



Officer Safety Column:

National Crime Information Center Violent Person File: No Routine Encounter



Any police chief who is alerted in the middle of the night to the reality that an officer has been fatally wounded understands firsthand that one loss is unacceptable. Yet, the number of law enforcement officers killed each year in the line of duty between 2008 and 2010 averaged 51. As technology advances, so do opportunities to share information among law enforcement. However, police officers are not always provided the immediate information needed to elude potentially life-threatening situations. In August 2012, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Violent Person File became operational. The Violent Person File was created to enhance officer safety by alerting law enforcement officers when they encounter an individual who has a history of violence against law enforcement or violent behavior using a weapon. The file also comprises individuals who law enforcement reasonably believes are a threat to police officers.

Criminal History of Offenders Killing Police Officers

An analysis was conducted regarding the criminal history of offenders identified in law enforcement officer killings. The analysis concluded that 44 percent of these offenders had histories of violent crimes while 39 percent had previous weapons violations. In addition, 23 percent had criminal records for assaulting police officers or resisting arrest, and 4 percent had murder convictions prior to killing or assaulting law enforcement officers. As troubling as these statistics are, they do not include individuals who previously have made threats against the officers sworn to protect the public. Until now, an officer did not have access to a comprehensive snapshot of a subject's propensity of violence toward law enforcement prior to an encounter. For example, the officer would be unaware if the individual encountered made credible threats against a law enforcement officer only a week earlier. The Violent Person File allows for this information to be readily available to all law enforcement officers during this most critical time.

Criteria for Entry Information

A violent person record may be entered into the NCIC when the individual meets one of the following criteria:

- The offender has been convicted for the assault or the murder/homicide of a law enforcement officer, fleeing, resisting arrest, or any such statute that involves violence against law enforcement.
- The offender has been convicted of a violent offense against a person to include homicide and attempted homicide.
- The offender has been convicted of a violent offense against a person where a firearm or weapon was used.
- A law enforcement agency, based on its official investigatory duties, reasonably believes that the individual has seriously expressed his or her intent to commit an act of unlawful violence against a member of the law enforcement or criminal justice community.

Depending on which criteria prompts the individual's entry into the file, a corresponding warning will precede the record during a hit response.

How It Works

The Violent Person File was created exclusively to enhance officer safety. Therefore, the file is cross-searched as part of an NCIC inquiry into the Wanted Person File and the Vehicle File when vehicle-related information has been previously entered into the record. There is no need to conduct a separate query of the Violent Person File.

Center for Officer Safety and Wellness

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Consider this example: A law enforcement agency receives information regarding credible threats by an individual against police officers. The subject is entered into the Violent Person File. Subsequently, the subject is encountered in another state during a traffic stop. The police officer conducts an NCIC inquiry and quickly learns the individual is deemed a threat to police officers. The Violent Person File record is preceded with the following caveat: "Warning: The subject in this record has been deemed a serious threat to law enforcement officers. Use caution in approaching this individual. Do not arrest or detain based solely on this information." The officer calls for backup and approaches the individual with extreme caution, potentially avoiding a tragic outcome.

Police officers are constantly reminded of the dangers they face each day. It is clear that there are no routine encounters. Therefore, law enforcement executives should encourage their departments to utilize the Violent Person File in an effort to provide all police officers with vital information that could potentially save their lives.

For additional information on the NCIC Violent Person File, please email Buffy M. Bonafield at buffy.bonafield@leo.gov.



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