



Crowd Control Procedures

Police officers can get into a variety of dangerous situations performing police operations including traffic stops, domestic disputes, brawls, and chases. Oftentimes crowd control occurs alongside many of these circumstances. Crowd control is also necessary for sporting events, controversial court verdicts, and parades. For example, should a routine traffic stop turn violent, people may gather to witness the event and record it. In this instance, police must deal with not only the offending party but also bystanders who may try to intervene. There are many forms of crowd control and using the proper procedures benefits your officers.

Crowd control procedures focus on the task of controlling large or gathering groups with a limited number of police officers. Use policies, planning, and tactics equally to mitigate damage and injuries sustained should a crowd become riotous or beyond the control of the officers present. Crowd control procedures should cover planned and unplanned events, from a holiday parade to a riot. Police presence at these events requires officers to have situational awareness of any growing concern.



At demonstrations, political rallies, and protests, hostilities can escalate quickly. A solid police presence can be the difference between control and total mayhem. Special equipment such as helmets, batons, shields, and less-than-lethal weapons should be available for use during such events. All staff intending to use the conflict engagement PPE should attend relevant training. Some crowd control tactics your police agency should have in place to maintain order:

Plan and Set-Up: Routine events expecting crowds still require planning for traffic control, officer locations, officer responsibilities, and anticipated outcomes. While sudden events do not allow for pre-planning, a policy on such events allows departments to respond and handle them smoothly. Single-officer crowd events, like traffic violations that escalate, may require the removal of the officer until assistance is provided. Plan for these situations as well.

Communication, Equipment, and Skills: Communication should be prioritized to reinforce that officers are in charge. Communicating status updates as events change rapidly during large gatherings, moving units around the site, denoting changes in the environment, and denoting when an event has concluded helps maintain order. Additionally, positive communication like officer de-escalation can alleviate conflict.

Crowd Control Team Tactics: When police departments are trained in team tactics, fewer officers can accomplish more. Officers trained to form, fall into, extend, and move within a line, column, or wedge formation while in stressful environments can be extremely effective in deterring unruly groups.

Team Arrest Skills: Train on making a team physical arrest quickly and efficiently in the presence of a crowd, particularly one that is growing in size and hostility. Ensure that professionalism is a top priority.

Crowd Dynamics: Officers must recognize the dynamics that exist in every crowd. For example, many good people, who are followers, will engage in a violent disturbance if malevolent leaders are not deterred or arrested. Voice commands with a show of force are likely to turn back good bystanders from engaging further.

Personal Protective Equipment: More hostile encounters are likely to require specialty officer divisions using specialty equipment. Have enough equipment ready for the number of officers planned for the event.

Additional Food for Thought: Plain clothes observers, cameras, body cameras, detours and alternate routes, mutual aid availability, mobility of forces, and less-than-lethal munitions all play a role in your ability to successfully control gathering crowds.

Crowd control requires planning, training, knowledge of your community, and specialty equipment. From the routine parade to the unforeseen response to a community event, police departments that prepare beforehand are more likely to be successful in keeping events calm, peaceful, and lawful.

