

## Preventing K-9 Self Deployments

### BACKGROUND

The canine officer arrived at the scene of a physical assault, where three suspects quickly adhered to the officer's commands to stop fighting. The officer began interviewing one of the suspects, but moved out his K-9's sight, prompting the K-9 to self-deploy and bite the suspect. This happened a second time before the officer secured the K-9 in the back of his police vehicle.

### SCENARIO

When the canine officer arrived at the scene, he observed three women in a physical altercation on the sidewalk adjacent to a busy four-way intersection. The officer exited the vehicle, leaving his driver's side door window open, in the event he required the K-9's assistance. The women complied with the officer's commands to stop fighting and got onto the ground in a prone position, allowing the officer to safely separate and secure them. Upon arrival of police back up, the interview process began. The officer escorted one of the females around the corner – out of the K-9's sight, which triggered the K-9 to self-deploy from the open driver's side window and bite the female on her upper leg. After several "break" commands, the K-9 released his hold and returned to the vehicle per the direction of his handler. The woman, who was bitten, was crying uncontrollably, requiring the officer to raise his voice to get her attention. As a result, the K-9 perceived the shouting to be threatening to the handler and self-deployed a second time, biting the woman in the arm while she was trying to protect herself. After several more break commands, the K-9 released and the officer secured the K-9 in the back of his police vehicle to prevent it from deploying a third time.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- The officer did not follow training protocols and conducted his interview out of his K-9's sight, causing the dog to self-deploy as he was trained.
- The officer did not follow training procedures that dictate to keep "One eye on the suspect and one eye on the K-9" at all times.
- When the K-9 self-deployed the first time, the officer should have assessed why the K-9 self-deployed and adjusted his interview location and interaction with the woman.
- The officer should have secured his dog in his vehicle to prevent a second self-deployment.
- Door popping hardware / setups may have prevented this incident from occurring.

### RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES

Recommendations and best practices are as follows:

- Continue regular and ongoing training for both the handler and K-9 on deployment methods which may include:
  - Deployment from vehicle training.
  - Health and obedience.
  - Legal liability, *and*
  - Report writing.
- Continuous training of the handler on situational awareness and scene safety for themselves, the K-9, and interviewee.
- Consider outfitting all K-9 vehicles with "Door Popper," a device that eliminates self-deployment because the K-9 cannot deploy until the officer presses a release button on his or her uniform, and training handlers on its proper use.

### SPECIAL NOTE

Because not all departments have upgraded their fleets, which now come prefabricated with the K-9 vehicle patrol set ups, there may be older vehicles still in use that do not have door-release hardware. Regular ongoing training should be continued with the handler and K-9 on obedience, situational awareness, and safety considerations for the officer and K-9.

**Questions? Ask your Supervisor or contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant at (203) 946-3700.**