

**Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission**  
**Level I Handgun Instructor Course**  
**2008**

**Mental Conditioning**

By the time they put on the uniform to start their first shift, the Law Enforcement Officer should have received the tools to be successful in all aspects of the occupation. Numerous hours have been spent in classroom, driving course, and range. Equipment is state of the art and in pristine condition. Skills have been honed to the point of being reflexive in recognition that preparation is critical to successful outcome in a world of the unexpected. All too often though, officers and deputies who have honed their physical skills have neglected to put the same effort into the mental preparation required to deal effectively with a deadly force situation. It means nothing if the one who graduated “top gun” in the firearms training has their mind somewhere else when they unexpectedly encounter the sudden appearance of knife, gun or club. Being in a constant state of mental awareness can many times preclude the officer from having to use force to resolve an incident. One must be aware of danger before they can defend against it.

The following “Color Code” system is commonly used in law enforcement to illustrate the five levels of awareness:

**CONDITION WHITE:**     Unaware and Unprepared – This is the condition of most in the civilian population. Those in this condition are generally not aware of their immediate surroundings but rather are preoccupied by other events in their lives. The Law Enforcement Officer should *never* be in this condition.

**CONDITION YELLOW:**   Relaxed awareness – A person in this condition is aware of all that is going on around them. They are scanning for anyone or anything out of the ordinary. This condition can be maintained comfortably and indefinitely without undue nervous strain. This is not a state of paranoia. This condition can and should become second nature to all officers on or off-duty.

**CONDITION ORANGE:**   Specific alert – This condition occurs when someone or something has aroused suspicion. A person in this condition is formulating plans and thinking of tactics, cover, lighting, options, escape routes, etc. This condition can be maintained for several hours when necessary.

**CONDITION RED:**        Fighting mode – The defensive plan developed in condition orange is being implemented. The person in this condition is taking action and is in control of their assets and faculties. Conditioned response from training is kicking in.

**CONDITION BLACK:**     Overload and panic – A person in this condition is unable to think or function rationally. The sense of being overwhelmed causes them to freeze. The possibility of this occurring can be greatly reduced through realistic scenario training and the development of the will to win to overcome and fight through the fear.