

**MICHIGAN COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT STANDARDS**

# **Basic Training Firearms Standard**

## **Primary Duty Handgun Standard**



**Dynamic Firearms Drills  
Reality-Based Decision-Making Scenarios**

# **INSTRUCTOR GUIDE**

## **Instructor Commentary**

This document summarizes the 2019 modifications to the basic academy curriculum and minimum performance standards for the primary duty handgun and explains the “why” behind the updates. The primary goal of academy training is to prepare recruits for routine patrol and highly stressful incidents, including life-threatening situations that may require the use of deadly force. MCOLES is committed to staying current with the most effective learning theories and training methods, based on information supported by the latest research findings.

This standard is the result of reviewing the annual FBI report on law enforcement officers killed and assaulted (LEOKA), exploring progressive firearms training concepts and methods, facilitating input from Michigan subject-matter-experts and academy firearms instructors, and collaborating with firearms instructors from the FBI, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), and other firearms experts from around the country. The goal is to incorporate best practices into academy firearms training.

The ability to quickly and accurately process information under stress is essential to officer survival. When it comes to deadly force situations, making quick and accurate decisions is as important as the ability to shoot accurately. Accordingly, MCOLES also reviewed research findings of cognitive scientists in order to better understand how humans process information and make decisions.

Preservation of human life is at the core of deadly force decision making and firearms instructors shall ensure this concept permeates throughout firearms training.

### **Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA):**

A review of LEOKA data ensures updates are based on credible information with the goal of making academy firearms training relevant, realistic, and effective. Data from actual officer-involved-shootings helped shape this standard, trying to match reality as close as possible in order to best prepare officers for life-threatening situations.

LEOKA data have been consistent over the last few decades, which indicate that approximately half of all officer-involved-shootings occur within 5 feet of the threat, approximately a third occur between 6 feet and 20 feet of the threat, and just over 10% occur at distances greater than 20 feet from the threat.

The data asserts that officer-involved-shootings occur at distances requiring three categories of shooting responses: 1) close-quarter-combat tactics and techniques for when the attack is close, 2) marksmanship skills for when the attack is from a distance, or 3) a combination of both close-quarter-combat and marksmanship for when the attack is from somewhere in between these two distances. The desired outcome of this standard is to prepare recruits to be mentally and physically proficient in “fighting with a gun” in a life-threatening encounter at any distance.

## **The Balance Between Close-Quarter-Combat and Marksmanship**

As already noted, many officer-involved-shootings occur in close-quarters, unfold rapidly, and involve movement. Accordingly, academy firearms training should focus on dynamic and realistic one-handed and two-handed close-quarter-combat shooting techniques. These techniques shall be conducted while recruits are under duress and moving. Although static two-handed marksmanship is still an important component of academy firearms training, it should not dominate firearms training like it has traditionally. Firearms instructors should find the right balance between marksmanship and close-quarter training. Marksmanship should also be taught in a tactical and realistic manner, relevant to law enforcement situations (e.g., movement to cover), rather than with a “target practice” mindset that has no real connection to life-threatening encounters.

## **Cognitive Research on Decision-Making and its Relevance to Training**

Cognitive scientists and behavioral psychologists describe a two-system process for decision-making. “System One” is the powerful and fast-working subconscious brain, completely automatic because it works off intuition and emotion. “System Two” is the less powerful and sometimes lazy conscious brain, much slower than System One because it is analytical and rational, thinking through the problem and weighing out the options. Experts now know that most of the time intuition comes first and rational thought comes second. Good decisions are usually the result of both systems working together.

These findings are relevant to law enforcement training because officers are often forced to make quick decisions that can have lifelong effect on everyone involved. Quick intuitive decisions are desirable and even preferred when they are based on an accurate and reasonable interpretation of the totality of circumstances, referred to by some cognitive experts as *informed intuition*. However, quick decisions can be problematic when they are influenced by inappropriate implicit bias (system one) or the result of inadequate training.

During life-threatening situations, officers will likely engage System One, because there is usually no time to engage System Two. Poor decisions are more likely to occur if the involved officer lacks *informed intuition*. This is important because the ramifications of poor decisions are magnified exponentially when the decision confronting the officer is whether to use deadly force.

Experts also suggest that the subconscious brain influences decisions that are not rushed. In other words, even when there is time to utilize the analytical conscious brain and weigh the pros and cons of a decision, the subconscious brain influences decisions. It shapes the interpretation of the input, assesses the information through the lens of subconscious biases, and confirms initial (intuitive) thoughts and perspectives. This could lead to bias, complacency or misreading obvious threat cues.

When the scientific discoveries are applied to law enforcement performance, it means that most patrol decisions are influenced by each officer's deep-seated beliefs, life experiences, and world view (implicit bias). If an officer is not aware of how implicit bias works, it will likely influence decisions.

These findings in decision-making make perfect sense. As veteran officers and trainers, most would agree that officer behavior, performance on the job, and situational outcomes are profoundly influenced by the involved officer's background, experience, personality, demeanor, attitude, ability, and opinions. Simply stated, recruits and veteran officers with wider world views and richer experiences make better decisions. The findings in the cognitive sciences support this belief and demonstrate how an officer's world view affects behavior and judgment.

Trainers are quite familiar with the concept of subconscious competence; practice a physical skill often enough and it becomes "automatic" when needed. This is important for three main reasons: 1) so officers can focus on the situation at hand and not have to concentrate on executing a physical skill; 2) because subconscious competence usually equates to fluid and skilled physical maneuvers; and 3) because an automatic response is usually faster than a consciously initiated response.

Cognitive experts believe decision-making works in a similar way. The subconscious brain has the ability to quickly and automatically interpret the environment, recognize patterns, and categorize people and circumstances. If officers realize and practice the accurate and reasonable interpretation of the world around them in realistic training scenarios and on the job, sound judgment is likely to emerge.

However, an important step in the training process of developing sound judgment is immediate feedback, usually in the form of debriefings and performance assessments after scenario training. These debriefings should be student-led initially, requiring recruits to explain their actions. Recruits must explain how they interpreted the situation and the "why" behind their actions so instructors can better analyze and understand their world view. Honest and insightful feedback from veteran officers, supervisors, and instructors is also a vital component of this learning process, appropriately honing the student officer's judgment. The feedback should include an open discussion regarding the possible influence of implicit bias.

### **Unintended Subconscious Competence (AKA: Training Scars)**

One goal of firearms training is to develop subconscious competence in realistic physical skills which will translate to performance in life-threatening assaults. Subconscious competence is developed by doing the same thing over and over again. However, when one compares what goes on at many firearms ranges to what goes on in actual officer-involved-shootings, there is often quite a gap in consistency. On a range, tactical movement, communication skills, independent thinking, shooting on the move and at moving targets, etc. might be prohibited, restricted, or unrealistic due to

safety concerns. Yet in real life, these are the exact skills and concepts expected of officers.

The real danger is that constant repetition of some range safety protocols might cause the recruit's brain to lock bad habits into their subconscious brain, causing subconscious competence. This could potentially cause an officer to do some of these range protocols automatically and subconsciously in actual life-threatening assaults (e.g., not move, not talk, quickly re-holster, not consider a tactical retreat or other options, etc.).

An equally important goal of firearms training is to develop subconscious competence in tactics, communication skills, de-escalation, and judgment, especially as it relates to deadly force decisions. Recruits should have to demonstrate the ability to:

- seek and maintain a tactical advantage,
- communicate effectively to analyze and control the situation,
- use people skills to persuade subjects into compliance,
- handle tense situations without losing emotional control,
- prioritize the protection of human life, and
- deploy deadly force only when it is objectively reasonable and justified by the totality of circumstances, with the preservation of human life as a priority.

These are all critical components of firearms training yet are not sufficiently nurtured by merely working on physical shooting skills on the range. These skills need to be developed away from the live fire range in facilitated discussions, firearms drills, role plays, and realistic training scenarios and then reinforced on the range. New officers need to understand that judgment is just as important as physical firearms proficiency and this concept should permeate throughout firearms training.

### **Three-Component Firearms Standard**

The findings and patterns recognized from LEOKA data, combined with the revelations of cognitive scientists, support a three-component academy firearms standard. Each component addresses a vital piece of the overall training goal, allowing for a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to academy firearms training.

The first component involves physical firearms **drills** in a less-lethal environment to safely accommodate dynamic training and performance at realistic speeds and conditions. This gives recruits the practical physical skills they will need to perform in actual critical incidents, without the risk associated with live fire.

The second component involves deploying close-quarter-combat shooting tactics and techniques and precision fire on a **pass-fail qualification course** with duty gear (e.g., primary duty weapon, secure holster, belt, live ammunition, etc.). This allows recruits to demonstrate proficiency in relevant skills with the equipment they will possess on duty.

The third component brings it all together, requiring recruits to handle common and statistically dangerous law enforcement situations in **realistic scenarios**, causing them to demonstrate judgment as they forge their way through ambiguous law enforcement scenarios that may or may not escalate to life-threatening encounters.

Facilitating decision-making scenarios during the basic training academy is not only essential for stress inoculation and to help make training practical, but scenarios allow experienced trainers to monitor, evaluate, and help shape recruit judgment and their intuitive decisions in “tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving” situations. To help develop sound judgment, it’s imperative for recruits to receive relevant and immediate feedback on their performance in these scenarios. The lack of insightful feedback to correct inappropriate behavior might reinforce or “anchor” undesirable behaviors or worldviews.

### **Block Instruction vs Frequently Spaced Interval Instruction**

Firearms training in the basic academy is often scheduled in large blocks of instruction. This training model of long-duration sessions over a short length of time can be efficient and beneficial for short-term learning. Reserving a single block of time at a firearms range for recruit training may also be easier to accomplish. However, memory research has shown that “block training” helps produce one of the highest rates of swift deterioration of a skill once it is acquired. This research indicates that those trained and reinforced at frequently spaced intervals over longer periods of time tend to perform more successfully and better avoid skill degeneration. Accordingly, MCOLES recommends spacing out firearms instruction and practice over the duration of the academy. This could be facilitated with firearms drills and related training in shorter sessions over time, and much of this could be conducted without utilizing live fire.

### **Conclusion**

Academy recruits must be exposed to training that “speaks to” and widens their subconscious brain. This is true for physical skills to achieve appropriate subconscious competence in practical responses to life-threatening situations, and for cognitive skills to achieve appropriate judgment and reasonable decision-making in stressful situations. Firearms training must be more effective by ingraining sound tactics, developing subconscious competence in physical skills, enhancing communication skills and de-escalation techniques, emphasizing unbiased policing practices, and improving judgment regarding the use of force in stressful situations.

Since firearms drills and reality-based training scenarios have been a part of many basic training academies for years, the intent of this three-component training standard is to standardize and fine-tune these training strategies, rather than embark on something completely new.

The framework or blueprint for this proposed standard is supported by FBI research of officer-involved-shootings (LEOKA Research), brainstorming sessions with firearms

trainers, input from Michigan subject-matter-experts, and the latest findings and conclusions of scientists on how decision-making takes place.

## **Dynamic Firearms Drills**

**Subjecting all recruits to dynamic drills is a mandatory component of this academy firearms standard. Academy firearms instructors shall use the lists of tactical concepts contained in this document as a “blueprint” to create relevant dynamic drills to comply with this mandate.**

Firearms training shall incorporate drills to expose officers to realistic situations and environmental conditions officers are likely to face on the job. To develop subconscious competence in essential firearms skills, like threat recognition and close-quarter-combat (CQC) tactics and techniques, officers must train, practice and demonstrate dynamic responses to realistic threats at realistic speeds.

Simulating the fast and dynamic circumstances of actual officer-involved-shootings on a live fire range with duty weapons and live ammunition can create serious safety concerns. These safety concerns put significant limitations on training, often making live-fire training very unrealistic. However, dynamic drills that incorporate training munitions and video simulators can more accurately mimic reality, which allows recruits to respond realistically at the speed of real life, with much less risk.

When conducting dynamic drills at realistic speeds, the potential for or injury still exists and must be managed through policies, procedures and protocols to ensure a safe training environment.

The following list of firearms skills and tactical concepts was created based on LEOKA findings and brainstorming sessions with Michigan firearms subject-matter-experts. Each SME then ranked the following list of tactical concepts in order of importance.

1. Draw and shoot at extreme close quarters (e.g., bent elbow hip & point shooting, etc.).
2. Shooting on the move and at moving targets
3. Shooting while moving to cover and from various cover positions
4. Malfunction and reload drills
5. Shooting at multiple targets
6. Shooting while illuminating the threat with a handheld flashlight
7. Shooting rounds to the body and then the head or pelvic area (body armor drill)
8. Shooting with non-primary gun hand
9. Transition drills (e.g., handgun to shotgun, Taser to handgun, firearm to less-lethal)
10. Verbalization during and after shooting or using force
11. Long gun drills
12. Weaponless defense drills

13. Timed events to test proficiency (e.g., draw and shoot in minimum amount of time)
14. Shooting while wearing winter gear (jacket and gloves) and in foul weather (rain, snow, cold, heat, etc.)
15. Shooting without prescription glasses (if applicable)
16. Shooting in full riot gear – including gas mask

Throughout the development process, additional firearms concepts were suggested by Michigan SMEs and academy firearms instructors. The following items were not rated for importance and some of them may be just as important as any of the concepts listed above:

- ❖ Awareness drill demonstrating the danger of an unintentional discharge due to a sympathetic reaction or startle response if finger was left on the trigger when not intending to shoot.
- ❖ Obstacle course involving dynamic movement, use of cover and multiple targets.
- ❖ Simulating an injured limb and reloading accordingly.
- ❖ Shooting from odd positions, including after being “knocked to the ground.”
- ❖ Shoot-don’t shoot decision-making drills.
- ❖ Changing trajectory due to bystander safety or hostage situation.
- ❖ Perform under physical and mental stressors and require combat breathing.
- ❖ Shooting from distances greater than 25 yards.
- ❖ Multiple shot concept, firing more than single and double taps to neutralize a threat.
- ❖ Drawing and shooting backup weapon.
- ❖ One-handed shooting.
- ❖ Disengagement, including tactical retreat.
- ❖ Exiting car and immediately engaging a suspect.
- ❖ Realistic threat recognition drills.

Drills are important because this is where recruits learn, practice, and acquire the skills and tactics that will help them perform in real life-threatening encounters. Drills allow trainers to assess recruits’ practical skills in realistic conditions at realistic speeds without the risks and limitations associated with live fire.

Academy firearms instructors shall develop drills that incorporate as many of the concepts listed on pages 6 and 7 as training time allows. Instructors may develop drills that address concepts they feel are important but are not on this list as well. Multiple items can be incorporated into one dynamic drill. For example, one drill could encompass many close-quarter-combat tactics and techniques by requiring recruits to: 1) draw and move offline, 2) shoot from the hip or point shoot, 3) shoot at a moving target, and 4) shoot while moving toward cover (addressing list items 1, 2 & 3)

To maintain consistency in academy training and to avoid confusion, firearms instructors should collaborate with subject control instructors when designing these dynamic drills.

### **Decision-Making Scenarios**

**Subjecting all recruits to scenario training is a mandatory component of this academy firearms standard. Academy firearms instructors shall use the following list as a “blueprint” to create realistic scenarios to comply with this mandate.**

This component involves deadly force decision-making during realistic scenarios while utilizing training munitions and/or video simulation to experience and demonstrate proper judgement under duress. The first six scenarios on the list below were identified and ranked in order of statistical risk of officer death (LEOKA Research). The last two scenarios on the list are reflective of current events around the country.

These scenarios should attempt to capture and reenact credible behaviors, including realistic threat cues and pre-assault indicators. Scenarios should be based on the fact patterns of local incidents. Each recruit shall participate in all eight situational scenarios, preferably as the primary officer.

To help “anchor” the lessons learned in scenario training, this training should be tied to emotion. One way to tie scenario training to real emotion is to have local officers, who were involved in situations the training scenarios are based on, participate in the scenario debriefing. The officers could share their experiences with the recruits and describe how the incident unfolded, highlighting what went right and what went wrong. The involved officers could articulate how training helped or hindered their performance, what training was relevant or unrealistic, or how unreasonable expectations failed to adequately prepare them for what unfolded.

- 1. Arrest Situations** (robbery, burglary, drug related, other attempts to arrest).
- 2. Premeditated Ambush and Unprovoked Attack Situations.**
- 3. Traffic Pursuits/Traffic Stops** (unknown risk traffic violation, felony stops).
- 4. Suspicious Persons/Suspicious Circumstances.**
- 5. Disturbance Calls** (DV, bar fight, person with firearm, etc.).
- 6. Tactical Situations** (barricaded offender, hostage taking, high-risk entry, etc.).
- 7. Non-Compliant, Not Assaultive Suspect** (due to a mental illness, intoxicated suspect, or unable to comply for other reasons, disrespectful “contempt of cop” type scenario).
- 8. Armed Suspect (Other than Firearm) at a Distance** (knife, baseball bat, hammer, etc., but at an extended distance away from officers initially).

LEOKA data noted the following situations were also high-risk circumstances that should be addressed in scenario training when practicable: 1) foot pursuits, 2) prisoner care (e.g., handling, transporting, custody), and 3) investigative activities (e.g., surveillance, search, interview).

Exposing officers to training scenarios involving mental health issues where they can apply lessons learned from Module II.C.4 (The Response to Those with Mental Disorders) and possibly recognize common symptoms of a mental health emergency is strongly recommended. Handling situations involving someone with a mental illness or experiencing a medical emergency can be very difficult and often involves non-compliance (#7 on the scenario list).

Premeditated ambushes and unprovoked attacks of law enforcement officers have become more common in recent years. Although scenarios need to be realistic and winnable, training should prepare recruits for these two situations as well. The goal and theme of reality-based scenario training should be to emphasize the concept that legal knowledge, command presence, situational awareness, sound tactics, effective and respectful communication, weapons proficiency, and sound judgment is likely to make officers and citizens safer, even during an ambush or spontaneous attack.

### **Scenario Safety**

The inherent risk involved in reality-based scenario training requires the establishment of strict safety policies, procedures and protocols to maintain a safe training environment and reduce the risk of injury to everyone involved. These safety guidelines establish systems and protocols that will maintain and enhance safety.

The primary objective of safety guidelines is to enhance the safety of everyone involved, including the public, while promoting a healthy and realistic training environment. **The reduction of risk, based on planning and the recognition of high-risk circumstances, is the first step in maintaining a safe training environment.**

All personnel involved with academy scenario training shall be familiar with the MCOLES Scenario Safety Guidelines and any additional safety guidelines implemented by each academy.