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Commission Adopts Patrol Rifle Standard

Law enforcement agencies across the country have been upgrading their firepower. An informal survey of about 20 law enforcement agencies by the International Association of Chiefs of Police revealed that since 2004, all had either added weapons to patrol units or have replaced existing weaponry with military-style arms.

These changes have apparently been in response to the expiration of certain assault weapon prohibitions in 2004 and an arguably resultant proliferation of more powerful weapons on the street. Many law enforcement agencies across the nation report encountering a growing number of situations involving the use of assault rifles. Orlando has experienced a 26% increase in the seizure of such weapons since 2004, and its officers are noting an increasing number of armed robberies involving the use of assault weapons. Houston's police chief has identified the AK-47 assault rifle as a weapon of choice for warring gangs, major drug distributors and immigrant smugglers.

Michigan law enforcement agencies have responded in sync with their counterparts in other states. Agencies have turned to arming officers with rifles in response to threats that officers will encounter situations in which their traditional firearms are inadequate.

The 2006 Job Task Analysis (JTA) recently completed by MCOLES, supports the position of agency administrators. The responses to the JTA indicate an upward trend toward the use of

patrol rifle by officers across the state. Across all agency sizes and types in Michigan, approximately 53% of the responding patrol officers indicated that they used patrol rifles at some time during the course of their duties. In 1996, only 23% of the patrol officers indicated that they used a patrol rifle.

As a result, MCOLES has created a set of patrol rifle training objectives and a course of fire for basic recruit training. The full commission approved the training at their

December 2006 meeting with an effective date of June 1, 2007. The training objectives address the common characteristics of the patrol rifle, when to deploy the rifle, the fundamentals of marksmanship, decision making, rifle operations, rifle ammunition, and tactics. The course of fire consists of three stages of fire at various distances, which include the standing, kneeling, and prone shooting positions. The third stage is a point-shooting exercise and

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In-Service Firearm Standard to be Pilot Tested Across State *Prototype to Emphasize Officer Safety and Survival*

A prototype MCOLES in-service firearm standard has been developed and will soon undergo pilot testing at 25 law enforcement agencies and training facilities throughout Michigan. Pilot testing provides an opportunity to collect data for assessment of the standard's potential to fulfill the intent of its design.

When MCOLES developers first took on the task of devising an in-service firearm standard, a significant amount of time was spent looking at problems occurring in actual officer-involved shootings. It is significant that this research identified major gaps between what is typically stressed in in-service

firearms training and the challenges officers face in actual shootings. The most common problems that were identified were mistakes of fact, use of untenable tactics and inaccurate threat assessment in low light. Improper use of cover, poor communication during combat, and inadequate fear management also caused officers to commit errors that either compromised their safety or exposed them to civil liability.

The prototype standard consists of seven knowledge objectives as well as one combat proficiency objective. Legal considerations, threat assess-

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A Message from the Executive Director...



I open my comments amid all sorts of speculation regarding the direction the state will be taking to solve its current budget crisis.

The crisis has been brought on by a shortfall in the amount of revenue coming into the state's coffers. Revenue has not reached the predictions that were used to create the state's budget. As a result, a large deficit has developed in the first six months of the 2007 fiscal year. This red ink will grow with the passage of time. Under these circumstances, the Governor and the legislature are compelled, by the state's constitution, to bring spending into alignment with revenue.

Given the substantial cuts that have already taken place, agreement on how this might best be accomplished has been elusive. Proposed solutions have ranged from shrinking the size of state government to seeking new sources of revenue. As I write this piece, the only consensus that is evident suggests that state gov-

ernment will be undergoing some type of noteworthy reconfiguration, soon. The size of the problem and the paucity of solutions leave little else but changes in the status quo to consider.

These ongoing fiscal problems are mirrored in many of our local communities. They are most painfully evident in the dwindling number of law enforcement officers on patrol. As of March 12, 2007, Michigan's law enforcement population is down by 1,667 positions from September 11, 2001. This is a 7% decline.

A closer look reveals that this trend is not confined to any particular region of the state, and it is roughly proportional to overall population density. For instance, the Detroit Police Department has lost over 20% of its officers since 2001, and Wayne County has lost more officers than any other county in the state. Yet, sparsely populated Ontonagon County, has lost 20% of its law enforcement officers, as well.

The Michigan State Police have experienced a 17% decline in trooper strength in the same

period. By comparison, however, ninety one Michigan communities have similarly experienced reductions of 17 % or greater in their law enforcement strength. Overall, a total of 224 law enforcement agencies in Michigan have seen their sworn officer strength decline since 2001.

These facts, interspersed with some other realities, point to serious public policy issues emerging for Michigan's public safety leadership. Technology and information are affecting both law enforcement service and the way that crime is committed. We are addressing shrinking resources amid increasing crime and increasing demands for service. The extent and character of Michigan's economic recovery is going to define, or re-define, our responsibilities and how we carry them out. At the risk of sounding clichéd, I would add that perhaps like never before, we're going to need innovative thought...and a healthy measure of courage.

The Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards

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Executive Director

Handguns Still Preferred in Assaults on Officers

While there is little doubt that more powerful firearms are more frequently being used to commit various crimes, the evidence with regard to assaults on police officers indicates that handguns continue to be the preferred weapon. The FBI has recently released new findings on how offenders train, carry and deploy the weapons they use to attack law enforcement officers.

This 5-year study demonstrated that persons who attack police officers prefer handguns, because they are readily available, and they can be concealed. Many offenders who have assaulted law enforcement officers have significant experience with firearms. In fact, the study demonstrated that offenders practiced more often than the officers they assaulted. Moreover, offenders who assault officers tended to be "street combat veterans" who have been involved in previous shooting confrontations. This is quite the opposite of their law enforcement victims, the minority of whom had not been involved in any previous shooting incidents. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of officers who had become victims had been involved in hazardous incidents wherein they had the legal authority to use deadly force but chose an alternative course of action. This mind-set was in stark contrast to a "shoot-first" mentality displayed by attackers.

Another unsettling observation in the FBI report concerns missed cues. There was evidence that many officers who were attacked overlooked "red flags" or visual cues indicating that the assailant

was armed. Researchers discovered that offenders concealing firearms often touched a concealed gun with their arms or hands to assure themselves that the weapon is still hidden, secure, and accessible. Just as officers generally blade their body to make their sidearm less accessible, armed criminals have learned to do the same in encounters with police, ensuring concealment and easy access. Ironically, it was noted that officers working off-duty security at night clubs are often very proficient at detecting persons who are carrying concealed firearms but seem to "turn off" that skill when returning to general patrol duties where their attentions may be more divided. Also, the researchers noted offender comments that female officers tend to search more thoroughly than male officers. However, on the street, both male and female officers regarded females as less of a threat, despite evidence that more female offenders are armed today than 20 years ago.

It is significant that the shooting style of offenders tended to be instinctive. In other words, they did not generally look through the sights of the firearm when in combat. Instead, they pointed and fired the weapon without consciously aligning the sights. Curiously, the hit ratio associated with this style of shooting at police was superior to that of officers returning fire. This was attributed to the fact that in many cases the officers began shooting only after they were under attack.

This study mirrors research supporting the MCOLES in-service firearm prototype that is currently being pilot tested

across the state. The proposed standard requires training that more closely addresses situations revealed in the FBI study. It encourages informed decision making, proficiency in combat oriented shooting and sound tactics as foundational components of officer safety and survival.

Commission Adopts Patrol Rifle Standard

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stage two includes a mandatory reload.

To ensure the validity of the standard, MCOLES first solicited input from rifle subject-matter-experts from around the state. Then, MCOLES examined national and state research regarding officer involved shootings and agency best practices across Michigan. During 2006, MCOLES pilot-tested the standard at select training academies statewide. It should be emphasized that the standard only affects recruit training. It still remains the prerogative of local agencies to select an appropriate rifle and to train their officers to their desired level of proficiency.

Passing this standard does not mean that the students are certified in patrol rifle or sniper operations. Instead, the 12-hour block of instruction is designed to provide the students with a minimum level of competency in the operation of common types of patrol rifles prior to entering field training at an agency.

Commission Meets at Kettering University

On March 14, 2007, the Commission held its regular meeting in Flint. Kettering University and Sheriff Robert Pickell hosted the meeting, which was conducted at Kettering's facilities on property that used to be the main manufacturing location for General Motors. Even though the school is small, it graduates one of the largest mechanical engineering graduating classes in the United States annually and is consistently ranked as one of the leading schools in the country for an undergraduate engineering education.

This was the Commission's first "paperless" meeting. Eliminating the large volume of printed reports and action item explanations, the Commissioners moved through their agenda using computers. Among the business before the Commission, the Patrol Rifle Standard, previously adopted by the Commission for Basic Training, was added to the program for Recognition of Prior Training and Experience (RPTE). A remediation firarms skill for RPTE



Sheriff Gene Wriggelsworth, Mrs. Vida Fisher, and Executive Director Raymond W. Beach, Jr.

was also adopted on a pilot testing basis. The Commission also approved a revised disability application form and investigative protocol for the Public Safety Officer Benefit program.

The Commission was privileged to have this meeting coordinated by Mrs. Vida Fisher, of Kettering University. Mrs. Fisher is the Director of Corporate and Foundation Gifts at Kettering. On July 16, 2005, Mrs. Fisher's son, Owen Fisher, perished in the line of duty while serving as a Flint Police Officer.

In-Service Firearm Pilot Testing *continued from page 1*

ment, tactics, decision-making, and local policy considerations are among the required training content. The proficiency component emphasizes aiming methodologies, distances and shooting patterns that are common to actual shooting situations. The standard is designed to give agencies administering the standard maximum flexibility to focus on local priorities.

On completion of the pilot test phase, MCOLES staff will apply adjustments and report back to the Commission. It would be at this time that the Commission would consider mandating the standard for all Michigan law enforcement agencies.

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