

**PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT  
MANUAL OF GENERAL ORDERS**

**General Order: 27.01**

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**USE OF FORCE: GENERAL GUIDELINES**

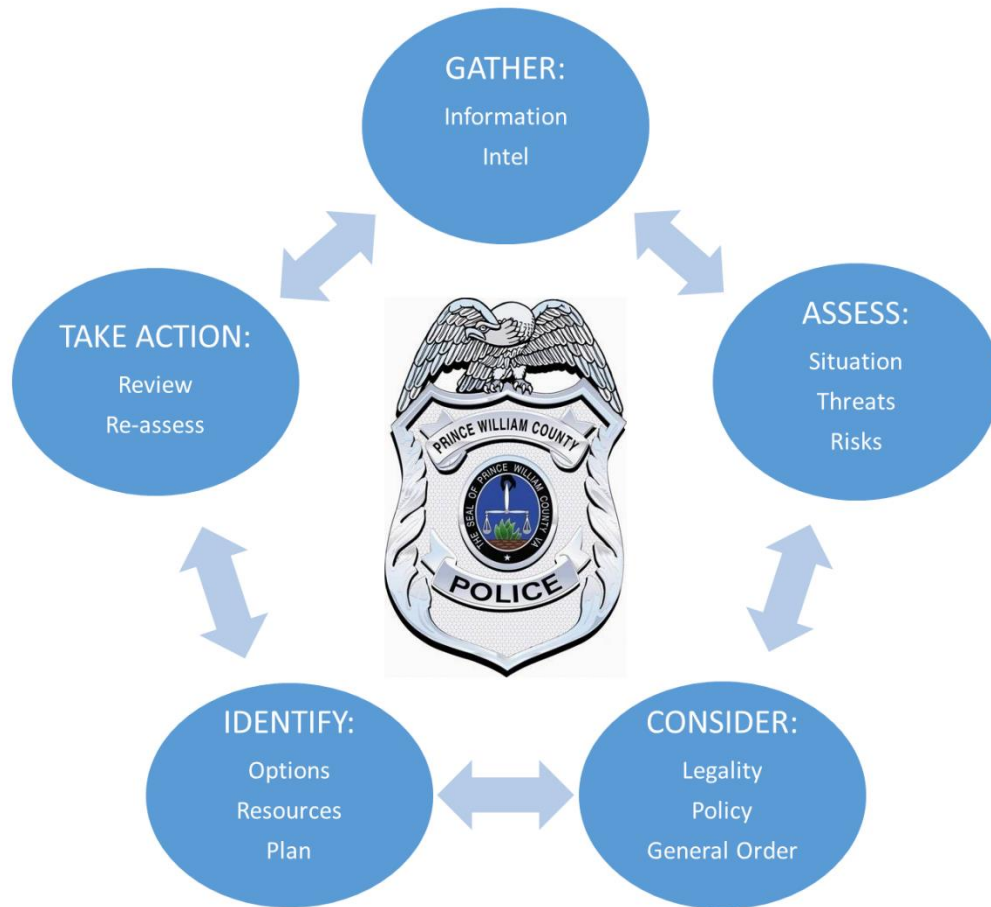
- I. Purpose – The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines pertaining to the use of force, including deadly force, and the investigation and review of use of force incidents.
  
- II. Policy – The Prince William County Police Department’s fundamental ethos is safeguarding the lives of all people (i.e., the public, police officers, and those suspected of criminal activity). The Department is committed to accomplishing this mission with respect to every individual’s constitutional and legal rights. Because of their law enforcement and peacekeeping role, Prince William County Police Officers, at times, are confronted with situations where the use of force may be necessary to effect a lawful arrest or detention, ensure public safety, and/or protect themselves or others from harm. Although no policy can anticipate every situation or circumstance an officer may face, in situations where the use of force is necessary, the force used must be reasonable based on the officer’s perception of the totality of the known circumstances at the time of the use of force. When possible and safe to do so, the officer will attempt to de-escalate potential use of force confrontations by utilizing sound tactical positioning (considering distance and cover), effective communication, and contact and cover responsibilities.
  
- III. Definitions –
  - A. **Use of Force** – When an officer uses physical action (beyond simple control), a chemical, or an object to overcome another person’s resistance. Force options include, joint manipulation, pressure sensitive areas, chemical munitions (O.C. Spray - oleoresin capsicum, C.S. Gas - orthochlorobenzal-malononitrile), tackling, strikes, impact tools (extendible baton, kinetic impact munitions), electronic restraint device (taser), and/or firearms (or any weapon used in a deadly force situation).
    1. Force used to gain control of a situation must cease when the purpose justifying its use has been accomplished or when the continued use of force is no longer objectively reasonable under the totality of the known circumstances.
    2. Any action by an officer in the process of making or assisting with a lawful detention or arrest that results in an injury to the detainee/arrestee, or complaint of injury by the detainee/arrestee, shall be investigated as a use of force.
  
  - B. **Objectively Reasonable** – In determining whether the use of force is necessary, officers shall evaluate each situation considering the totality of the known facts and circumstances including, but not limited to, the seriousness of the crime, the level of

threat posed to the officer or others, and whether the subject is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight. The reasonableness of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. Additionally, determining reasonableness of force must allow for the fact that police officers are forced to make split second judgments in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving. The force used must be reasonable under the circumstances known to the officer at the time force is used. (*Graham vs. Connor*, U.S. Supreme Court 1989)

- C. **Simple Control** – Any hands-on physical contact used by an officer, in the course of his/her law enforcement duties, with the intention to guide or influence a subject’s movement **who is not offering resistance**. Some examples include, but are not limited to, the escort position, guiding a subject’s hands into the handcuffing position, or stabilizing a subject’s balance. Any action by an officer to overcome resistance, to include passive resistance, will be investigated as a use of force.
  - D. **Deadly Force** – Any force that is likely or intended to cause serious bodily injury or death. *See also Virginia Code § [19.2-83.3](#)*
  - E. **Serious Bodily Injury** – Injury that involves a substantial risk of death, unconsciousness, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty.
  - F. **Chokeholds** - Any technique that restricts the intake of oxygen for the purpose of gaining control of a subject.
  - G. **Neck Restraint** (i.e., “carotid restraints”) – The use of any body part or object to attempt to control or disable a person by applying pressure against the neck, including the trachea or carotid artery, with the purpose, intent, or effect of controlling or restricting the person’s movement or restricting the person’s blood flow or ability to intake oxygen. For specific policy guidelines refer to General Order [27.02 Use of Deadly Force](#). *See also Virginia Code §§ [19.2-83.3](#) and [19.2-83.4\(A\)](#).*
- IV. Use of Force Legal Considerations –
- A. Use of Force – The “objective reasonableness” of force is determined based on the 1989 Supreme Court decision of *Graham vs Connor*, and subsequent case law, which states that officers must use a reasonable amount of force for the situation facing them on the scene “at the moment” force was used. Additionally, members should consider the totality of the circumstances, including the severity of the crime, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officer(s) or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.

- B. **Deadly Force** – An officer shall not use deadly force against a person unless the officer reasonably believes that deadly force is immediately necessary to protect the law enforcement officer or another person, other than the subject of the use of deadly force, from the threat of serious bodily injury or death. In determining if an officer’s use of deadly force is proper, the following factors shall be considered, the reasonableness of the officer’s belief and actions from the perspective of a reasonable law enforcement officer on the scene at the time of the incident and the totality of the circumstances. For more specific guidelines refer to General Order [27.02 Use of Deadly Force](#). *See also Virginia Code § [19.2-83.5](#).*
- V. **Duty to Intervene** – Any officer present and observing another officer, or any law enforcement official, using force that is beyond objectively reasonable under the totality of the circumstances shall, when in a position to do so safely, intervene to end and prevent the continued use of excessive force. Additionally, officers have the duty to render medical aid (see Section VI of this GO) and immediately notify an on-duty supervisor. (1.2.10 LE1). *See also Virginia Code § [19.2-83.6](#).*
- VI. **Medical Aid Following Police Action** – When safe and circumstances reasonably permit, medical aid, as outlined in General Order [40.04 \(Medical Guidelines\)](#), should be rendered following any law enforcement action in which there are complaints of, or an officer observes, injuries, sustained injuries, or impaired consciousness. Environmental circumstances may influence the timing and actions of the aid response. Appropriate medical aid may include, but is not limited to, increased observation, flushing chemical agents from the eyes, applying first aid, evaluation by paramedics, or for more serious or life-threatening incidents, immediate aid by medical professionals. Additionally, activating the Emergency Medical System, immediate medical aid consistent with training should be administered for any obvious severe injuries or unconsciousness. *See also Virginia Code § [19.2-83.6](#)*

## VII. Critical Decision-Making Model –



The critical decision-making model is based on a decision-making framework that can be used during critical incidents or other tactical situations. The model provides officers with a graphic that illustrates a logical, easy to use thought process for quickly analyzing and responding appropriately to a range of situations including, when to use force. This structure helps to ensure each critical step is considered and that key questions are answered when going through a use of force decision-making process.

The model guides officers through a process of collecting information; assessing the situation, threats, and risks; considering legal authority to act and Department Policies and General Orders; identifying options; determining the best course of action; and acting, reviewing, and re-assessing the situation.

In addition, the model gives officers a framework for explaining the thought process behind their decisions post event, such as when providing information during a use of force investigation.

VIII. Use of Force Model –



The use of force model is intended to be used as a guide, for a police officer's response to a subject's actions, when use of force is necessary to effect a lawful arrest or detention, ensure public safety, and/or protect themselves or others from harm.

In use of force situations, when determining what force should be used, the totality of the circumstances an officer faces must be considered. This includes, the severity of the crime, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officer(s) or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight. Other factors an officer may consider can include, but are not limited to, physical size and/or capabilities of the subject, age of the subject, mental or emotional state of the subject, prior knowledge, and environmental concerns, etc. Additionally, an officer must self-assess and consider their own physical size and/or capabilities, level of training, etc.

In deadly force situations an officer must reasonably believe that deadly force is immediately necessary to protect the officer or another person (not the subject of the use of deadly force) from the threat of serious bodily injury or death. In deadly force situations, consideration will be given to a subject's capability and intent rather than his or her age, physical size, etc.

- IX. Proficiency Training – At least annually, all Department personnel who are authorized to carry Department issued/approved weapons are required to receive in-service training on departmental use of force policies. This training may be conducted through a Department approved electronic training management program. Additionally, all Department personnel who are authorized to carry lethal weapons, less-lethal munitions (ex. Kinetic impact munitions), and electronic restraint devices are required to demonstrate proficiency annually.
- A. Certification/re-certification and in-service training will be conducted, monitored, and documented by certified instructors.
  - B. Only those officers who demonstrate Department acceptable levels of proficiency will be authorized to carry Department issued/approved weapons.
  - C. Refer to the weapon specific general order for qualification, recertification, and remedial requirements.
  - D. In-service training for weaponless control tactics techniques and chemical and impact weapons will occur at least biennially.
  - E. No officer will be authorized to carry any weapon until instructed in, and provided with, all policies of this Department pertaining to the use of force.
- X. Reporting a Use of Force – When an officer is involved in a use of force or when police action results in an injury, or complaint of an injury by a person being lawfully arrested or detained, the event will be reported/investigated as a use of force. For more specific reporting guidelines refer to General Order [27.04 Reporting and Investigating Uses of Force](#).