.

#### First Cover Unit:

The First Cover Unit is the second unit to arrive on the scene. The operator positions his vehicle approximately 6' – 8' to the left of the primary unit at a slight inward angle. The first cover unit officer takes a guarded position behind his driver's side door and waits for the second cover officer to get into place. Once the second cover officer is in place the first cover unit officer can move around the back of his vehicle and takes up a position behind his passenger side door with his handgun. If the stop is occurring in a hostile area you may want to consider keeping this officer back as a control/rear cover officer until additional officers arrive.

#### Second Cover Unit:

The Second Cover Unit is the third officer to arrive on the scene. The Second Cover Unit in most instances will be deployed either to the right side or the rear of the primary unit if room does not exist to position the vehicle to the right side. If the stop is occurring at night be cautious not to backlight the other officers with your headlights as you approach. If room exists to the right side of the Primary Unit to position this unit, the diver will take cover behind the drivers door of their vehicle otherwise they will move to the passenger side door of the Primary Unit. This officer can utilize a handgun, shotgun or patrol rifle.

#### Third Cover Unit:

If you have a fourth officer present have that officer approach and take cover behind the passenger door of the Primary Unit (Note this is not a mandatory position that can be eliminated if manpower shortages.