

TO: Police Chiefs, Public Safety Directors, and Fund Commissioners

FROM: Chief Harry Earle (Ret.)  
J. A. Montgomery Consulting

DATE: October 18, 2020

RE: Recent Ambush Attacks Reinforce the Need for Training and Mitigation Measures

The most recent ambush attacks of two Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Deputies on September 12, 2020, should remind all law enforcement professionals of the very prevalent risk of ambush attacks.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the recent shooting attack at the home of two Camden County Police Department Officers’ house is a reminder police professionals also need to be vigilant while off duty and about their family safety as well.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, ambush attacks of law enforcement officers are not unique. In fact, during the years 2010-2016, eighty-one (81) officers were killed in ambush attacks.<sup>3</sup>

This history of ambushes and these recent attacks in California and New Jersey should serve as the catalyst for police leaders to have a discussion with officers about the risk of ambushes and develop agency tailored plans to help mitigate these risks. One such option includes classifying the level of agency operational safety and corresponding mitigation efforts based on ever-evolving local and worldwide events and threats. The below table is not an all-inclusive list of needed actions to prevent or mitigate ambush threats, but it can serve as a starting point for an agency to further develop a comprehensive ambush threat safety plan.

<b>Level 4 – Heightened Officer Safety Level – Ambush Threat</b>	
<i>(This is the <u>minimum standard safety level for everyday police duty</u> as history has demonstrated that there is always a heightened risk of an ambush attack against law enforcement)</i>	
A	Review of existing department policy with agency personnel for the wearing of authorized body armor and all equipment.
B	For those non-specialty trained tactical officers that have been issued a ballistic helmet, ensure that it is readily accessible. Additionally, officers should be proficient with its use and have completed training while utilizing such equipment.
C	For those that have been issued enhanced supplemental ballistic protection such as an outer vest rifle plate assembly, ensure that it is readily accessible. Additionally, officers should be proficient with its use and have completed training while utilizing such equipment.
D	Ensure officers know departmental policies regarding intelligence gathering and information sharing to include timely notifications regarding any officer safety threat to regional fusion centers.

E	Review with civilian staff member’s activity that may be deemed suspicious in the area of the Municipal Building/Borough Hall or Police Department. Ensure such civilian members fully understand the proper reporting mechanisms to report suspicious activity.
F	Ensure that lifesaving medical equipment, including tourniquets, is available and that officers have been adequately trained. Encourage officers to carry medical equipment in their personal vehicles in the event of an off duty ambush. It is essential that such general medical equipment stowed in police vehicles is of the same type or very similar and located in the same location of each vehicle to avoid confusion during a crisis.
G	Evaluate areas that are or should be considered areas that are “Employee or Authorized Personnel Only” at the Municipal Building/Borough Hall or Police Department. Ensure that such areas are properly posted and reviewed by the Municipal Attorney so that such prohibitions can be appropriately enforced.
H	<p>Conduct realistic training and create ongoing general dialogue amongst officers regarding ambushes that should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practical scenarios on how to unholster a duty weapon while seated in a patrol vehicle with the seatbelt fastened and unfastened. Complex and realistic scenarios should be practiced at a firing range under the direction of a qualified firearms instructor. Simulations utilizing imitation firearms can be conducted during roll call under the supervision of a qualified firearms instructor. The key is to build muscle memory in learning how to draw a weapon under circumstances that are different than during standard qualification courses.</li> <li>2. Teaching and constantly reminding officers to consistently check their surroundings, their police vehicle, and personal vehicles for the signs of a threat or vehicle tampering is essential. Remember, the concept of "WIN" (What's Important Now) can make a difference in recognizing and or surviving a critical incident.</li> <li>3. Always radio in any "flag down" contacts and provide a description of the person or vehicle.</li> <li>4. Encourage officers to speak with their families on how they should react during an ambush or other incident.</li> <li>5. Encourage officers to secure their online profile. This includes updating privacy settings, virus protection, use of two-factor authorization when possible, and utilizing strong passwords on any devices. Numerous applications and services exist where officers can have their personal information removed from the internet, and agencies may encourage this practice.</li> <li>6. Some police vehicles are equipped with enhanced safety systems such as ballistic door panels and rear approach warning safety systems. If these systems exist on any department vehicles, ensure officers are trained regarding their use, and whenever possible, incorporate their use into the ambush simulation drills.</li> </ol>

**Level 3 – Enhanced Safety Level – Ambush Threat**

(An example of when an Enhanced Safety Level may be needed could be that numerous ambush attacks on law enforcement officers have occurred in the country and/or heightened concern of an ambush against law enforcement exists due to provided intelligence)

A	All actions associated with Level 4 and:
B	For those that have been issued a Ballistic helmet, such equipment shall be located within the front seat of the vehicle when possible.
C	For those that have been issued enhanced supplemental ballistic protection such as an outer vest rifle plate assembly, such equipment shall be located within in the front seat of the vehicle when possible.
D	Consider obtaining mobile video surveillance cameras and deploy them in the parking area of the police department to supplement any existing video systems.
E	Review existing Police Headquarters/Municipal Building video surveillance systems to ensure they are working correctly and capturing the locations most conducive to an ambush.
F	Advise civilian police employees not to wear clothing with a police emblem or department logo while at the Police Department/Municipal Building for work or while off duty.
G	Whenever possible, deploy police units for patrol purposes that may be equipped with enhanced safety measures (ballistic door panels, rear warning system, etc.)
H	Evaluate the need to close or secure portions of the Police Department, such as a Police Service Window or Watch Desk. Although service may still be provided, persons must utilize a phone or other means to request assistance.
I	Enhanced monitoring of incoming calls for service by supervisors and dispatch personnel to be alert for potential ambush and distraction calls.
J	Personnel may only leave at the end of their tour of duty upon approval of a supervisor, and this includes officers assigned to specialized units.
K	Close all blinds and window coverings at the Police Department and evaluate the need to do so at the Municipal Building.
L	Evaluate the need to deploy light trailers or portable lighting to the front of the Police Department/Municipal Building, parking areas, and other areas conducive to an ambush.

**Level 2 – Significant Safety Level– Ambush Threat**

(An example of when a Significant Safety Level may be needed could be that numerous ambush attacks on law enforcement officers have occurred in the State of New Jersey or areas outside of New Jersey adjacent to the region and/or heightened concern of an ambush against law enforcement exists due to provided intelligence)

A	All actions associated with Level 3 and:
B	Consider restricting the duty of unarmed Special Law Enforcement Officers to inside of the Police Department or in close proximity to regularly armed Police Officers.
C	Evaluate the feasibility of assigning all officers to work with a partner.
D	Evaluate the need to direct that police personnel wear the uniform of the day with issued body armor and duty equipment (Detectives and support personnel)
E	Cancel all public tours of the Police Department.
F	Evaluate the need to recommend court and other municipal meetings be canceled.
G	If feasible and such equipment exists, only deploy police units for patrol purposes that are equipped with enhanced safety measures (ballistic door panels/rear warning).
H	Recall all police units from private residences. (Assigned take-home vehicles).
I	Evaluate the need to lock the Police Department/Municipal Building down or post officers at entrance(s).

**Level 1 – Critical Safety Level– Ambush Threat**

(An example of when a Critical Safety Level may be needed could be that numerous ambush attacks on law enforcement officers have occurred anywhere in the immediate region or a significant attack on an officer has taken place in the region and the suspect has not been apprehended.

A	All actions associated with Level 2 and:
B	The Police Department and the Municipal complex are entirely locked down. These facilities may be closed, or if open and possible, post officers at designated entrances.

C	Based upon the risk in the immediate area, consider assigning officers to serve in a role as a Rapid Response Team. These officers should have advanced training and specialized equipment.
D	Dependent upon the threat, consider positioning officers at the Police Department for enhanced protection.
E	Evaluate the need to block off parking areas of the Police Department or Municipal Building/Borough Hall.
F	Evaluate the need to transport and escort unarmed civilian employees to and from work.

The materials provided in this correspondence are for general informational and educational purposes only and they are not intended to be and should not be considered legal advice or opinions. Prior to making any policy or rule changes, seek the advice of your municipal attorney.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Breul, N., & Luongo, D. (2017). *Marking It Safer: A Study of Law Enforcement Fatalities Between 2010-2016*. National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup>Cuellar, Dan. (2020, September 20). *\$75,000 reward offered for gunman who shot up officers' homes*. Retrieved from 6ABC: <https://6abc.com/camden-county-police-officers-home-shot-new-jersey-nj/6431214/>

<sup>3</sup>Stimson, Brie. (2020, September 13). *Compton ambush leaves two LA County Sheriff Deputies fighting for their lives*. Retrieved from FoxNews: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/compton-ambush-leaves-2-la-county-sheriffs-deputies-fighting-for-their-lives>