

Suspect Supervision

BACKGROUND

Officers detained an Emotionally Disturbed Person with handcuffs, placed him on a kitchen chair, and left him unattended for several minutes without monitoring. The individual slipped his handcuffs and began to fight with the officers, resulting in multiple Taser deployments. The person became unresponsive and died.

SCENARIO

On May 24th, 2010 at approximately 7:50 PM a local Police Department received a call asking for an officer to respond to a large male who was out of control. Three Officers were dispatched and responded. Upon arrival they found the Emotionally Disturbed Person (EDP) in the bedroom underneath the bed in an uncontrolled rage. He was actively destroying the bed frame, box spring and mattress. Based on these actions, and information provided by the EDP's wife, responding officers determined that this person was in need of a medical/psychological evaluation. One Officer began the Police Emergency Examination Request (PEER) and called for an ambulance to transport the individual to the emergency room. The other two Officers were able to verbally calm the individual down.

At some point prior to the ambulance arriving, the individual became enraged again and threw the destroyed bed across the room and charged aggressively towards the three Police Officers. The Officers again attempted to verbally calm the individual. When this failed to be effective, the Officers escalated the verbal commands and ordered the individual to the ground and to get on his stomach, which he refused. This refusal required the Officers to physically gain control of the individual and placed him in hand-cuffs. Because of his size, the Officers used three sets of hand-cuffs interlocked, securing his hands behind his back. Once they were able to secure the hand-cuffs and gain control of him, the Officers placed him onto a chair in the kitchen.

At this time all three Officers left the individual unattended and turned their backs to him while they spoke to the individual's wife. At this time, the individual was able to "slip" his cuffs and began to fight with the Officers, causing the Officers to deploy multiple uses of force, including the Police K-9 and Taser. The individual was subsequently Tased 35 times. During the altercation the suspect became unresponsive and subsequently died.

OUTCOME OF THE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

This large individual was able to "slip" his hand-cuffs, thus creating a situation which resulting in injury to the Officers, the Police K-9 and his ultimate death.

EXPLANATION OF THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The Officers did not properly monitor the individual which lead to the individual's ability to "slip" his hand-cuffs. This action lead to an increased use of force with the deployment of the Police K-9, a physical altercation, and 35 Taser Deployments.

LESSONS LEARNED

Dealing with suspects, including Emotionally Disturbed Individuals (EDPs), has become one of the most common calls for service law enforcement agencies. These individuals can become out of control very quickly, leading to Officer injury and the individual's injury – sometimes involving fatalities. We learned from this call that the individual was not properly supervised while he was sitting in the kitchen chair. This allowed the individual to "slip" his hand-cuffs. Upon investigation it was determined that this particular Police Department did not train its Officers on the Department's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for suspect/EDP supervision. If the individual was properly supervised he would not been allowed to "slip" his hand-cuffs, thus eliminating the need for the increased use of force.

CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE EXPERIENCE

Although the proper procedure was not known by the Officers, the department's policy and procedures were adequate. The recommendation would be ongoing and regular communication of the department's SOPs, policies and training, especially involving emotionally disturbed individuals. More importantly, Officers must understand that although a person is hand-cuffed they still pose a potential danger and threat to themselves and their fellow officers.

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