POLICY AND PROCEDURE NO. 430

Foot Pursuits

Date Issued: September 13, 2015
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1. PURPOSE:

Foot pursuits present significant risks of injury or death to officers, suspects, and bystanders. This policy provides a decision-making framework to help officers evaluate whether to initiate or continue a foot pursuit, with the objective of balancing effective law enforcement against the safety of all persons involved.

No policy can anticipate every situation. The decision to pursue or not pursue must be made rapidly under stress, and this policy recognizes that reality. The decision not to engage in or to discontinue a foot pursuit, where the risks outweigh the benefits of immediate apprehension, is a sound tactical decision and should not be viewed negatively without considering the perspective of the officer.

2. DEFINITION:

A foot pursuit occurs when an officer chases a person on foot in an effort to detain or arrest that individual. For purposes of this policy, an officer who follows or observes a person from a distance without a show of authority—such as verbal commands to stop or identification as a police officer—is not engaged in a foot pursuit.

3. DECISION TO PURSUE:

The decision to initiate or continue a foot pursuit requires a continuous assessment of risk versus benefit. Officers should consider the following factors:

A. Factors Favoring Pursuit

a. The suspect poses a serious and immediate threat to public safety if not apprehended.

b. The suspect is believed to be armed and presents a danger to others.

c. The offense is serious and the suspect’s identity is unknown.

d. Backup is available or en route.

e. The officer is familiar with the area and terrain.

B. Factors Favoring Disengagement or Alternatives

a. The officer is alone with no immediate backup available.

b. The officer is pursuing more than one suspect.

c. The officer has lost visual contact with the suspect.

d. The terrain, lighting, or environmental conditions create an unacceptable risk of injury or ambush.

e. The pursuit leads toward a building, confined space, or area with no cover, and the officer has no backup.

f. The suspect's identity is known and apprehension can be accomplished later under safer conditions.

g. The officer's physical condition does not support continued pursuit.

h. The area is densely populated and the pursuit creates a risk to bystanders.

4. TACTICAL PRINCIPLES:

1. Officers should not enter a building, structure, or confined space during a foot pursuit without backup.

2. When two officers are pursuing and suspects split in different directions, the officers should stay together and pursue a single suspect.

3. If multiple suspects are detained and one flees, an officer should not pursue if doing so would endanger the officer's partner.

4. Officers should maintain a sufficient tactical gap to allow reaction time and avoid running directly into a confrontation on the suspect's terms.

5. An officer who has lost a firearm, radio, or light source (if nighttime) during a pursuit should discontinue and seek assistance.

6. Officers should be aware that residents may mistake pursuing officers for intruders, particularly at night.

5. ALTERNATIVES TO FOOT PURSUIT:

Where resources and circumstances permit, officers should consider alternatives to a direct foot pursuit, including:

a. Establishing a perimeter and containing the area.

b. Requesting additional units, K-9, or air support.

c. Maintaining visual surveillance from a distance until resources arrive.

d. Disengaging and pursuing apprehension at a later time when the suspect's identity is known or can be determined.

6. PREVENTING FOOT PURSUITS:

Officers should use tactical awareness during initial contacts with suspects to reduce the opportunity for flight. This includes positioning to limit escape routes, using the contact/cover principle when multiple officers are present, placing suspects in positions of disadvantage when appropriate, and maintaining awareness of body language that may signal an intent to flee.

7. COMMUNICATIONS:

An officer engaged in a foot pursuit must communicate with dispatch to the extent practicable. The priority information is the officer's location and direction of travel. Additional information such as suspect description and whether the suspect is believed armed should be communicated as the situation allows. Officers should not compromise their safety or tactical awareness to transmit radio communications.

Assisting officers and supervisors monitoring the pursuit should coordinate containment and respond to the pursuing officer's location.

8. USE OF FORCE:

A suspect who flees from police has demonstrated a willingness to resist custody. Officers should be prepared for the possibility of a physical confrontation at the conclusion of a foot pursuit. All use of force during or following a foot pursuit shall comply with Policy and Procedure No. 400 (Use of Force). The fact that a suspect fled does not, by itself, justify any particular level of force upon apprehension.

9. REPORTING:

1. Any foot pursuit that results in an arrest, use of force, injury to any person, property damage, or a complaint shall be documented in the officer's incident report.

2. Supervisors who become aware of a foot pursuit should respond to the scene when practicable and ensure appropriate documentation.

3. Officers equipped with a body-worn camera shall activate the camera in accordance with Policy and Procedure No. 403 (Body-Worn Cameras). Officers who are unable to activate prior to or during a foot pursuit due to tactical or safety considerations shall activate as soon as practicable and shall document the reason for delayed activation consistent with Policy 403.

Per:

Paul B. Saucier
Chief of Police

Revisions:

April 16, 2026–

Complete revision of Policy 430 (originally issued September 13, 2015 under Chief Sargent). Removed inaccurate legal analysis regarding Article 14 seizure during foot pursuits; replaced with accurate show-of-authority framework consistent with Commonwealth v. Stoute. Removed mandatory eight-point immediate radio transmission requirement; replaced with practical communication guidance prioritizing officer safety. Removed "reason for foot pursuit" radio requirement. Streamlined risk assessment framework. Added reporting and documentation requirements. Added BWC activation requirement consistent with Policy 403. Added use of force cross-reference. Reformatted to current WPD template with Chief Saucier signature.

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