

FOOT PURSUITS: RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Police foot pursuits can be a hazardous activity for law enforcement officers as one study found that officers were intentionally injured by suspects in 10% of foot pursuits and suffered accidental injuries, such as falls and trips, in 14% of foot pursuits.¹

An agency policy governing foot pursuits supported by a comprehensive training program can help keep officers safe. Some considerations for the Chief of Police when evaluating their current agency policies and procedures concerning foot pursuits:

1. Ensure officers consider the potential risks balanced against the need to pursue them at the moment. Like motor vehicle pursuits, foot pursuits are erratic and unpredictable, and some of the same criteria used when deciding whether or not to initiate, continue, or terminate a motor vehicle pursuit might also be applicable during foot pursuits.
2. Before initiating a foot pursuit, officers should consider backup officers' availability or proximity, especially when entering isolated or dense wooded areas.
3. Ensure communications personnel receive training concerning foot pursuits and know their role in the process, similar to how they likely have been trained to assist with communications during a motor vehicle pursuit.
4. Determine what policy provisions or training materials have been provided to guide decision-making on when to stop pursuing or direct that a foot pursuit be terminated.
5. Evaluate the feasibility of procuring GPS-enabled devices to determine an officer's location when on foot. Incorporate guidelines concerning such equipment into the agency policy and include the use of such technology during training evolutions. If such equipment is in place at the agency, ensure there is an established testing program to ensure it is operating properly.
6. Establish a body-worn camera review program for all foot pursuits, even when the pursuit does not result in an apprehension or use of force.

Considerations for training concerning foot pursuits:

1. Ensure the tenants of the agency foot pursuit policy are included in the training program.
2. Include tactical considerations that address the unique risks of foot pursuits, such as but not limited to:
 - a. Solo Officer: When an officer is alone, the risks increase significantly. Backup may not be immediately available, and the officer's safety becomes paramount.
 - b. Unfamiliar Area: Pursuing a suspect in an unfamiliar location can lead to unexpected hazards. Lack of knowledge about escape routes, obstacles, or hidden dangers poses a threat.

- c. Hostile Environment: Foot pursuits often occur in high-stress environments. Alleys, dark streets, or abandoned buildings can be perilous.
 - d. Armed Suspects: Pursuing individuals known or suspected to be armed escalates the danger. Officers must weigh the risk of confrontation against the need for apprehension.
3. Utilize role-play scenarios involving subjects who flee on foot during the agency use of force and defensive tactics training program. When conducting such training evolutions, encourage officers to verbally practice announcing their location, direction of travel, suspect description, and more. Officers' radio messages during foot pursuits can often be undiscernible, and practicing such communications under stressful conditions might be critical to officer safety.
 4. Ensure the agency policy and training objectives are incorporated into the agency's Field Training Officer program.

A Sample Foot Pursuit Policy Template is available [here](#).

Some additional resources for consideration:

- [Six Officer Survival Questions Before Initiating a Foot Pursuit](#)
- [IACP – Foot Pursuits](#)
- [Foot Pursuits: Keeping Officers Safe](#)
- [The Dangers of Police Foot Pursuits](#)

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant.

¹Stroshine, M. S., & Brandl, S. G. (2021, September). The Impact of Foot Pursuits on Police Use of Force. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.