Colorado Springs Police Department
General Order

500 Use of Force

Section 500 – Use of Force

Effective Date: 10/19/2026
Supersedes Date: 6/5/2024

.01 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide department personnel with guidelines for the lawful use of deadly and less lethal force.

.02 Cross Reference

GO 501 Use of Prone Restraint
GO 502 Use of Sedatives Prohibited
GO 510 Reportable Force
GO 1106 Death or Life Threatening Injury Incidents
DL-500-01 Conducted Electrical Weapons (CEW)
DL-500-02 Oleoresin Capsicum (OC)
DL-500-03 Specialty Impact Munitions (SIM) & Specialty Impact Delivery System
DL-600-03 Peace Officer Whistleblower Actions and Protections
DL-1000-02 Law Enforcement Decision-Making
DL-1011-02 Medical Clearances
DL-1106-01 Deadly Force Investigations

.03 Discussion

The Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) values the sanctity of human life and embraces its mission to protect the public while ensuring laws are being appropriately enforced. To accomplish this, police officers are granted the unique authority to use lawful force against members of the public for legitimate law enforcement purposes.

The authority to use force carries with it a heavy responsibility to prevent its abuse. Police agencies have an obligation to provide their sworn officers with the policies, training, and equipment necessary to accomplish their mission.

.04 Policy

When feasible based on the circumstances, sworn officers will use techniques and tactics that seek to reduce the likelihood of needing to use force.

These techniques and tactics include but are not limited to:

- De-escalation techniques
- Disengaging from a suspect to allow for additional resources or those with specialized training (e.g., mental health, crisis intervention) to respond
- Containing an area and conducting surveillance on a suspect

Officers should make use of force decisions using the guidance of the Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) critical decision-making model and safety priorities model in accordance with DL-1000-02 Law Enforcement Decision-Making.

It is the policy of CSPD that sworn officers use only the force that is reasonably necessary to effectively bring an incident under control. The use of force must be objectively reasonable considering the level of resistance or aggression posed by the subject or to the threat faced by citizens or officers.

- Sworn officers must only use the force that a reasonably prudent officer would use under the same or similar circumstances.
- Sworn officers will use nonviolent means, when possible, before resorting to physical force, unless nonviolent means have been or would be ineffective under the circumstances.
- Sworn officers will continually assess the circumstances and reduce or cease force when the force being used is no longer reasonably necessary to control the subject.
- Sworn officers will use force consistent with their knowledge, experience, training, and capabilities.

Warning Required

Prior to using force, sworn officers shall identify themselves as peace officers.

The sworn officer shall give a clear verbal warning of their intent to use force. If the warning is related to deadly force, the sworn officer will specifically warn of the impending use of firearms or other deadly physical force, if possible. A warning must be given with sufficient time for the warning to be observed.

The sworn officer is not required to give this warning when doing so would unduly place the sworn officer at risk of injury and/or would create a risk of death or injury to other persons. When a warning cannot be given in a situation where force is used, the sworn officer will document the reasons why in the case report.

.05 Definitions

Active Aggression: A threat or overt act of an assault, coupled with the present ability to carry out the threat or assault, which reasonably indicates that an assault or injury to any person is imminent. Threatening body language includes, but is not limited to, blading the body, assuming a boxer stance, circling a sworn officer's position, clenching of the hands from an open to closed position, forming a fist, etc. Active Aggression is a higher level of resistance than Active Resistance.

Active Resistance: Physically evasive movements to defeat a sworn officer's attempt to control, including, but not limited to, bracing, tensing, pushing, flailing arms, running away, or verbally signaling an intention to avoid or prevent being taken into or retained in custody. Active Resistance also includes attempting to avoid apprehension and failing to comply with a sworn officer's order to reveal themselves from concealment or surrender. Walking away may be considered active resistance if the person continues to walk away from a sworn officer after having been given a lawful order or having been told the person is under arrest. Active Resistance is a higher level of resistance than Passive Resistance.

Bodily Injury: As defined in C.R.S. § 18-1-901(3)(c), means physical pain, illness, or any impairment of physical or mental condition.

Chokehold (C.R.S. § 18-1-707(2.5)(b)): A method by which a person applies sufficient pressure to a person to make breathing difficult or impossible and includes but is not limited to any pressure to the neck, throat, or windpipe that may prevent or hinder breathing or reduce intake of air. Pursuant to state law, it also means applying pressure to a person's neck on either side of the windpipe, but not to the windpipe itself, to stop the flow of blood to the brain via the carotid arteries.

Deadly Force: Any use of force that creates a substantial risk of causing life-threatening injury or death.

De-escalation: Taking action or communicating verbally or non-verbally in an attempt to stabilize the situation and reduce the immediacy of the threat so that more time, options, and/or resources can be called upon to resolve the situation without the use of physical force or with a reduction in the force necessary. De-escalation may include the use of such techniques as command presence, advisements, warnings, verbal persuasion, slowing down the pace of an incident, or tactical repositioning.

Firearm: Lethal firearms excluding those dedicated to deploying less-lethal munitions

Flight: The act of running away from a sworn officer or hiding to avoid arrest.

Immediate: For the purpose of this policy, an action occurring instantly and without delay. Immediate is more time sensitive than imminent.

Imminent: For the purpose of this policy, an action that may occur at any moment. Imminent is less time sensitive than an immediate action.

Less Lethal Use of Force: Any use of force other than that which is considered deadly force.

Life Threatening Injury: Serious bodily injury which, in the opinion of a physician involved in their treatment, is likely to result in the death of the injured person.

Medical-Behavioral Emergency: An incident in which a medical situation (often drug-induced or drug-enhanced) at times can present as solely a behavioral issue or behavioral health crisis. Indicators may include but are not limited to: extreme agitation; elevated heart rate; altered mental state or confusion; erratic or irrational behavior; public nudity or insufficiently attired for the weather; pain tolerance; rapid, shallow, or no breathing; temperature extremes (feels very cold or hot to the touch); inappropriate or excessive sweating. Assessing risk for a medical-behavioral emergency may also include actual knowledge that the person has consumed drugs, especially stimulants.

Minimization of Injury: The degree of physical force necessary to control a situation or take a subject into custody, consistent with minimizing the degree of injury to the subject or other persons. The force used must be objectively reasonable, considering the resistance posed by the subject or to the threat faced by citizens or the sworn officer.

Notwithstanding: In spite of, despite. (See section .10(B))

Nonviolent Means: The use of de-escalation techniques in a police-citizen encounter in an attempt to resolve the encounter without the use of physical force.

Objectively Reasonable Force: This is the term created by federal case law as the standard by which sworn officers' actions will be evaluated in use of force situations (see Graham v. Connor). This term means the force that an objective, trained, and competent peace officer, faced with similar facts and circumstances, would consider necessary and reasonable to subdue an attacker, overcome resistance, effect custody, or gain compliance with a lawful order. The determination of reasonableness must be based on the totality of the circumstances and must include a consideration that sworn officers are often forced to make split-second decisions in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving. The determination of reasonableness is not based on the 20/20 vision of hindsight. Some of the factors evaluated in the application of the term "objectively reasonable" include the severity of the crime at issue, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the sworn officer or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.

Passive Resistance: Physical actions that do not prevent the sworn officer's attempt to control, for example, a person who remains in a limp, prone position, or passive demonstrators.

Physical Force: As defined in C.R.S. § 24-31-901, means the application of physical techniques or tactics, chemical agents, or weapons to another person. This definition does not include a show of force.

Serious Bodily Injury (SBI): As defined in C.R.S. § 18-1-901 (3)(p), means bodily injury that, either at the time of the actual injury or at a later time, involves a substantial risk of death; a substantial risk of serious permanent disfigurement; a substantial risk of protracted loss or impairment of the function of any part or organ of the body; or breaks, fractures, a penetrating knife or penetrating gunshot wound, or burns of the second or third degree.

Sworn officer or Officer: For the purpose of this policy, this term refers to an officer or city marshal, both of which are P.O.S.T. certified positions.

Target-Specific Directed Fire: A use of deadly force in which an officer discharges their firearm in a purposeful and controlled manner in the specific direction of a known and active threat whose location is inferred because they are not clearly visible to the officer.

Vascular Neck Restraint: A physical maneuver in which a person applies pressure to vascular veins to temporarily cut off blood flow to the brain, rendering a person unconscious.

Warning Shot: An intentional discharge of a firearm into the air, ground, or an inanimate object with the intent of announcing the capability or willingness to apply deadly force.

.10 Use of Deadly Force (C.R.S. § 18-1-707)

A. An officer is only justified in using deadly force to make an arrest when all of the following are present:
   - All other means of apprehension are unreasonable given the circumstances; and
   - The arrest is for a felony involving conduct that includes a suspect's use or threatened use of deadly physical force; and
   - The suspect poses an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to the peace officer or another person; and
   - The force employed does not create a substantial risk of injury to other persons.

Officers are prohibited from using deadly force to apprehend a person who is suspected of only a minor or non-violent offense (C.R.S. § 18-1-707 (2)(a)).

B. Notwithstanding (in spite of) any other provisions in C.R.S. § 18-1-707, an officer is justified in using deadly force when all of the following are present:

- The officer has an objectively reasonable belief a lesser degree of force is inadequate; and
- The officer has objectively reasonable grounds to believe, and does believe, that the officer or another person is in imminent danger of being killed or of receiving serious bodily injury.

.12 Use of Deadly Force Prohibited

A. Chokeholds and vascular neck restraints are prohibited.

B. An officer will not use deadly force against an unarmed person in flight unless expressly authorized by this policy (under .10, points A. or B.).

In all situations in which deadly force is used against a person, a thorough investigation will be conducted in accordance with GO 1106 Death or Life-Threatening Incidents and associated procedures.

.20 Restrictions on Firearms as Deadly Force

1. Warning shots are prohibited.

2. Sworn officers must use caution when discharging a firearm if an innocent person may be injured.

3. In any circumstance involving shooting at or from a moving vehicle, the officer must be authorized to use deadly force pursuant to section .10.

   A. Officers shall not discharge firearms at a moving vehicle unless:

   a. An occupant of the vehicle is using or immediately threatening deadly force against the officer or another person by means other than the vehicle itself; or
   b. An occupant of the vehicle is intentionally operating the vehicle using or threatening to use it as deadly force against an officer or another person, and no reasonable alternatives to deadly force, including moving out of the vehicle's path, are available.

   Officers will avoid intentionally placing themselves in the path of a moving vehicle and will use tactics to reduce the necessity of using deadly force when possible.

   B. Officers shall not discharge firearms from a moving vehicle unless it is an emergency in which deadly force is immediately necessary, and no reasonable alternatives are available.

4. Officers may only use target-specific directed fire if all of the following are true:

A. The officer has the legal authority to use deadly force pursuant to C.R.S. § 18-1-707; and
B. The officer can acquire a specific target and identify them as the correct target by observing clear indicators of the suspect's inferred location, although they may not be able to observe the suspect; and
C. The officer has a reasonable belief that no other persons besides the person posing the deadly threat are at substantial risk of injury if the officer uses target-specific directed fire; and
D. No other reasonable alternative would allow officers to prevent death or serious bodily injury to perform the rescue.

Target-specific directed fire does not include the following tactics, which are prohibited: firing rounds in the general direction of a threat; firing rounds meant to impact around or over a threat; firing rounds as a distraction or to draw someone out; or firing rounds to steer an individual away from a location.

.30 Use of Less Lethal Force

A sworn officer may use physical force only if nonviolent means would be or have been ineffective.

Sworn officers shall use force in a manner that is consistent with the minimization of injury to others.

When sworn officers are authorized to use less lethal force, they will only use the type and amount of force that is objectively reasonable.

Sworn officers are authorized to use physical force when one or more of the following apply in accordance with C.R.S. 18-1-707:

(1) To effect an arrest.
(2) To prevent an escape.
(3) To prevent an imminent threat of injury to the peace officer or another person.

Nothing in this policy prevents the use of force authorized under statutory sections other than C.R.S. § 18-1-707 of Colorado law; any force used by an officer must be used in a manner that complies with this policy.

.32 Additional Restrictions on Use of Less Lethal Force

There are additional restrictions on officers' actions during protests, detailed in GO 1210 Assemblies & Mass Events.

There are additional restrictions on the use of particular less lethal weapons. The use of a particular tool may be restricted by the level of subject resistance (passive resistance, active resistance, active aggression) and other factors. See the applicable department-level SOPs for this information, listed in the Cross References section of this directive.

There are additional restrictions on the use of canines as force, detailed in GO 1203 Canine (K9) Unit.

.40 Factors Considered in Use of Force Incidents

When determining whether to apply force and evaluating whether a sworn officer has used reasonable force, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

1. The seriousness of the suspected offense/reason for the contact
2. A sworn officer's legal authority
3. The suspect's actions
4. The immediacy of a threat posed to sworn officers or others
5. Non-violent means
6. Minimization of injury to suspect and others
7. Medical aid or assistance rendered

Subject and officer factors may also be relevant in an incident involving force. Subject and officer factors include, but are not limited to, age, size, relative strength, skill level, injuries sustained, level of exhaustion or fatigue, the number of officers available vs. subjects, and subject impairment.

.50 Medical Considerations

Employees will ensure that individuals who sustain injuries during a law enforcement action receive appropriate medical aid as quickly as reasonably possible, Appropriate medical aid to a person not in physical distress as described below depends on the circumstances and should be based on the employee's training and experience as well as department procedure.

In an incident that involves the use of force, a person may show signs of physical distress. Employees are not expected to diagnose medical conditions but will recognize signs of physical distress.

Physical distress includes objectively observable conditions such as:

- Loss of consciousness
- Respiratory distress (obvious difficulty breathing, gasping, agonal breathing)
- Absence of breathing

- Observable seizure activity
- Sudden physical collapse
- Visible serious injury (e.g., uncontrolled bleeding)
- Sufficient indicators that a person is experiencing a medical-behavioral emergency. See GO 501 Use of Prone Restraint for more special considerations in medical-behavioral emergencies.

Employees must immediately summon emergency medical assistance for any person against whom force has been used who is in physical distress. The person in custody must be continuously monitored under direct supervision, and employees will provide first aid to the person within the scope of their training and experience until medical assistance arrives.

Even when no injury or adverse reaction is apparent, employees will request a medical response after the use of any of the following less lethal weapons:

- Conducted electrical weapon
- Oleoresin capsicum (OC) or other chemical
- Specialty impact munitions

Decisions regarding medical care, including transport, will be made solely by medical professionals after they have assessed the individual.

Officers will seek medical clearances as necessary in accordance with DL-1011-02 Medical Clearances.

.60 Duty to Intervene and Report for Sworn Personnel

A sworn officer shall intervene to prevent or stop another peace officer from using physical force that exceeds the degree of force, if any, permitted by C.R.S. § 18-1-707, without regard to rank/chain of command or what agency employs the peace officer.

The intervening sworn officer shall notify a supervisor of the intervention as soon as possible. A supervisor must respond when notified of such an incident.

A failure to intervene as described in this section is a Class 1 misdemeanor under C.R.S. § 18-8-802(1.5)(d). Additionally, the P.O.S.T. Board is required to permanently decertify the officer upon receipt of notice of the officer's discipline, if the incident resulted in serious bodily injury or death of the person. The revocation may only be overturned if the officer is exonerated by a court, an administrative law judge, or a hearing officer.

Retaliation, in any form, against sworn personnel reporting such a situation will not be tolerated.

.62 Civilian Personnel

Civilian employees do not have the law enforcement authority granted to peace officers to use force under C.R.S. § 18-1-707.

If facing a use or imminent use of physical force by a third party, it is safest for a civilian employee to disengage, maintain distance, and call for emergency assistance. If that is not possible under the circumstances, nothing in this policy prevents a civilian employee from using physical force against a person in defense of themselves from what they reasonably believe is the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force by that person to the degree reasonably necessary and to the extent permitted by C.R.S. § 18-1-704.

Civilian personnel will follow the requirements in .50 Medical Considerations of this directive.

Duty to Report

Civilian personnel are not subject to the duty to intervene in force as peace officers are under Colorado law. Civilian personnel will not intervene, physically or verbally, in a use of force they perceive to be excessive or unreasonable. If a civilian employee questions the reasonableness of an employee's use of force, the civilian employee will immediately report their concerns to an on-duty, sworn supervisor. The sworn supervisor receiving such an allegation will take immediate steps to investigate the use of force. Retaliation, in any form, against civilian personnel reporting such a situation will not be tolerated.

.70 Review Responsibilities of the Responding Supervisor

The responding supervisor to a use of force event will ensure a complete and comprehensive investigation is completed, including those topics outlined in the Field Supervisor Response form (attached).

.80 Authorized Equipment

Employees are authorized to use only less lethal and lethal weapons issued or approved by the department following department policy. Only trained, authorized personnel who have reviewed and acknowledged all applicable use of force written directives and demonstrated proficiency in the use of an authorized less lethal or lethal weapon are approved to carry those weapons.

Requests to introduce new less lethal weapons, lethal weapons, or modify existing equipment outside of modifications authorized by policy, must be reviewed by a deputy chief and approved by the Chief of Police. This approval requirement includes weapons that will be field tested in the performance of an employee's duties. A deputy chief or the Chief of Police may, at their discretion, refer such requests to the Use of Force Committee or other appropriate subject matter experts for evaluation and recommendation prior to making a determination.

.90 Use of Force Training

- All use of force training will be documented, and such documentation maintained by the Training Division

- Department personnel authorized to carry lethal and less lethal weapons will receive refresher training on the agency's use of force policies annually.

- Officers will receive training on and demonstrate proficiency with all approved lethal and conducted energy weapons annually and other less lethal weapons no less frequently than every two years. Training may occur more frequently as specified in associated written directives on less lethal weapons.

- As appropriate, training that is applicable to use of force may include instruction designed to reinforce the following:
    - Practical application of de-escalation techniques, nonviolent means, and minimization of injury;
    - Decision-making and judgment;
    - Tactics and techniques; and
    - Providing medical assistance

Community Service Officers
Because community service officers are not peace officers and are issued OC for the sole purpose of self-defense, their training curriculum and requirements are aligned with the limits and scope of their job responsibilities and authority. Community service officers will receive annual refresher training on relevant portions of use of force policies. They will receive refresher training, including demonstrating proficiency, on the use of OC no less frequently than every two years.

Attachment

Field Supervisor Response Form