

## Shooting from Cover and Concealment

Stories abound throughout the law enforcement community of officers injured or killed while standing mere feet from an object that if used correctly, would have stopped incoming projectiles. Equal in number are those where tragedy occurs because cover was unnecessarily abandoned prior to the threat being neutralized or where officers mistook concealment for cover. It is not sufficient for trainers to instruct their students in *how* to use cover (proper techniques) without addressing *what* actually constitutes cover and *when* to use it. Students need to be encouraged to develop a continual awareness of their surroundings in regards to cover as well as concealment until it becomes second nature so that they do not wait for the sound of gunshots to be looking for it. An academic understanding of Cover as being an object which effectively *stops or deflects* a projectile and Concealment as being anything which *hides* a person from the observation of another along with rules about when and when not to use a barricade for support, does little for the person, who for decades has watched their television heroes successfully take refuge behind wooden doors and overturned tables and not given it a thought. Additionally, force-on-force simunitions training *must* address the fact that the pane of glass which keeps the marking cartridge from causing pain will not do the same if that tactic is used on the street against real firearms. Below are just a sampling of issues to be addressed in the classroom, the range and subsequent scenario training.

- **What constitutes cover** will change as the weapons at the disposal of the adversary changes. The object that stops the handgun round may not be effective against a rifle. While a thorough knowledge of ballistics is not practical for everyone, a basic understanding of the capability of different weapons can be a great advantage. At the least, officers need to be aware of the capabilities and limitations of the body armor they wear.
- **While vehicles** are frequently available for cover, officers should familiarize themselves with the areas of the vehicle which maximize their protection. Engine blocks and wheel areas can provide more cover than the doors yet standing outside the vehicle may expose the officer's feet and legs to shots being skipped under the chassis.
- **Depth of cover** issues; Officers should be taught to think of the area behind the object they are using as being their protection rather than the object itself. It is important that they recognize that positioning themselves too close to the object limits their field of view, creates problems with their balance and shooting platform when attempting to return fire, and in general limits their options. Maintaining distance from the cover also allows them to lean out, not exposing themselves until they are ready to shoot.

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Standing too close to cover can create problems with stance, balance, field of view, and limit options

Maintaining a reasonable distance from the object being used for cover allows officers to expose as little of themselves as possible when shooting. Yet, it must be noted that distance from cover can become a liability when:

- Facing multiple suspects who have different angles on their position or,
- The suspect(s) have an elevated position allowing them a high angle line of sight over the object of cover or,
- The suspect(s) change position creating a new unexpected angle.



Effective use of cover - Until - Suspect changes position

**When to move to cover/When to fight:** The use of available cover is an essential element of a deadly force encounter involving firearms. Yet, an officer moving to cover that is 15 yards away while an opponent is pulling a weapon from a waistband 3 yards away is a formula likely to result in disaster. It is critical to incorporate scenario training that presents the need for officers to weigh the distance and immediacy of the threat against the distance to effective cover. Additionally, students must be trained to return effective fire *while moving* to cover, in situations in which that decision is determined to be correct. The speed of the movement should seldom exceed the ability of the officer to fire accurately.

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**Good shooting techniques from cover** must be taught. Advantages *and* disadvantages of different techniques from different positions should be taught, discussed and demonstrated.

- Officers should learn techniques and positions which allow them to fire accurate shots without undo exposure of themselves to their opponent. Training should include an opportunity for the students to view positions from the perspective of the opponent (Red/Inert Gun Demonstration Only)



- Minimize the time of the exposure to fire accurate shots then, when possible, appear in a different location to fire again to not give an advantage to the adversary.



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- Teach the officers to be cautious about extending weapon, hands and arms beyond the cover into areas that have not been cleared.



- They should be trained to shoot at the available target area and not expose themselves to get a full or better view of the suspect.

Good use of cover:



Officer's view



Suspect's view

Poor use of cover:



Officer's view



Suspect's view

## Shooting from Cover and Concealment

- Shooting over the top of cover will generally expose more of the officer to the suspect than shooting from around the sides.



- Officers should learn to shoot from around all sides of objects using the dominant hand. Switching the weapon from hand to hand *may* expose less of the shooter but sacrifices accuracy and speed for all except those who may be truly ambidextrous and practice religiously. Those who think otherwise should be encouraged to reconsider until after satisfactorily using their support hand to complete all stages of their department qualification course. Another factor to consider is proficiency in reloading and clearing malfunctions with the weapon in the support hand.
- To keep the opponent from being able to observe such activities, move the weapon and hands behind cover when reloading and clearing malfunctions. All continuity of fire issues should be accomplished while keeping the head and eyes up and in position to observe any changes in the opponent's position.
- Students should be given the opportunity to learn the advantages and disadvantages of using the piece of cover to support and steady the gun hand to enhance accuracy. Some factors for them to consider are:
  1. The slide must not be allowed to contact the cover where it would cause a potential malfunction.
  2. When shooting from the left side of an object, clearance must be given to allow a spent casing to eject freely from the ejection port.
  3. Touching the hand to an immovable surface causes the weapon to recoil more aggressively, causing potential for malfunction and slowing down the time it takes to reacquire the sights for follow-up shots. This can be mitigated by *lightly touching* a knuckle rather than leaning hard against the cover for support.

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4. Attaching the back of the hands to the cover usually results in more exposure of the shooter's head to the threat and may extend the muzzle into an area beyond the cover which has not been cleared of threats.



Knuckles only touching



Back of hand touching



Suspect's view  
Knuckles touching



Suspect's view  
Back of hand touching

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5. When choosing to stand back from the cover and not allow the hands to touch, sight off-set becomes an issue. The bore axis being lower than the sights allows the sights to be on target but the fired round to strike the object being used as cover. This not only prevents the round from impacting the intended target but depending on the composition of the cover, can cause fragmentation from the fired bullet as well as the object struck, to ricochet back into the shooter's face.



The sights clear the cover



The fired round does not

6. Have a good reason before leaving cover. Once attained, officers should leave effective cover *only* when it serves to give them an advantage or when the cover being used is no longer able to be defended effectively. Additionally, the defensible position of cover gives the officer an opportunity to “slow down” the situation and allow them to observe the big picture.

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### 7. Be prepared before leaving cover.

- Reload the weapon *prior* to movement.
- Pick the safest route to a specific objective
- Consideration should be given to an “L” movement to take advantage of all objects between the officer and their adversary. Cover can be a large tree or vehicle 15 yards away that can be kept between them.



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8. Take advantage of concealment provided by such things as shadows, darkness, and shrubbery if no cover is available and movement is necessary.

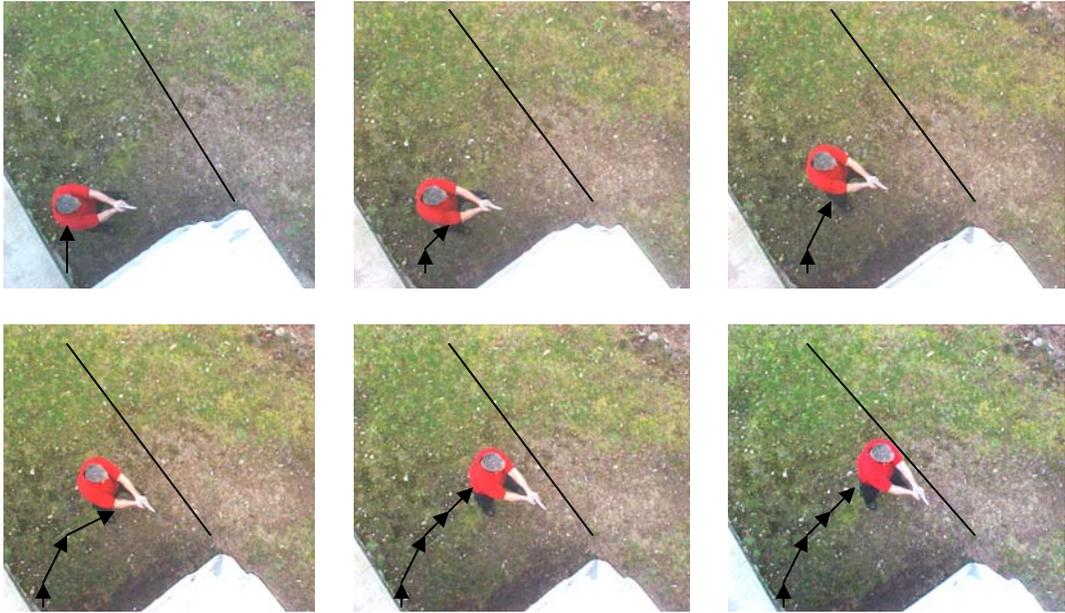
### Clearing Techniques:

“*Slicing the Pie*” is a term used to describe the technique used to search an area while taking maximum advantage of available cover. With the weapon held in a Guard position so as to not block the field of view, the officer moves slowly and incrementally out from cover, visually searching a small “slice” of the unsecured area. Once confident that it is safe to do so, the officer again deliberately moves out to where the next “slice” can be observed and cleared. This is done until all the area in question has either been cleared or a suspect is encountered. This technique which maintains a balanced, stable platform allows the officer to respond efficiently to any threat encountered. This also eliminates the need to search the same area twice which is required with a “quick peek” technique.

The “*Quick Peek*” technique which may be more suitable to some tactical situations again takes available cover into consideration. While the officer maintains a Guard position, the head is moved quickly out from cover to observe as much of the unsecured area as possible. This usually requires the movement to be repeated several times, especially if the area is large or contains objects which might conceal someone. If there is a need to repeat the movement, subsequent peeks should be done from different levels or positions so as not to present a potential target repeatedly in the same place for any opponent that may be present. The advantage of exposing the head for a minimum amount of time should be weighed against the fact that it may be difficult to see a threat when the officer’s head is moving quickly and any area that is cleared is lost from view when the head is brought back behind cover. During that time, the situation in that area can change without it being under observation. A further disadvantage is that this technique tends to turn somewhat aerobic in nature and may increase the pulse and respiratory rate by the physical nature of the activity itself. The student should be allowed to explore both techniques in force-on-force scenario training.

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Slicing the Pie