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*Editor's note:* The entire staff of the Force Science Institute would like to extend our very best wishes for a safe and healthy 2012. We're deeply grateful for the support and enthusiasm you continue to share with us and we look forward to an exciting and enlightening year to come. Your dedication, interest and energy continue to fuel us and for that, we thank you!

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**I. New video combats public myths about police shootings: View it online or on DVD**

In a unique production assisted by the Force Science Institute, law enforcement authorities in an Oregon county have created an online video that explains to civilians the realities of officer-involved shootings and counters prevalent myths fostered by Hollywood fantasies.

In 17 minutes, the program ranges from addressing why officers don't try to shoot knives out of the hands of attackers to how cell phone and dash-cam recordings can significantly distort impressions of deadly force encounters. In all, the production tackles 7 persistent misconceptions that often lead to unjust accusations of wrongdoing regarding police use of force and provides scientific insights into the true dynamics of life-or-death confrontations.

The video, called "Hollywood vs. Reality: Officer-Involved Shootings," can be viewed online [by clicking here](#). (*DVD copies are also available. See below.*) Officials who posted it for public viewing are willing to share it with other agencies as a valuable educational tool.

**BACKSTORY.** Several years ago, after a series of hotly protested police shootings in Portland, the state's major metropolitan area, the Oregon legislature mandated that each county devise a "more standardized and transparent" system for "managing" OISs. Included was a directive that each county conduct annual "community outreach and education" on law enforcement's use of deadly force.

Lane County, whose seat is the city of Eugene, was "among the first to respond with a protocol," according to DA Alex Gardner. Among other things, law enforcement agencies in the county, plus the Oregon State Police, organized an Interagency Deadly Force Investigative Team to probe each OIS and forward evidence gathered to the DA's office for assessment.

To fulfill the public education requirement, the county launched a series of high-profile events, beginning with daylong instruction and exercises that involved exposing local reporters and politicians to shoot/don't shoot scenario training.

"Running civilians through scenarios is expensive, and in this area there's considerable turnover among news reporters, so the effective benefit is not always lasting," says Melinda McLaughlin Kletzok, the PIO for Eugene PD and a reserve deputy for the Lane County SO.

For 2011's community education, she told *Force Science News*, it was decided to produce a video that "could always be online" for public access--"something that would counter the kind of misinformation that seems to commonly arise after any OIS." This, she says, would allow basic facts about deadly force to be communicated even when officials couldn't comment publicly on the specifics of an ongoing investigation.

Dr. Bill Lewinski, executive director of the Force Science Institute, was in Eugene last January for a 2-day Force Science training seminar and agreed to appear on camera to deliver pertinent findings emerging from FSI research. At about the same time, Dr. Alexis Artwohl, a Force Science board advisor and certification course faculty member known for her work in police behavioral science, was participating in a training program elsewhere in the state. She joined in the video production also. Kletzok coordinated the project, which was filmed and edited by the professional production company Attic Media.

In the finished program, other contributors--Eugene Ofcr. Joe Kidd, Oregon State Police Sgt. Alan Gilbert, and DA Gardner--offer their particular perspectives on OISs. But the most extensive content comes from Lewinski and Artwohl.

**HOLLYWOOD BRAINWASHING.** In the opening minutes, Artwohl points out 3 ironies about the public perception of OISs:

- civilians commonly expect "these events to defy the laws of physics";
- officers are expected "to defy the limits of human performance" by having "perfect memories and perfect decision-making, when research clearly shows" that to be impossible;
- "the judgment of police officers is often based on myths, assumptions, and personal opinions that may not necessarily be true."

Gardner then suggests that these critical misconceptions stem in large part from brainwashing of the public mind by Hollywood. Our "video culture" conveys "a tremendous amount of misinformation" about police operations and behavior, he says. "The extent to which the public relies on what they see on TV and in the movies," often without being fully aware of it, "makes it very difficult for people to evaluate whether an officer has behaved appropriately in a use-of-force application."

**MYTH-BUSTING.** The bulk of the video, then focuses on myths about OISs, phrased in the form of naive but potentially inflammatory questions that Kletzok and Gardner say frequently arise from the media and community activists after offenders are shot by police.

Here's an abridged sampling. In some cases, the online video includes real-life dash-cam footage to help illustrate the problems discussed.

**"Why didn't the police talk the aggressor down?"**

Most of the time, officers *do* talk people down, using their communication and persuasion skills, Artwohl points out. Research shows that "only about 1% of all calls for service result in any use of force, and only a very small percentage of those result in use of deadly force...."

"Not all offenders can be talked out of what they're getting ready to do. At that point, the only thing an officer can do is use force to protect his life and protect the public."

Sometimes because of chemical, emotional, or other issues, subjects are "unable to listen to anything," Lewinski adds. "That means *they* are in control of the situation. The officer is the reactor and has to respond to what the person is doing.

"It's not the officer's choice, usually, to avoid using verbal skills. It's the person being unable to listen or attend or being unwilling to do what the officer is saying...."

### **"It was just a knife and the officer had a gun. Why didn't the officer just disarm the subject?"**

"Some people think an individual armed with a knife is not a dangerous threat to an officer," Lewinski says. "From our research and the research of others, we know that not to be true. Knives can actually be *more* dangerous than a gun...."

Force Science studies show that "a young person in reasonably good shape can cover as much as 31 feet in the time it takes an officer to draw his gun, point, and fire 1 round. If a person is 7 feet away, the officer could even have his gun in the low-ready position, and by the time he raises the gun and fires even once, he could be stabbed.

"A stab from a knife or a stab and upward cut can be extremely quick. Each cut or slash can occur at less than one-quarter second, and any one could be lethal for the officer...."

### **"Why not shoot the gun or knife out of their hand? Why not shoot to wound the subject? "**

Lewinski recalls TV and movie westerns in which the hero defeats an attacker with this kind of precision shooting. "It's one of those Hollywood myths," he says. "It looks good on film but doesn't work in the real world. Officers do not have the ability to fire and hit that accurately in a dynamic encounter."

Even if officers aim for center mass, they "tend not to be as accurate as they might be on the range because the dynamics by which people move in a real-world encounter are such that center mass is a constantly changing target...."

To stop the threat, the goal of police deadly force, "the best place an officer can aim for is center mass," Lewinski explains. "Even then it's not a guarantee," but it's more realistic than the extraordinary challenge of intentionally hitting only an arm or a leg.

### **"Why were they shot in the back?"**

In framing an answer to this nettlesome question, Lewinski describes a shooting in which he served as an expert witness. When the officer made the decision to shoot, the threatening suspect was facing him full-on. Yet when the smoke cleared, the officer's rounds were found

to have struck in the suspect's side and back, making it appear that the officer had not been in jeopardy when he fired.

"By the time I can say '1,000-and,' the officer had fired 4 rounds," discharging a bullet every quarter-second, "shooting to save his life," Lewinski says. In that eye-blink, the suspect had begun to turn away, a movement the officer would not have had time to detect and react to. Inevitably, the subject's side and back were exposed in the process to the line of fire.

"Very true, shots did go into the back," Lewinski says. But in the time span involved, "there was nothing the officer could have done to stop from shooting the subject in the back." In the video, Lewinski demonstrates the twisting-and-turning movement involved.

### **"Doesn't a video of an event tell the whole story?"**

In a word, No. A video camera, Lewinski explains, records action "from a particular perspective," and that's "very limiting in its ability" to tell the full story. "Look at the number of cameras necessary for referees to look at during a football game" in attempting to "accurately and completely" judge an action under scrutiny, he says.

In a video recording, which "people tend to think is an accurate reporter of any particular incident," some action may be missing entirely, and what's shown can be significantly skewed. Lewinski references a camera some officers now wear that sits just in front of an officer's ear.

"This reportedly has the view of the officer, but it does not. If you close your left eye, for instance, you will see what your right eye sees. Your right eye sees a different field of view than your left eye. Now imagine a camera far behind your right eye. What does that see? *No* camera records things as an officer's eyes and brain record it."

**OIS PROCEDURES.** After the myth-busting segments, which also include reaction-time realities and less-lethal devices, the video concentrates on a walk-through of investigative procedures, given by Gardner and Gilbert. Among other things, they explain how the deadly force investigative team operates and why investigations sometimes take months to complete.

Gilbert expresses empathy "with the public and media being frustrated because a lot of information isn't released immediately. It's frustrating for the police, too. We want to get the story out, especially when an officer has done something heroic. But we need to wait so as not to taint the investigation."

Artwohl notes in conclusion, "Most officers will tell you that by far the most stressful part of the event is what happens afterwards. We need to refrain from a rush to judgment. The least we can do is provide officers the benefit of the doubt while the investigation is going on."

**COPIES AVAILABLE.** Public feedback on the video has been "very positive," Gardner says, "but where we'll get the most is on the heels of the next shooting." Meanwhile, he and Kletzok encourage other policing agencies to benefit from the production, which Gardner describes as "a lasting tool to help educate people who are unfamiliar with law enforcement

use of deadly force and how it is investigated. Officers deserve that community understanding. They've earned it."

Kletzok agrees. The video, with its expert observations on the subtleties of OISs, can be accessible "for years to come, whenever questions come up about shootings," she says. "At times when an agency might be unable to comment directly on a lethal force event, the video can speak for the agency about controversial or misunderstood issues."

**If you'd like a copy in DVD format,** contact Gardner at: [alex.gardner@co.lane.or.us](mailto:alex.gardner@co.lane.or.us) and reference Force Science News.

## **II. Force Science to orient oversight commission on force facts**

After 3 decades with the Winnipeg Police Service, where he gained first-hand experience with the challenges and controversies of police use of force, Insp. Brian Cyncora changed hats last summer to become the first executive director of the new Police Commission for the Canadian province of Manitoba.

Among his early actions at his new post was booking a day of "training and orientation" for the commission's 9 members, conducted by Dr. Bill Lewinski, executive director of the Force Science Institute. Lewinski will appear before the group in mid-January, just ahead of the weeklong certification course in Force Science Analysis scheduled in Winnipeg.

The Manitoba Police Commission, created under recent provincial Police Services legislation, is intended to provide advice on police standards, to prepare special studies on enforcement issues, and to recruit civilians to monitor investigations of police "incidents" and complaints. Its members have a mixture of law enforcement, social service, business, legal, academic, and activist backgrounds.

Cyncora says he arranged for Lewinski's presentation because "After spending 30 years as a police officer, I truly understand how important it is for decision-makers to hear about the use of force from the Force Science research perspective