

POLICE1

WHAT COPS WANT IN 2025

Police1's State of the Industry survey reveals a safety crisis as officers face rising assaults, inadequate training and support that's often too late

INSIDE

Assaults on officers are up — here's why

5 actions every leader must take to protect their team

What to do when backup is minutes away — or doesn't come

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FROM THE EDITOR

The rising tide of aggression toward law enforcement is reshaping what it means to wear the badge. Officers are facing assaults at levels not seen in over a decade, often while patrolling alone, without timely backup, and with limited training to prepare for the violence they encounter.

This year's Police1 State of the Industry survey set out to explore a stark question:

Are officers being set up to survive — or to suffer through — today's policing realities?

The responses from frontline officers paint a sobering picture. A significant share reported being assaulted within the past year, with most citing a clear rise in hostility since 2020. Officers identified not just the physical threats, but also the systemic failures that leave them vulnerable — from delayed response times and inconsistent leadership to gaps in defensive tactics and real-world training.

Yet amid these challenges, officers also pointed to solutions: stronger field supervision, more realistic training and leadership that's present, not just procedural. Their feedback underscores an urgent need for policing strategies that match the realities of the job — and protect those doing it.

This report includes analysis from Tim Dees, Chief Scott Hughes and Lt. Dan Marcou, each offering critical insight into how law enforcement can respond — from the command level to the front lines.

Be sure to bookmark our "What Cops Want" content hub to access additional results from this year's survey, plus browse our archive of previous surveys: <https://www.police1.com/what-cops-want>.

Stay safe,
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OFFICERS SAY ASSAULTS ARE RISING — AND SUPPORT ISN'T KEEPING UP

WRITTEN BY
Tim Dees

Police1's annual "What Cops Want" survey results reveal a troubling disconnect between the threats officers face and the staffing, training and leadership they need to stay safe

Each year, Police1 collects responses from hundreds of law enforcement officers nationwide focused on specific issues of importance to the profession. The focus of this year's "What Cops Want" survey was officer safety and specifically, preventing assaults on officers.

This year's survey exposes a growing and deeply personal concern among officers: not just the danger of the job, but the feeling that they're increasingly being sent into harm's way without support, training, or leadership.

When cops or cop advocates try to make a point about the mortal hazards of a law enforcement occupation, some detractor usually pipes up with a list of other, more mundane jobs that are more dangerous. This criticism has merit when the risk of death is narrowly considered. U.S. Department of Labor statistics from 2023 (the most recent year available) rank "Protective service occupations" at No. 10 and "Law enforcement workers" at No. 20 in a list of occupations ordered by fatalities in the workplace (there is considerable overlap between the two, although the former includes firefighters). Truck drivers, construction workers and "production occupations" all experience proportionately more deaths at work than do police.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

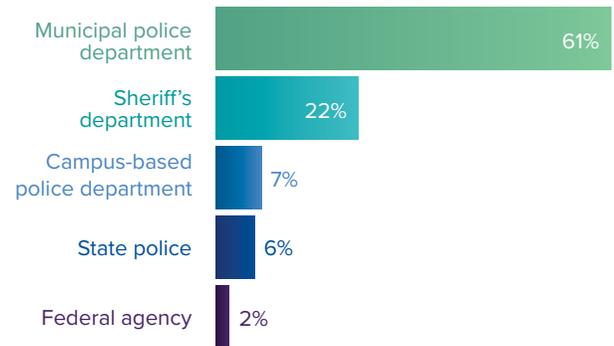
A total of 1,260 people submitted responses to the survey. Of those, 585 identified their roles as administration, custody/detention, investigations, leadership, support or training. This article reflects the responses from the 675 respondents who said they were line supervisors or patrol or school resource officers. All but five said they were sworn officers.

Seventy-four percent worked for urban or suburban agencies, with the rest working in a rural environment. Sixty-one percent worked for municipal police departments, 22% for sheriff's departments, and the rest were split between federal agencies, state police, and college, transit, or tribal police departments. Over half (54%) work for agencies with 100 or fewer sworn officers. Only 11% work for agencies with more than 1,000 officers. It's worth noting that almost half (46%) of the local police departments in the United States have fewer than ten full-time sworn officers.

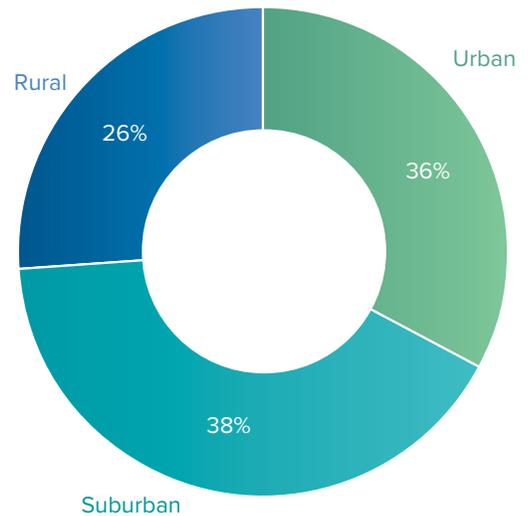
Of the 675 respondents who said they were line supervisors or patrol or school resource officers, 82% worked a patrol car alone. Only 4% said they regularly have a partner, with 9% saying it varied with the day. The cops feel safer when they have a partner: 92% answered that they "agree" or "strongly agree" that having a partner enhances safety, with fewer than 5% believing otherwise.

Of the patrol officers who responded, day shift officers were in the majority, with 42% saying that's when they worked, with 16% on swing (evening) shift, and 23% on the night shift, while 20% said they rotated between shifts. Eighty-eight percent operate out of a patrol car, 6% are on foot patrol, and the remainder are on motorcycles, bicycles, or some other conveyance.

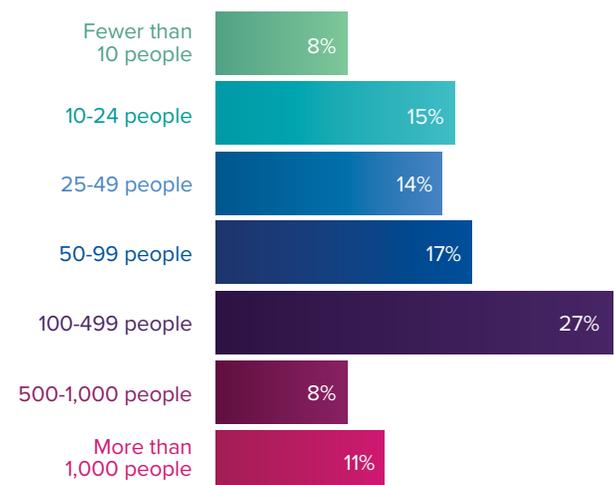
Respondents by agency type



Respondents by response area



Respondents by agency size





However, there are two important distinctions to consider: While it's sobering to consider the consequences of losing the brakes on your semi-truck and crashing or that you might fall off a roof you're repairing, cops often die when someone murders them. They get killed because of who they are and what they're doing, which they view as an honorable way to make a living and serve the public. There is a significant psychological burden there.

The other factor is the incidence of assaults against law enforcement officers. Police and security officers are victims of workplace violence far more often than the next most hazardous job of mental health worker. The FBI reported that 2023 saw the highest rate of assaults against officers in 10 years, with 79,091 cops reporting an attempt to injure them. Relatively few people go to work every day knowing there is an excellent chance that someone will eventually try to attack and kill them.

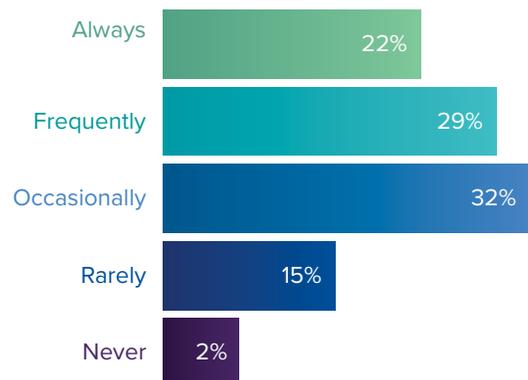
This year's survey carried over many of the concerns police expressed in past years. The cops are tired and demoralized over inadequate staffing and the poor quality of new hires. There aren't enough of them to do the job effectively, and some of the cops that have been brought in are undependable. Training is insufficient. The rookies are being released to work solo before they're ready, so as to fill out the patrol roster. For the most part, officers are disappointed in their leadership, or lack thereof. They see their leaders as too concerned with politics and liability, too isolated from operations, and having no appreciation of the realities of the job.

ASSAULT CONCERNS

When asked how often they work in areas considered high-risk for assaults on officers, 72% reported this was a daily, weekly, or occasional occurrence. The remaining 28% said this happened "rarely" or "never."

Respondents cited understaffing as a major threat to their risk of assault — 83% said their safety was "always," "frequently," or "occasionally" compromised because there weren't enough officers to do the job safely. Officers reported that understaffing had delayed their backups in emergencies (75%), increased their exposure to high-risk calls (56%), made it difficult or impossible to take necessary breaks (43%), or extended their response times to incidents (63%).

How often do you feel your safety is compromised due to understaffing in your department?



Fatigue was cited as a major challenge. Officers were required to work mandatory overtime, eliminating their regular days off. They're forced back to work without having adequate sleep, and not as on top of things as they should be due to insufficient rest between shifts.

What specific safety risks have you experienced due to understaffing?



Assaults on officers are a very real concern. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they were very or somewhat concerned about being assaulted while on duty, while 40% said they had been the victim of an assault in the past year, with 17% experiencing multiple assaults. Most of the attacks were empty-handed: punching, kicking, biting (89%); 18% involved some sort of weapon, and 8% had someone try to hit them with a vehicle. Nearly half of officers (45%) had been spat on.

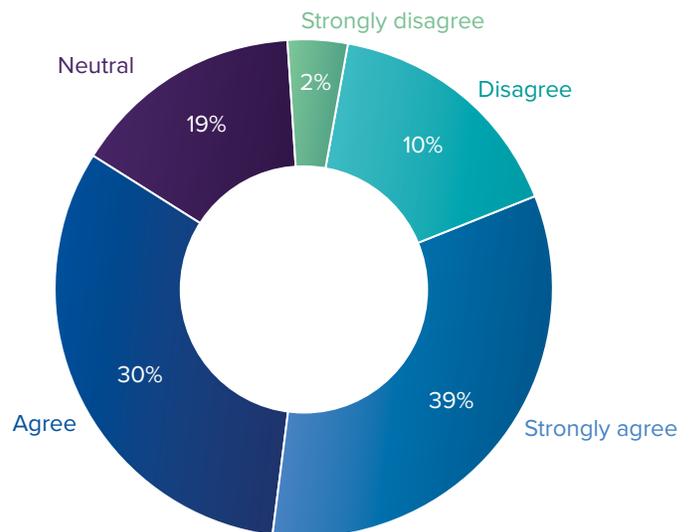
The driving forces behind the assaults are what you might expect. Mental health crises led the list (92%), followed by drug influence (87%), alcohol intoxication (86%) and gang activity (39%). However, officers also cited social trends and pressures as assault vectors, including public distrust of law enforcement (61%), homelessness (36%), economics (29%) and liberal criminal justice policies such as bail reform and lighter sentencing (60%).

Cops have always depended on one another for physical and moral support, giving rise to the strong brotherhood of the badge. Patrol officers can rely on that assistance in the field less than ever before. When assistance was delayed, 36%

of respondents indicated the delay was between 5–10 minutes, with 14% indicating a delay of 11–15 minutes and nearly nine percent said backup could be more than 15 minutes away. That might not seem critical to the casual observer, but experienced cops know that 10 minutes can be a literal lifetime if you're in a fight by yourself. More than two-thirds (67%) of respondents said these delays had compromised their safety.

Quantity of backup isn't the only problem. Quality is a major concern as well, as new hires are inexperienced and not always promising. Two-thirds of the officers said that the increase in safety risks was due to a "younger and less experienced workforce." Lack of real-world experience was the most common problem cited (90%), but insufficient training (52%), over-reliance on senior officers (39%) and difficulty with team dynamics (38%) were also noted as problems.

Do you believe safety risks have increased due to a younger and less experienced workforce in your department?

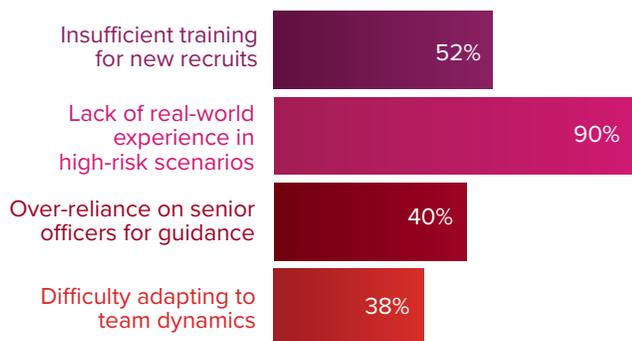


The cops had a lot to say about this topic, with almost a quarter (24%) of respondents posting an observation. Narrative comments mentioned a shift in academy training priorities from tactics and practical skills to "DEI" and data entry. Rookies are averse to risk-taking, use of force



and simply making decisions out of fear of being sued or disciplined. They have poor social and communications skills. Many have never been in a physical fight.

What do you think are the main contributing factors to the increase in safety risks due to a younger and less experienced workforce?



The assaults seldom come without warning. Most respondents (89%) said suspects frequently or

sometimes show signs of aggression before an assault. The harbingers included refusal to comply with commands (96%), physical posturing (90%), verbal threats (81%), intoxication (76%) and prior contacts with the offender (47%). Several officers noted mental health problems as an indicator. Most officers (58%) said their training in recognizing assault cues was adequate.

Eighty-two percent of officers have noticed an increase in aggressive behavior of suspects since 2020, the year of the George Floyd incident in Minneapolis and calls to defund the police.

The largest increases in aggressive behaviors were verbal threats or intimidation (88%), unarmed physical aggression (89%) and armed aggression, with firearms (30%) and without firearms (33%), with vehicular assaults at 16%.

Public perception of the police (76%), fed by negative portrayals of police in the media (84%) and anti-police rhetoric from politicians (82%) were most often cited as the causes of increased aggression. Other contributing factors were

abuse of alcohol (55%) and other drugs (69%), mental health crises (77%) and homelessness (31%). Changes in criminal justice policy limiting officer response (47%), reduced use of pre-trial detention (53%), and relaxed sentencing and early release policies (73%) were all cited as contributors to the problem. One officer said, “The younger generation is seen as being more disrespectful to law enforcement.” I recall similar observations from my own field training officer when I was a rookie in 1979.

The list of suggested remedies to reduce assaults on officers was long, but two choices overshadowed the others: 87% wanted greater consequences for assaults on officers, and 73% wanted more and better staffing. Nearly two-thirds (64%) suggest improving training in defensive tactics to include techniques like Jiu-Jitsu and ground defense, and 31% want the carotid control (also known as the lateral vascular neck restraint) back as a use of force option. De-escalation training (39%) and greater focus on addressing mental health issues (58%) were also popular responses.

WHAT OFFICERS ARE SAYING ...

On fear-based hesitation

“Newer officers seem more hesitant to act or do anything out of fear of being sued, fired, or criminally charged. They were taught that the optics of a situation matter more than the safety of the officer or public. If you are more worried about how it looks than what actually happened, it creates hesitation, and hesitation gets people hurt or killed.”

On being under fire from all sides

“We are tired. We are attacked constantly by the public, politicians and the media. The criminals are emboldened, the public is misinformed and our own agencies are more concerned about liability than backing us. There’s only so much an officer can take before they shut down or walk away.”

On training that checks a box

“Defensive tactics are largely forgotten. My department checks the box so we meet the POST requirement, but there’s no emphasis on actual competence. The public wants us to be perfect, but we’re not being trained to succeed — we’re being trained to pass.”

On being alone on the front line

“I patrol alone in a rural area. My backup is 20+ minutes away on a good day. If someone decides to fight me, my survival depends entirely on my own training, fitness and mindset. That’s the reality no one talks about.”

On the patrol-leadership disconnect

“Our department leadership says all the right things in public, but behind closed doors, they underfund training, ignore equipment requests, and promote based on politics, not merit. The rank and file are demoralized and it shows.”



A quarter (25%) of respondents said that the increased aggression they encountered affected their ability to perform their duties safely “always” or “frequently,” while 49% said this happens “occasionally,” and 23% “rarely.”

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

One out of four (25%) cops had only basic, academy-level defensive tactics (DT) training; 55% said they had what was termed “intermediate” training; 19% have advanced certifications of some type. Half of the officers (50%) get DT training only once a year, with another 16% receiving quarterly training; 3% train monthly; 22% said they train in DT “rarely,” and 11% get no DT training at all after the academy. The officers’ assessment of the effectiveness of their training was hot and cold: 53% said their training was “very effective” or “effective,” but the rest said they felt their training “ineffective” or “very ineffective.”

Empty-hand controls are the most commonly used (91%) techniques, followed by ground-fighting techniques and TASER deployment, both

at 47%. Only 10% reported using their batons, despite this being the most common less-lethal weapon carried by cops. Seven percent described other methods, such as OC spray, verbal judo, takedowns, flashlights and “just overpowering based on numbers.”

There is not a lot of simulation training going on with regard to anti-assault defense. Only 13% said they got regular simulation training, with another 54% saying they got it, but “infrequently.” Thirty-two percent got no simulation training at all.

When simulation training does happen, 76% of it is hands-on arrest and control tactics, followed by 61% takedowns, grappling and mat work; 66% use scenario-based training with role players; 48% have use-of-force simulators; 34% virtual reality-based scenarios; and 63% have firearms simulation training. Only 5% reported no simulation training at all. Most thought simulation training was effective: 79% agreed or strongly agreed that simulation training enhanced their ability to recognize high-risk incidents, and 63% agreed or strongly agreed that the training helped them de-escalate an assaultive suspect.

Officers were asked a free-form response question, “What specific defensive tactics or skills would you like additional training in to enhance your safety and effectiveness?” The answers were unsurprisingly varied, but Brazilian or Gracie Jiu-Jitsu showed up again and again. [This martial arts form has been adopted successfully to a law enforcement setting.](#) Most officers who get the training pursue it on their own at private studios.

FIREARMS TRAINING

Many agencies have cut back on the amount of live-fire firearms training they schedule. Ammunition is expensive, and officers often have to leave their patrol or other work areas to travel to the range to shoot. Some outdoor ranges have been encroached on by civilization, causing the locals to complain about the noise when they used to be too far away to hear it. The upshot is that cops aren’t shooting for practice as much as they used to.

The officers who were surveyed were less resolved over the effectiveness of their firearms training. Asked, “Do you believe your department-provided firearms training adequately prepares you for high-stress scenarios,” 47% agreed or strongly agreed, but 32% went the other way, with 21% remaining neutral on the topic. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the firearms training the cops are getting.

It appears that most officers are getting their firearms training at traditional ranges comprised of parallel lanes with shooters on one end and targets on the other. This arrangement is efficient, but not conducive to real-world, dynamic scenarios. Asked what improvements could be made to make the training more effective, 75% responded “moving target practice,” and 73% wanted more frequent training. Most officers want more intensity to the training, with 62% asking for “stress inoculation” and 69% wanting “decision-making under pressure.” Half wanted “shooting

WHAT FACTORS DO YOU BELIEVE CONTRIBUTE TO ASSAULTS ON OFFICERS?



ALCOHOL INTOXICATION: 86%



MARIJUANA: 28%



SUBSTANCE ABUSE (E.G., OPIOIDS, FENTANYL, METH, COCAINE): 87%



MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS: 92%



GANG-RELATED ACTIVITY: 39%



PUBLIC DISTRUST OF LAW ENFORCEMENT: 61%



HOMELESSNESS: 36%



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRESSORS: 29%



POLICY CHANGES (E.G., BAIL REFORM, SENTENCING PRACTICES): 60%

accuracy drills,” presumably something more involved than “fire ten and holster.” A few officers commented that they were not allowed to draw their guns from the holster at the range, so they start and end each course of fire with the firearm in hand.

The free-form responses to this question indicated that many, if not most, officers are attending firearms sessions that are strictly qualification, not training. There is little or no nighttime training, as the range staff, and possibly the range itself, is available only during the day. “Scenario-based training” was the most frequent request.

When asked how often they train with firearms, the responses were sobering, maybe even frightening. While some go to training weekly (<1%) or monthly (11%), 25% trained quarterly, and 21% annually. Twenty percent said they “rarely” train, and an alarming 23% said they never train with their firearms.



Some officers take responsibility for their own firearms training exclusive of what their agencies supply or require. Five percent said they train while off duty every week, and 17% train once per month. Twenty-four percent train on their own quarterly, and 12% annually. Unfortunately, 42% said they rarely or never train with their firearms while off duty.

CONCLUSION

If policymakers and agency leaders are serious about protecting the public, they must first protect those who serve with proper staffing, realistic training and leaders who listen.

This year’s survey makes one thing clear: officers aren’t just under pressure — they’re under-protected. They’re being sent into volatile, high-risk situations without the support, preparation, or personnel they need to stay safe.

It’s a bitter irony that while the public often demands better-trained police, many officers are asking for the same — and being ignored. The disconnect lies not in the will to improve, but in the funding, priorities and political courage to make it happen.

Training can no longer be treated as a luxury. Staffing can no longer be treated as a budget line to trim. And officer safety can no longer be treated as an acceptable trade-off. This isn’t just a warning. It’s a wake-up call. **1**

About the author

Tim Dees is a retired police officer and the former editor of two major law enforcement websites who writes and consults on technology applications in criminal justice. He can be reached at tim@timdees.com.



WHAT OFFICERS NEED FROM THEIR LEADERS AND HOW CHIEFS CAN DELIVER

WRITTEN BY
Chief Scott Hughes

From patrol pairings to tactical training and visible leadership, here's a 5-step plan to close the safety gap exposed in the 2025 survey

Nearly one in five officers faced an assault last year — a clear sign that officer safety demands your focus in 2025. The fifth annual “What Cops Want” survey from Police1, drawing on hundreds of sworn officers’ experiences, highlights assault risks and suspect aggression hitting your workforce hard. Over 80% see hostility rising since 2020; half say understaffing puts them at risk daily.

Chiefs, your mission is ensuring your team has the tools — training, staffing and equipment — to succeed. Here are five practical steps, rooted in the survey’s findings and [FBI LEOKA reports](#), tailored to work within your agency’s constraints.

WHAT OFFICERS NEED YOU TO ADDRESS

Patrol is stretched thin — 82% of officers are working alone, yet 92% say having a partner improves safety. FBI LEOKA data shows that solo officers account for 68% of assaults. Twenty-seven percent of officers say they work daily in high-risk areas, with another 33% in such zones occasionally — meaning over 60% regularly face dangerous situations.

Aggression is clearly on the rise: 81% say it has worsened since 2020, attributing this to anti-police rhetoric (81%) and mental health crises (80%). Most attacks (85%) are unarmed and often



linked to subjects in mental health distress (91%) or fueled by public distrust (55%). Understaffing remains a critical threat — half of respondents say it endangers their lives. Sixty-seven percent report that delayed backup has compromised their safety, with 35% waiting 5–10 minutes and 8% waiting more than 15 minutes for assistance.

Training gaps are also evident: only 45% feel well-prepared to recognize pre-assault indicators, even though 94% identify “refusal to comply” as a key warning sign.

YOUR PLAYBOOK: FIVE STEPS TO ACT ON NOW

1 Make training a priority: Turn roll call into real-world prep

More than half of officers report insufficient training — and roll call offers a prime opportunity to fix that. Transform roll call into a hands-on training lab. Use videos — from [YouTube](#), [Police1](#), or your own bodycam footage — to review real incidents. Assign supervisors to lead 10-minute sessions analyzing stops, assaults, or

de-escalations. Ask officers to break down each one: What worked? What didn't? What would you do differently? Highlight the ugly too — mistakes teach most.

Reinforce these insights with hands-on practice. Run weekly drills on handcuffing, pat-downs and searches. Can your officers draw handcuffs without taking their eyes off a suspect? Time it. Repeat it. Ten reps a week builds muscle memory — and costs nothing.

You set the tone. When roll call becomes a training ground, your team becomes more confident, capable and ready.

“ Understaffing remains a critical threat — half of respondents say it endangers their lives. ”



2 Collaborate on training: Partner up to cut costs

Too many departments overlook the benefits of collaboration. My solution: team up with nearby jurisdictions to slash training costs and lift the profession. Share instructors and split hosting costs. Host joint sessions on firearms, defensive tactics, or de-escalation strategies geared to high-risk calls, which 27% of officers say they face daily.

At my department, we opened our in-house ground fighting course to officers from surrounding agencies — at no cost. It raised the bar for everyone. If your agency lacks certified instructors, say in de-escalation, another agency likely has them. And if you rely on mutual aid during critical incidents, training together now strengthens coordination later.

Start simple: make a call, offer what you have and set up one joint session this year. Shared training builds competence — and camaraderie.

3 Rethink patrol staffing: Deploy two-officer units where it counts

Half of survey respondents feel unsafe due to understaffing, with 92% saying partners make a difference. LEOKA 2022 data shows solo officers account for 68% of assaults, and research finds two-officer teams reduce use of force by 25%. My take: don't overhaul everything — look at high-profile calls. You're already sending two solo cars to those anyway — domestics, bar fights, the messy ones. Why not pair those officers in one cruiser from the start?

Sure, you lose some patrol spread, but most calls need a second officer regardless. At night, they're backing each other up constantly — two-officer shifts could simply formalize what's already happening.

Test the approach where it counts — during peak hours and in high-activity zones. If possible, reassign an administrative officer or adjust shift schedules. Monitor key metrics like assault rates and response times to track the impact. Use mutual aid to cover any shortfalls. This isn't a full-scale restructuring — it's a practical, temporary staffing adjustment.

WHAT OFFICERS ARE SAYING ...

On the disconnect between command and patrol

“Our executive staff are so disengaged from the day-to-day and have lost touch with the realities of what officers are going through. They need to be willing to come to roll calls, answer tough questions, and show care and compassion instead of downplaying officer concerns.”

“Leadership is nonexistent in my department. The entire command staff needs to be replaced. This is neither sour grapes, nor bitterness — but reality.”

“Listen to the line officers. Believe it or not, they know more than you do.”

On visibility and leadership by example

“Get out of the office, work some shifts on patrol and try to remember what actually happens in the real world.”

“Every appointed rank should do an independent shift in patrol. To create policy and discipline fairly, you need a current understanding of what officers face.”

On support and morale

“Be there for your officers. Show up and come to briefing just to say hi once in a while.”

“Take care of your people and they will take care of the mission.”

“You need to put your officers first and have their backs. Your officers need to know you’re standing up for them.”

4 Equip them right: Get creative with funding

This is your most expensive step, but it’s the loudest way to show officers they matter. Officers notice when their safety is a budget priority. Half say understaffing puts them at risk and 67% say backup delays are dangerous — gear can help close those gaps. Well-equipped officers handle risks better.

My approach: [Apply for FEMA and DOJ grants](#), or tap local businesses for donations; a retailer might chip in.

Quick wins: Add [ballistic shields](#) to cruisers — they block gunfire. Add breaching tools. If rams are out of reach, grab sledgehammers from a local store for forced entry. Stash pry bars in SRO

offices for emergencies. Equip patrol with lighted safety vests—think LED-powered ones like [LiT Safety Vests](#), glowing bright for automobile crash investigations, or traffic control details, visible from afar.

Look at your admin budget. Can you pause a software upgrade and put that money into safety gear instead? Make the case. Officers see where the money goes — and it tells them what you value.

5 Lead visibly: Get your sergeants on the streets

Survey results are loud and clear: officers don’t feel supported by leadership. They think supervisors are disconnected, and they’re right — when leaders stay behind a desk.

My fix: get sergeants out of the office and into the field. If your lieutenants are burying them in admin work, cut that off. Their job is to lead and that means riding with patrol, jumping calls, spotting problems and coaching on the fly. Ride-alongs don't need to be constant. One a month, per shift, changes everything. Officers see their supervisors showing up. Leaders see what's really happening. It builds trust, catches problems early and shows that you care about your officers getting them home safe.

You set the tone — free them up to lead.

YOUR MOVE: LEAD, DON'T LAG

More than 80% of officers say aggression is rising. Half say they're at risk due to short staffing. That's your warning light — and your call to act.

Roll-call drills. Shared training. Smart patrol pairings. Creative gear funding. Field supervision that's actually in the field. These aren't guesses — they're grounded in what your officers say they need, and backed by LEOKA.

Threats won't wait. Your officers shouldn't have to either.

Chiefs, lead with what works in 2025. **1** >

About the author

Chief Scott Hughes has served in law enforcement since 1997, holding various leadership positions and driving organizational improvement through effective management and accountability. A respected instructor with the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission and Calibre Press, he teaches courses on use of force, officer safety, tactics, and leadership development.

Chief Hughes holds a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership, a graduate certificate in Criminal Justice Education, and a proud graduate of the FBI National Academy. He is a Certified Law Enforcement Executive (CLEE) and an active member of the Association of Force Investigators.

In addition to serving as Chief of Police in one of Ohio's fastest-growing suburbs, he founded Crosden Consulting, which provides expert witness services, consulting, and auditing for public safety organizations nationwide. Learn more at www.CrosdenConsulting.com.





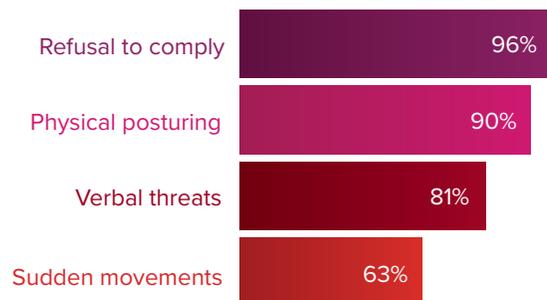
WHAT TO DO WHEN BACKUP IS 15 MINUTES OUT — OR DOESN'T COME AT ALL

WRITTEN BY
Lt. Dan Marcou

Officers must prepare to survive assaults on their own. Here's how to recognize threats early, train smart and respond decisively when the fight starts

Police1's "What Cops Want in 2025" reveals that physical and verbal assaults are on the rise, with nearly 40% of respondents reporting they were assaulted on duty in the past year — some more than once.

The survey confirms what many street cops already know: aggression has been on the rise since 2020 — and officers are seeing it firsthand. Survey respondents reported observing pre-assault indicators like:



Signs of intoxication and pre-assault grooming behaviors were also commonly observed. This is a particularly dangerous time for aggression to be on the rise, as 42% of officers report waiting 11 minutes or more for backup — or that backup doesn't come at all. More than half say understaffing compromises their safety on a daily or weekly basis. One officer shared, "My backup is always 10+ minutes out. I'm it until they get there."

Since survey respondents agree that most assaults are preceded by pre-assault indicators, it's critical that every badge-carrying member of this profession becomes keenly aware of — and able to recognize — these cues, especially when help may be far away.

Assaults can be broken down into four phases. Officers need to be mentally and physically engaged during all four phases of assaults.

Pre-assault cues

Here is a list of indicators that officers polled identified as being observable just before an assault. Officers noticed suspects were:

- Verbally threatening
- Physically posturing (pacing, muscle clenching, stretching, shadow fighting, growling, preparation breathing, countdown, etc.)
- Making sudden movements
- Indicators of suicidal ideation
- Spitting
- Refusing to comply with commands
- Glancing toward their weapon
- Known to have a history of previous assaults
- Participating in criminal behavior in progress
- Intoxicated due to alcohol and/or drugs
- Creating a distraction
- Suffering from mental health delusions, etc.
- Fleeing
- Engaging in what could be called pre-fight grooming (e.g., removing a hat or watch, rolling up sleeves, taking off a shirt)
- In possession of a mindset bent on engaging in a physical altercation
- Shifting into a bladed stance to the strong side, or assuming any identifiable fighting stance
- Backed up by a crowd urging on the conflict





PHASE 1: SELF-PREPARATION

I call this self-preparation because the survey reveals most departments are not properly preparing officers to survive assaults, much less effectively respond to them. (Leaders, please take note and do something about this besides firing officers who overreact and burying officers who underreact.)

Most defensive tactics trainers recommend weekly training sessions to prepare for an imminent assault. In contrast, the Police1 poll reveals leaders and officers report officers train in defensive tactics “rarely,” “yearly,” or “quarterly.” (There are even some locations where “none” is offered. WOW!)

So, if this describes your experience, now is the time to take responsibility for your own survival and train on your own dime, on your own time. However, it is preferable for agencies to take responsibility for this training.

“
Crowds don’t just spectate anymore.
They instigate.
”

Physical resistance and assaults are inevitable, so officers must prepare to withstand intense physical exertion by physically working out on their own — lifting, running and stretching regularly without pause, throughout their career.

 [Why police officers should adopt Lt. Dan’s workouts](#)

Additionally, officers should train regularly in de-escalation and physical control techniques, achieving instructor-level proficiency in both disciplines. Consider requiring officers to “teach back” techniques to achieve maximum proficiency.

Train for an automatic-response capability that involves a viable and defensible pre-attack response for common street assaults. When a specific assault presents itself, officers must respond instinctively with an effective counter.

 [Defensive tactics training on Police1](#)

Agencies should train their officers to use effective techniques, not only individually but as a team. It would be a good idea to prepare recordings of what are considered the best techniques, so officers are not only trained physically but also reinforced mentally by watching them individually at line-ups.

WHAT OFFICERS ARE SAYING ...



ON TRAINING, MINDSET AND SURVIVAL

“We’re not being trained to win. We’re being trained to not lose in court.”

“The warrior mindset needs to come back.”

“I would like to see course content that provides officers more confidence in their decision-making abilities. Younger officers lean on senior officers too often — they wait for someone else to act.”



ON DEFENSIVE TACTICS AND READINESS GAPS

“We stopped teaching people how to fight — and barely even how to defend themselves, if that.”

“I would train Jiu-Jitsu regularly if it was affordable or free. I just can’t afford a membership, and I know I’m not the only one.”

“It’s not the addition of skills that’s needed — it’s the frequency and intensity. Most of our folks get 8 hours a year because that’s all that’s mandated.”



ON SELF-PREPARATION AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

“I do a lot of my own training because I can’t count on my agency to do it right.”

“I wish our department would start a defensive tactics club — BJJ, Judo, ground fighting. I’d show up. A lot of us would.”

“I train on my own dime, on my own time — I know no one else will do it for me.”



PHASE 2: THE APPROACH

Approach as many calls as possible using the stealth approach. Shut down lights and siren and come in dark, parking down the street from the address rather than in front.

Be unseen by scanning and assessing on the approach. Pause, when possible, to assess every scene before announcing your presence. Keep cover between you and potential threats.

Identify the problem on scene before the problem identifies you.

After identifying the problem, move to a position of advantage and get enough backup before making contact, whenever possible. Remember, disengaging and standing by may be the best option if going in alone is not a viable tactical option for success.

PHASE 3: CONTACT PRE-ASSAULT TO ASSAULT/AMBUSH

Take and maintain a position of advantage — whether it's a vehicle contact, street contact, or a domestic violence call.

Contact-cover: Use the solid tactic of contact-cover. The contact officer makes contact using proper stance and distance, while the cover officer positions themselves by bracketing the suspect in a low-key presence prepared for anything without looking overbearing.

Have a pre-arranged signal to let each other know when it's time to move as a team to arrest. To look like professionals, use pre-trained team arrest tactics. The goal is to de-escalate the situation with verbalization, but when words fail, it will be best for you and the suspect to make the legal physical arrest before any assault occurs.



Distance and barriers: Use distance and barriers during certain contacts to increase your reaction time in case of assault.

Cover and concealment: Be aware of the importance of, and difference between, cover and concealment at all times, not just during high-risk situations. Take quick-peek corners wide. Never stand in front of doors. You never know what lies ahead.

PHASE 4: POST-ARREST/ASSAULT FOLLOW-THROUGH

Once you've prevailed, stabilize the suspect with proper handcuffing and check for injuries — theirs and yours.

Calm them (and yourself). Help them up. This should also be a pre-trained technique. Be the professional — not just because it's right, but because by now, cameras are rolling.

Secure them in a transport vehicle, monitor them, and search again before entering the facility.

Write a thorough, professional report documenting the suspect's actions, your de-escalation efforts, probable cause, and every tactic used. Tell the whole story so others see that your actions were not only justified — they were the actions of a professional.

Some common assaults — and my pre-trained responses

Officers in this poll described common assaults they faced. Here are a few mentioned and

“
We don't train
enough — and it shows.
”

pre-trained options I used on the street that worked for me.

Double leg takedown: When a street fighter suddenly shoots for a double leg, brace your palms on their shoulders, thumbs down, fingers up, and lift your feet. Let their momentum carry you backward while shooting your legs out of reach. Hook their right triceps with your right hand. Make chest contact and pull hard to your right, spinning around behind to control. This surprises most attackers.

The boxer: If a suspect assumes a boxing stance, I would mirror it — then fake a punch as a distraction and shoot a double leg takedown. Wrap their upper legs, head to the left hip. Once I had them, I'd hook a leg, topple them, and rotate to ankle/foot control. I'd flip them to their belly and apply pain compliance to secure the arrest.

 [Watch the video](#)

The spitting attack: Spitting might not kill you but untrained overreactions have gotten officers fired or charged. Block it with anything: clipboard, jacket, towel, or the suspect's own clothes. Then use a trained control technique.

 [Shot at and missed, spit at and hit](#)

CONCLUSION

The Police1 poll revealed that what most departments are doing to prepare officers for the assaults that lie ahead is not enough. One officer sincerely revealed, “We don’t train enough — and it shows.”

To prepare for the free throw — the safest, least contested aspect of basketball — think how much time a pro practices for that moment. You are also a pro. When it comes to an assault or ambush, it’s not a game. Much more is on the line.

This poll shows officers can’t count on anyone else for their survival. No one cares more about preparing you for success and survival than you do.

So now is the time to train — on your own dime, and your own time. You may find out, as I did, that your life depends on it. [1](#)

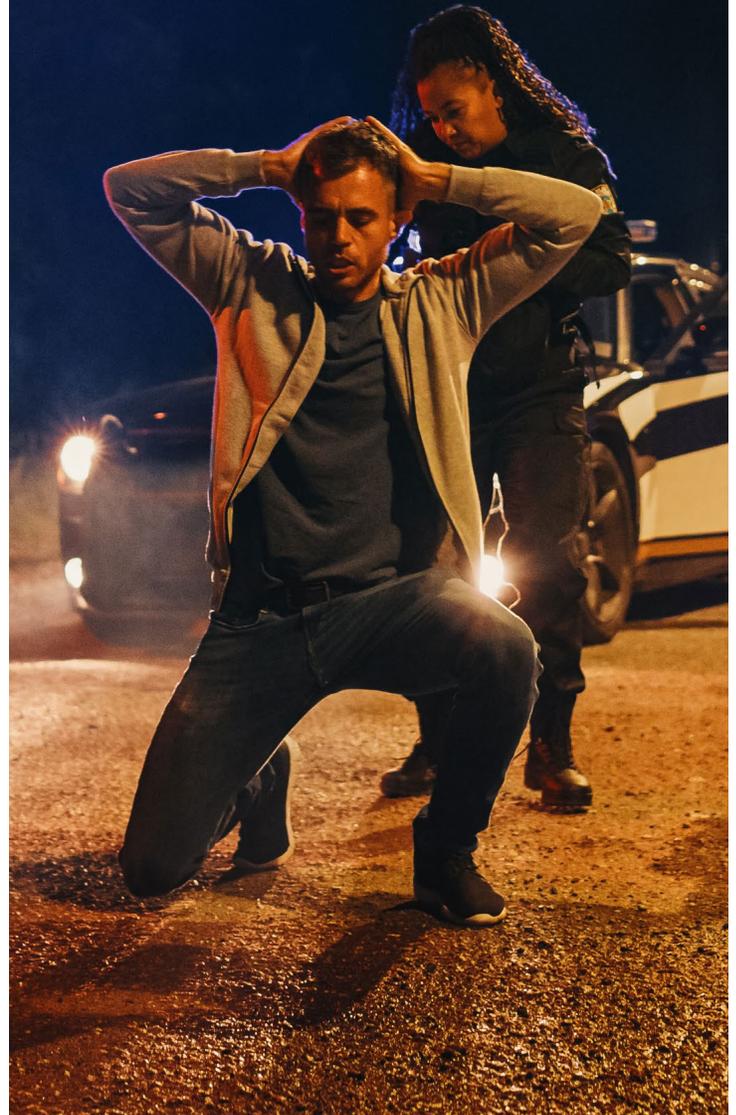
About the author

Lt. Dan Marcou is an internationally recognized police trainer who was a highly decorated police officer with 33 years of full-time law enforcement experience. Marcou’s awards include Police Officer of the Year, SWAT Officer of the Year, Humanitarian of the Year and Domestic Violence Officer of the Year. Additional awards Lt. Marcou received were 15 departmental citations (his department’s highest award), two Chief’s Superior Achievement Awards and the Distinguished Service Medal for his response to an active shooter.

“

*So now is the time to train
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”



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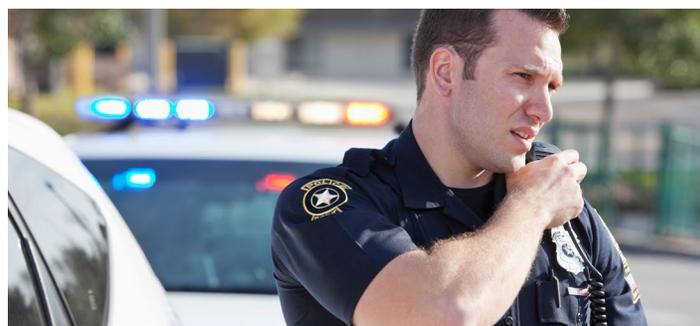
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MORE POLICE1 RESOURCES ON OFFICER SAFETY



Developing a respect-based police survival attitude

Respect may be the most important thing that contributes to an officer’s safety – here’s why



Protecting the protectors: Identifying and mitigating risks to officer safety

Using lessons learned from near misses to prevent injuries and fatalities from felonious assaults, missed firearms, ambushes and unprovoked attacks

 Access additional analysis of Police1’s survey here: <https://www.police1.com/what-cops-want>



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