



Hiring, Training, Reporting and Accountability

An Overview of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office

INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years, there have been a number of well-publicized deaths that have occurred after interactions between law enforcement and members of the communities we serve throughout the United States. In many of the cases, the training, tactics and motives of peace officers have been called into question and resulted in reforms in policing at local, state and national levels.

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office prides itself on fostering positive relationships with the communities we serve. In order to provide effective police services, the public must have the confidence that our deputies enforce the law in a fair and impartial manner. We earn this trust by ensuring every member of the public is treated with dignity and respect regardless of the circumstances of their encounter with our deputies.

This document is meant to provide information to all community members in the County of Ventura on the hiring, training, reporting and accountability for all members of this agency. It is intended to be a starting point for discussion on continuing our goal of incorporating best practices in the ever-changing landscape of policing.

HIRING

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office seeks to hire only those who will work toward the Sheriff's mission of safeguarding lives and property of residents in Ventura County with honesty and integrity. The background investigation is an extensive and exhaustive process that results in only the highest quality candidates being offered a chance to attend the Ventura County Criminal Justice Training Center (VCCJTC).

Our agency follows California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in conducting all background investigations as set forth in the California Government Code. Our background investigations are audited each year by POST to ensure we are meeting their high standards. The following is a brief description of the hiring/background process:

- All applicants go through written and physical aptitude tests. Only about 60% of applicants pass the written test and move onto the physical test, and about 90% pass the physical test.
- If an applicant passes the written and physical test, an exhaustive background investigation is initiated. This includes a pre-investigative questionnaire focusing on an applicant's financial, legal, employment and educational background. There is also a pre-investigative interview that consists of a written assignment and interview with a background investigator.
- After an applicant completes a lengthy personal history statement, they are invited for another interview with a background investigator that lasts between two and three hours. This interview focuses on past criminal behavior, financial disclosures, employment history, residence history and other aspects of their background. This includes interviews with relatives, personal references, secondary references provided by family members and personal references, current and former neighbors, former employers, supervisors and co-workers.

- The background investigation assesses ten qualities that POST indicates a police officer must possess, including:
 - Integrity
 - Impulse Control / Attention to Safety
 - Absence of Substance Abuse and other Risk-Taking Behavior
 - Stress Tolerance
 - Confronting and Overcoming Problems, Obstacles, and Adversity
 - Conscientiousness
 - Interpersonal Skills
 - Decision-Making and Judgement
 - Learning Ability
 - Communication Skills
- Each applicant is also subject to a polygraph examination that lasts approximately 4 hours. This is meant to reaffirm assertions made during prior interviews, and any deception discovered is considered an integrity issue that will likely result in disqualification.
- A financial inquiry is conducted and evidence of positive credit history and responsibility is required. An applicant cannot have any debts in collections, recent bankruptcies or any evidence of irresponsible personal finances.
- Background investigators conduct a records check from every local law enforcement agency where the applicant has resided in the ten years prior to their application. This includes records for traffic tickets, field interview cards, crime reports or arrest reports. Those records are compared with the personal history statement completed by the applicant and with statements made by them during the multiple interviews. Additionally, if an applicant applied with another law enforcement agency, our investigators visit those agencies and review the applications. This is done to ensure what the applicant disclosed to our investigators is consistent and accurate with prior disclosures.
- Investigators also conduct an unscheduled home visit with the applicant to look for evidence of cleanliness and well-being. During these visits, neighbors are contacted and asked for feedback on the applicant.
- The applicants complete a comprehensive psychological screening process. This process includes psychological testing in an effort to assess psychological suitability to perform the duties of the position of a peace officer. The psychological testing includes a MMPI-2-RF-PCIR (Police Candidate Interpretive Report), which includes police comparison norms, as well as the 16 Personality Factor test. These tests assess how the applicant approaches the testing, i.e. are they being open and honest or guarded and defensive. There are additional scales that assess such things as emotional regulation and stress tolerance, decision making and judgement, impulse control, substance use or abuse, integrity and ethics, assertiveness and persuasiveness, social and interpersonal skill levels, conscientiousness and dependability, among others. Upon completion of the testing portion of the screening, each applicant meets with a licensed psychologist who has met the POST requirements for conducting law enforcement pre-employment psychological screenings. Based on the test results, as well as all of the other

information available to the psychologist, he or she has the absolute authority to disqualify an applicant.

- The applicants are also subject to a medical examination including a basic physical examination, vision testing, hearing testing and a cardio-pulmonary stress treadmill examination.
- Each background investigation takes approximately 3-6 months to complete.
- As a result of the high standards and rigorous hiring/vetting process, just over 1% of those who ever apply actually become deputy sheriffs.
- The California POST background investigation manual that assists in our background investigations can be found here:

https://post.ca.gov/portals/0/post_docs/publications/background-investigation-manual/Background_Investigation.pdf

TRAINING

From the moment a candidate is selected to enter the VCCJTC as a deputy sheriff trainee, recurring training becomes a way of life for their entire career. Training comes first by way of the basic academy, which lasts six months and totals more than 900 hours of training. As a result of the intensive training, all successful graduates receive 32 credits earned towards an associate's degree in just six months. Upon successful completion of the basic academy, every deputy transitions to one of three Sheriff's custodial facilities. Prior to working in the facility, each deputy sheriff receives additional training through the Board of State and Community Corrections' Standard and Training for Corrections (STC). This training consists of a minimum of 79 hours on various custodial topics that include mental and behavioral health, crisis communication and de-escalation techniques, evidence based programs and practices, cultural diversity and ethnic disparity and gender identity among others. While in a custodial environment, our deputies are mandated to receive an additional 24 hours of STC refresher training each year.

After completing the basic academy and the STC course, our deputies transition to In-Service training that focuses on continued learning throughout their careers. Deputies receive additional specialized training throughout their careers attending other law-enforcement related conferences and seminars. The training our deputies receive is consistent with the law and with POST requirements and often exceeds those requirements.

Finally, prior to transitioning from custody to patrol, our deputies receive five months of additional training through the Sheriff's Office's Field Training program. This consists of classroom training for one month and field training for four months where each deputy has a hand-selected training officer assigned to them for the entirety of the field training.

By the time our deputies are certified to work as patrol deputies, they have experienced well over a thousand hours of professionalized training. The following is a breakdown of training received in the specific areas of use of force, discrimination and bias:

Bias and Discrimination

- During recruit training through the VCCJTC, each recruit is provided with 30 hours of mandated training in cultural diversity and discrimination.
- Bias-based Policing – Deputies receive 2 hours every 5 years through video, study guide and facilitation by a POST certified instructor
- Discriminatory Harassment – Review of departmental policy every year
- Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Prevention – LinkedIn training required every 2 years
- Developing Cultural Competency and Inclusion – Online class or 4-hour in-person class every 2 years

Use of Force

- POST requires a minimum of 12 hours of training specific to use of force, however, at the VCCJTC, our deputy sheriff trainees receive 32 hours of training specific to use of force. The topic of Use of Force is covered in many other aspects in the basic academy as well and results in approximately 224 hours of training on the topic.
- Arrest and Control – 62 hours during the basic academy and 8 hours every 2 years thereafter.
- Force Options Simulator – 4 hours every two years

De-Escalation

- The VCCJTC basic academy has a 4-hour block specifically on de-escalation. This is one of only four academies in the state using this new curriculum. De-escalation is covered in many other learning domains in the VCCJTC academy.
- More than 92% of Ventura County Sheriff's Office's patrol deputies have received additional training in the 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training class. The four primary goals of CIT are:
 - Reduce the intensity of a crisis using de-escalation strategies
 - Reduce the necessity for use of force
 - Promote pre-custody diversion
 - Collaborate with mental health consumers, their families, the community, and the stakeholders to build and support a vibrant and accessible crisis system.
- CIT training includes focus areas of signs and symptoms of mental illness and developmental disabilities (10 hours), de-escalation through effective communication and techniques (20 hours) and connecting people with resources to prevent the need to take people to jail (10 hours).

Body Worn Cameras

In 2016, the Sheriff's Office recognized the need for additional tools to assist in documenting evidence for criminal investigations, internal or administrative investigations and civil litigation. All patrol deputies were issued body worn cameras that are used to document activity where there is suspicion of criminal activity or a violation of law when investigative or enforcement action might be taken by a deputy. The use of the body worn camera in routine patrol activities has increased

accountability and transparency and served to provide an additional level of trust to community members who come into contact with our deputies. It also provides our deputies with reassurance knowing they will be protected from false accusations that might occur during interactions with members of the public.

Policies and Procedures

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office has a very detailed and thorough policy manual. All employees are required to read and familiarize themselves with all policies. Several policies are required to be read every year in conjunction with each member's annual performance appraisal. Those include but are not limited to:

- Discriminatory harassment
- Hate Crimes
- Conduct and Ethics
- Bias-Based Policing
- Use of Force

As it relates to the Use of Force Policy, well-publicized events involving deaths at the hands of law enforcement have spawned public campaigns demanding police reforms. There are claims that certain reforms will result in significant decreases in deaths after interactions with law enforcement. While many of the campaigns also include goals of defunding police or liberation from policing that cannot be supported by law enforcement, many of the proposed reforms have already been addressed on the Sheriff's website in the FAQ page, but are added here for additional clarity.

- *Ban chokeholds and all other neck restraints* – Chokeholds and strangleholds were already banned as a use of force option. For many years the carotid restraint, which focused on restricting blood flow rather than restricting the airway as a chokehold does, was a force option to be used against combative or violent suspects. The carotid restraint was removed as a force option on June 12th, 2020 to comply with a recent decision by POST to discontinue certifying training on the use of the carotid hold. In the last three years with more than 600,000 contacts with community members, Ventura County Sheriff's deputies used the carotid restraint six times, with just one application resulting in a minor injury.
- *Require officers to de-escalate where possible* – De-escalation is already taught in basic and CIT academies (see above under Training). Despite this training, de-escalation is not always possible, as situations might unfold immediately and do not allow time for any verbal engagement or de-escalation.
- *Require a warning in all situations before using deadly force* – Deputies are trained to give warnings before using force that might injure or kill a suspect, and this is supported by case law. However, not every situation allows time for warnings and deputies might be faced with a situation that requires an immediate response without verbal engagement.
- *Require deputies to exhaust all other alternatives, including non-force and less lethal force options prior to using deadly force* – This is not required because situations sometimes unfold so rapidly that deadly force is required immediately, such as the Borderline mass shooting.

- *Require officer to intervene to stop excessive force* – This “Duty to Intercede” is already in our Use of Force policy and has been for many years.
- *Ban officers from shooting at moving vehicles in all cases* – This tactic is often ineffective and is discouraged in our policy, however, there are situations where it might be appropriate to do so. For example, when a person is driving a vehicle into a crowd of protestors with the intent to injure and kill, a deputy may be in a position to use lethal force to end the encounter.
- *Establish a use of force continuum that restricts the most severe types of force to the most extreme situations and creates clear policy restrictions* – Our Use of Force policy does that and is updated as training and tactics are improved. Our policy is guided by state standards from POST, case law and the California Penal Code.
- *Require deputies to report each time they use force or threaten to use force against civilians.* This is already required through a written report and a verbal report to a supervisor. Supervisors review each report and all supporting evidence, including body worn cameras or other evidence. In each use of physical force, the area captain is notified and also completes a review. In addition, we have a group called the Force Tactics Analysis Committee comprised of law enforcement training experts and professional standards personnel who review uses of force to improve best practices and training to ensure deputies use good judgement, proper tactics, techniques and communication when applying force.

In addition to the Sheriff’s Policy Manual, we also maintain Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for all agency units.

The Ventura County Sheriff’s Policy Manual and SOPs can be found here:

<https://www.venturasheriff.org/public-resources/policy-manuals/>

REPORTING

The Sheriff’s Office is committed to the proper reporting and documentation of uses of force, complaints and many other areas as mandated by state law.

Pursuant to our Use of Force policy, every member of the Sheriff’s Office who uses physical force shall completely and accurately document the use of force in a report. For any use of force that results in serious bodily injury to a citizen or to a deputy, or that involved the discharge of a firearm, details of the incident are reported on an annual basis pursuant to Assembly Bill 71 and Government Code 12525.2. The Sheriff’s Office has been reporting that data to the California Department of Justice (DOJ) since 2017.

In addition to the data on uses of force, the Sheriff’s Office is required by Assembly Bill 953 to provide summary information on the number of complaints based on racial and identity profiling reported by civilians against law enforcement personnel to the DOJ. The Sheriff’s Office began reporting that data to the DOJ in 2017.

Starting on January 1st, 2021, the Sheriff’s Office will begin collecting data on all contacts involving the detention of any subject, including race, ethnicity, gender and many other characteristics, as mandated

in the Racial and Identity Profiling Act of 2015. This data will be reported to the DOJ in April of 2022 and every year thereafter.

All mandated reporting for the Sheriff's Office to the DOJ can be found on the DOJ's Open Justice website, found here:

<https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/data>

ACCOUNTABILITY

Those who attend the basic academy at the VCCJTC are some of the best and brightest women and men serving our communities. Just over 1% of those who apply are successful in becoming a deputy sheriff, and this is a testament to the rigorous background investigation and training process they experience. Despite the high quality of our deputy sheriffs, we remain committed to constant oversight and adjustments when training or performance deficiencies are discovered. This is accomplished in a number of ways.

Supervision

The most critical component to maintaining high standards in policing is through constant monitoring of performance and behavior through supervision. Each deputy works as part of a team that is supervised by a Sheriff's sergeant. Our sergeants conduct daily briefing trainings where they review policies and procedures, provide update training as best practices evolve, and even use real-life scenarios from ours and other law enforcement agencies to critique and prepare our deputies for incidents they might experience. Our sergeants respond to calls and observe our deputies as they carry out their duties. Sergeants use these observations and their time with our deputies to mentor and develop them.

As mentioned above in this document, every use of force requires documentation and review and our sergeants are the first line in reviewing each use of force. As part of the review process, our sergeants talk to the deputies involved, review all documentation pertaining to the incident, review available evidence such as body worn camera footage and summarize their findings in a report to a station captain. Captains conduct a secondary review to ensure that procedures were followed and proper tactics were utilized. There are times when a use of force followed all policies and was appropriate, but where other tactics could have been used that would have resulted in better outcomes. Captains can refer those incidents to the FTAC committee described below for a review of the incidents, along with recommendations for improvements on tactics and training.

Each year, sergeants conduct an annual performance review that judges deputies on a number of characteristics that include judgement, attitude, relationship with the public, acceptance of constructive criticism, acting in emergencies, relationship with arrestees and many others. The annual performance review is also used as a means to highlight our deputies' strengths, accomplishments, training and also the areas they need to develop. Sergeants work with our deputies to implement strategies to constantly improve upon their skills and abilities.

These evaluations are used, in part, during the promotional process to help our agency determine the promotability of our personnel.

Supervision also includes recognizing when our deputies make mistakes. We hold deputies accountable for violations of policies or laws as described below in the complaint process.

Complaints

The Sheriff's Office believes that a relationship of confidence and trust with the public is essential to effective law enforcement. Law enforcement personnel often face a difficult task. They must enforce the law in a fair and impartial manner and still protect the rights of all parties involved. They come in contact with people under the most stressful circumstances and yet must remain patient and courteous. They must exercise good judgement at all times, though they are often called upon to make split-second decisions that others have days and weeks to dissect. They see the worst sides of life but are still expected to give only their best. Deputies must be free to exercise their best judgement and to initiate law enforcement action in a reasonable, lawful and impartial manner without fear of reprisal, and they have an obligation to meticulously respect the rights of all persons.

Complaints against a Sheriff's employee can be made by another employee who becomes aware of misconduct, a supervisor who receives a complaint from any source alleging misconduct, or even an anonymous or third-party complaint. For those instances when a member of the public is not satisfied with the behavior or performance of any member of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office, we've created a complaint process that can be initiated either in-person or online. Instructions for filing a complaint against a Sheriff's Office employee can be found here:

<https://www.venturasheriff.org/contact/complaint/>

The Sheriff's Professional Standards Bureau is designed to protect the integrity of the Office of the Sheriff and all of its personnel. Only through a citizen's trust and confidence in their police is effective law enforcement possible. Investigations are generally handled by the Professional Standards Bureau and in some instances, depending on the allegation, complaints can also be handled by a sergeant at the divisional level, with oversight from the Professional Standards Bureau. These investigations include interviewing the complainant and witnesses, reviewing evidence like surveillance video, body worn camera video and written reports, reviewing the employees training file and eventually interviewing the employee.

California law provides that investigations be completed within one year, however, we strive to complete the overwhelming majority of cases within 90 days, although complex cases can take longer. All complaint investigation findings are reviewed by the Internal Affairs Captain and Professional Standards Commander. Any complaint that is sustained and results in discipline is reviewed by an Assistant Sheriff and County Counsel.

Discipline for violations of policy or law ranges from a written reprimand, suspension for one to fourteen days without pay, removal from a specialized assignment, demotion, or termination.

At the conclusion of the complaint process, the Sheriff's Office notifies the complainant and all involved parties of the outcome of the investigation. We also release to the public annual statistics on the number, type and outcome of complaints throughout the agency. This information is also shared with the Department of Justice.

The Sheriff's Office also has a system used to track complaints against deputies to determine if a pattern is developing in their behavior. This enables us to be proactive in recognizing and overcoming issues through supervision and training.

FORCE TACTICS ANALYSIS COMMITTEE (FTAC)

In 2016, the Ventura County Sheriff's Office created the Force Tactics Analysis Committee (FTAC), which is a committee of law enforcement force and training experts. The goal of this committee is to promote consistency with use of force training, reporting and review, identify and correct individual deputy problems or trends, recognize employees for using sound tactics during use of force incidents, identify and correct any agency shortcomings in policy training, and to be proactive in our force review process.

FTAC members meet each month and review all evidence from use of force incidents, including reports, audio recordings, body worn camera footage and any other evidence gathered during the incident. FTAC issues a determination on the use of force incidents and makes managers of the effected bureau aware of the results of the findings. FTAC can make a determination that additional training is required, and that training can come in the form of individual training for a particular deputy or department-wide training. If FTAC uncovers a violation of departmental policy or law, the matter is referred to the Sheriff's Professional Standards Bureau.

CONCLUSION

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office has a long history of recruiting the best and brightest women and men our community has to offer. The hiring and background process are intense and exhaustive. Long ago, we committed to progressive and professional training for all of our members. We committed to building and maintaining positive relationships with all members of our communities in order to make Ventura County a place where people feel safe to live and work.

As we move forward, we are determined to continue to find ways to listen and talk to our citizens in a way that allows us to work together to solve problems that occur in our communities.