

Foot Pursuits

I. PURPOSE

Foot pursuits are inherently dangerous. Agencies must establish a balance between protecting the safety of the public and officers during pursuits on foot and law enforcement's duty to enforce the law and apprehend suspects.

This document is intended to provide agencies with items for consideration when developing their policies regarding foot pursuits, including when they should be initiated, how they should be coordinated, and applicable guidelines and restrictions.

II. POLICY

Agencies should develop a policy statement to briefly and concisely explain to agency personnel and the public the agency's policy on foot pursuits.

Sample: It is the policy of this agency that officer and public safety shall be the overriding consideration in determining whether a foot pursuit will be initiated or continued.

Sample: Although it is a law enforcement officer's decision to initiate a stop, it is the suspect or violator who decides to precipitate a foot pursuit by fleeing. However, it is the policy of this agency that an officer's decision to pursue on foot shall be made with an awareness of and appreciation for the risk to which the officer and others will be exposed.

III. DEFINITION

Foot Pursuit: An incident where an officer chases—on foot—a person who is evading detention or arrest.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. General Provisions

Agency policy and procedures related to foot pursuits should address who

1. has the authority to authorize continuation and termination of a pursuit, to include officers engaged in the pursuit and/or a supervisor; and
2. is responsible for coordinating the pursuit.

B. Deciding When to Pursue

When developing their policies and procedures related to foot pursuits, law enforcement agencies should address when officers are authorized to pursue or continue the pursuit of a fleeing suspect. When making this determination, the following should be considered:

1. Is the pursuit supported by policy and are the officers' actions within established law? Specifically,
 - does reasonable suspicion of a crime or offense exist to support a detention or does probable cause exist, beyond the failure to submit to the detention, for an arrest?
 - is there reasonable belief that the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the public or other law enforcement officers? and
 - does the pursuit violate any provisions of agency policy, procedures, or training?
2. The number of officers available.
3. Whether alternatives to a foot pursuit are available, including
 - aerial support,
 - containment of the area,
 - canine search,
 - saturation of the area with patrol personnel, and/or
 - apprehension at another time and place when the officer knows the identity of the subject or has other information that would likely allow for later apprehension.
4. What risk factors exist, such as whether
 - the officer is acting alone,
 - the area is unfamiliar to the officer,
 - the area is hostile, such as a notorious drug trafficking location,
 - pursued suspects are known to be or suspected of being armed,

- there is more than one suspect being pursued,
- backup is not available in a timely manner,
- the officer is not in adequate physical condition to conduct a foot pursuit,
- contact with communications personnel cannot be established or maintained, and/or
- inclement weather, darkness, or reduced visibility conditions exist.

C. Supervisor's Responsibilities

Agency policy and procedures should outline the role of a supervisor during a foot pursuit. This should address

1. when a supervisor should take command, control, and coordinate the pursuit;
2. whether the supervisor should be physically present to assert control over the situation; and
3. the supervisor's role upon termination of the pursuit.

D. Communications Personnel Responsibilities

A key component of any foot pursuit is continuous contact between involved officers, supervisors, and communications personnel. Therefore, agency policy and procedures should provide direction to communications personnel, to include guidance regarding

1. who should be notified and when upon initiation of a foot pursuit; and
2. additional responsibilities, such as clearing radio channels of all non-emergency traffic and/or coordinating and dispatching backup assistance or air support units.

E. Pursuit Operations

Agencies should develop and train officers on the procedures to be followed during the foot pursuit. For instance, agencies should address

1. provision of information to communications personnel, which may include requiring that the initiating officer provide information regarding
 - the officer's unit identifier,
 - reason for the foot pursuit,
 - location and direction of pursuit,
 - number of suspects and descriptions, and
 - whether the suspect(s) is armed;
2. guidelines for
 - single/lone officers,
 - assisting officers, and
 - situations where two or more officers are in pursuit;

3. tactics to be utilized by pursuing officers, to include those related to safety concerns involving
 - traps or hidden dangers,
 - leaving police vehicles accessible,
 - situations where a suspect
 - crosses over a wall or fence;
 - flees from a vehicle;
 - rounds a corner; and
 - enters a building, structure, confined space, or wooded or isolated area.

F. Terminating a Pursuit

Specific guidelines should be developed regarding when and how a foot pursuit should be terminated.

1. Factors to consider when deciding whether to terminate a pursuit may include whether
 - the danger to pursuing officers or the public outweighs the necessity for immediate apprehension;
 - the officer becomes aware of any unanticipated circumstances that substantially increase the risk to public safety inherent in the pursuit;
 - the officer is acting alone—in exigent circumstances, agencies may elect to allow lone officers to keep the suspect in sight from a safe distance and coordinate containment;
 - the officer loses possession of their firearm;
 - a suspect's identity is established or other information exists, allowing for the suspect's probable apprehension without immediate threat to the public or officers;
 - a suspect's location is no longer known;
 - the officer loses visual contact with a suspect;
 - the officer is unsure of their own location or direction of travel;
 - the primary officer(s) loses contact with communications personnel, or contact with backup officers is interrupted; and/or
 - an officer or third party is injured during the pursuit who requires immediate assistance and there are no other law enforcement or medical personnel able to render assistance.
2. Procedures for terminating a foot pursuit should be established.

G. Training

Agencies should provide initial and regular training regarding foot pursuits. This training should address

1. foot pursuit tactics for officers,
2. supervisory responsibilities, and
3. communication personnel responsibilities.

H. Review

Due to the inherent risk to officers engaging in foot pursuits, agencies should consider conducting reviews of all foot pursuits to ensure compliance with policy and procedures and to identify any changes necessary to policy, procedures, or training.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. 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 its legal advisor before implementing any policy.

This document is not intended to be a national standard.

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