



PAWNEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
SHERIFF DARRIN VARNELL

Policy # Post Deputy Involved Critical Incidents	Related Policies:
<i>This policy is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. The policy should not be construed as creating a higher duty of care, in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party civil claims against employees. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with the laws governing employee discipline.</i>	
Applicable Oklahoma Statutes:	
CALEA Standard:	
Date Implemented:	For any formal policy or procedure, that may have derived from this document, agencies should first consult with their labor attorney to ensure it does not contradict statements in the city's personnel handbook.

- I. **Purpose:** One of the most critical investigations in any law enforcement agency is that of a deputy-involved shooting. These shootings bring media attention; citizen inquiries; liability issues; and, if handled incorrectly, irreparable damage to The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office's reputation and the deputy's well-being. It is widely accepted that deputies involved in shootings or other significant critical incidents require immediate support.
- II. **Policy:** The policy of The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office is to provide the services, to prepare and respond to the health and well-being of law enforcement personnel following a deputy-involved shooting or critical incident.
- III. **Training:** The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office shall provide training to all personnel in both normal and problematic posttraumatic reactions and appropriate ways to respond to employees who have been involved in a traumatic incident. Training should include what to expect personally (including the effect on family members), professionally, departmentally, and legally after a shooting or other significant use-of-force incidents. Such training may occur as part of the initial academy training and/or as part of The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office's ongoing in-service training program. The training material should be made widely available to personnel to use as reference material in the event they become involved in a deadly force or other critical incident.
- IV. **First Aid:** Immediately after a deputy-involved shooting or other critical incident, involved personnel should be provided physical and psychological first aid (e.g., emotional support, reassurance to involved personnel, assignment of a companion deputy to any

deputy who is directly involved in a shooting and is separated from others pending investigative procedures). This support should be focused on calming physical and emotional stress and restoring and/or reinforcing the deputies' sense of safety.

- V. Involved Deputies:** Deputies who did not fire their weapons are often overlooked in the aftermath of a shooting event, be mindful that “involved deputies” may include not only those who fired their weapon, but also deputies who were at the scene and either did not, or could not, fire their weapon. Such deputies are often strongly impacted. It is possible that similar reactions by such deputies may also take place following other critical incidents.

VI. Peer Support:

- A.** After providing needed public safety information, deputies who fired a weapon or were directly involved in a critical incident should be encouraged to step immediately away from the scene and be transported to a safe and supportive environment by a trusted peer or supervisor.
- B.** To ensure deputies are not isolated once transported from the scene, whenever possible the supervisor will ensure there is a companion deputy of the deputy's choice, a chaplain, or a supportive peer available. Often the best support person is a fellow deputy who is trained in peer support or has previously gone through a deputy-involved shooting, who can be assigned to the deputy immediately following the incident.
- C.** If deputies have an immediate need to talk about the incident, they should be encouraged to do so solely with individuals with whom they have privileged communication (i.e., attorney, chaplain, licensed mental health professional.)
- D.** Talking with trained peers who have had similar experiences can be quite helpful for deputies involved in deadly force and other critical incidents. Peer support deputies will respond as soon as practical to provide support and psychological first aid.
 - a.** Trained peer support personnel may also be an asset by participating in post-incident group interventions in conjunction with a mental health professional trained and experienced in working with law enforcement.
 - b.** Family members of deputies involved in shootings may also benefit from contact with a trained mental health professional and/or peer support, particularly from the family members of those who have previously been involved in shootings or other life-threatening events.
 - c.** Only peer support team members who have received specialized training in crisis intervention and the rules of confidentiality promulgated by The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office will be utilized. Peer support should only be ancillary to intervention by a mental health professional trained and experienced in law enforcement and deputy-involved shootings or other critical incidents and should never take its place.

VII. The Weapon:

- A.** Following a shooting incident, deputies often feel vulnerable if unarmed. If an deputy's firearm has been taken as evidence or simply pursuant to agency policy, a replacement weapon should be immediately provided as a sign of support,

confidence, and trust unless there is an articulable basis for deviating from this procedure.

- B. Deputies should be kept informed of when their weapon is likely to be returned. Care should be taken to process and collect evidence from the deputy as soon as practicable to provide an opportunity to change into civilian clothing.

VIII. Family/Loved ones of the Deputy:

- A. Deputies involved in a shooting or other critical incident should be provided with the opportunity and encouraged to personally contact their family members as soon as possible after the incident (e.g., by cell phone while being transported from the scene). Timely personal contact may reduce the likelihood of loved ones receiving incomplete or misleading information from the media or other forms of rapid electronic communications.
- B. It is prudent that no contact be made with family members before the deputies have had this opportunity. Deputies should be instructed to limit information to their well-being and not the facts of the incident. If it is not feasible to call themselves, then individuals who preferably know the families, or have been previously chosen by the deputies or have notification training, or are designated by The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office, should call as soon as possible.
- C. Offers to call other support people such as friends, family members, chaplains, qualified mental health professionals, and so on, should be made to ensure that the family members have their support system mobilized.
- D. Family members who wish to be with injured deputies should be offered transportation in lieu of driving themselves. Deputies not involved in the incident, but on duty at the time of the incident, should be allowed, as time permits, to contact their families and advise them that a shooting or other critical incident has occurred, but that they were not involved (or injured).

IX. Partnerships:

- A. The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office will establish a working relationship with one or more qualified, licensed mental health professionals experienced in the law enforcement culture as well as in the provision of post-shooting or other critical incident interventions. The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office should notify this mental health resource as soon as possible following an deputy involved shooting or other critical incident, so that an appropriate intervention can be facilitated in a timely fashion.
- B. The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office will develop a roster, with timely updates, containing the names and contact numbers of family members and significant others whom such personnel would like to have notified in the event that they are injured on duty and are unable to contact them personally. Deputies should also identify two or three fellow deputies, in order of preference, whom they would like to have contact their family or significant other when feasible if they are unable to personally make contact after a shooting or comparable critical event.
- C. The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office will take steps to help prevent this information from being viewed by unauthorized personnel. While it is preferable to have contact made by an deputy who is known to family members, this may not be feasible. The

Pawnee County Sheriff's Office will ensure that contacts with family and significant others is made by personnel trained to make such notifications.

X. The Investigation:

- A.** The investigative process and concerns over legal and administrative consequences are often a stressful part of a deputy-involved shooting or other critical incident for involved personnel. The first few hours after a shooting or other critical incident is a potentially emotional and confusing time so deputies may wish to consult their union and legal counsel. Whenever possible, deputies should be educated on the protocol of the investigation as well as any potential actions by the media, grand jury, or review board prior to any formal investigative interviews. It is equally important that, over time, deputies be made aware of the progress of the investigation in a timely fashion.
- B.** Significant use-of-force investigations are complex events and may involve an array of law enforcement and other government agencies. Continued communication among all parties throughout the course of an investigation protects involved deputies by mitigating misunderstandings and conflict among the different interests and concerns. While investigations are pending, supervisors should maintain regular contact with deputies and keep them apprised of any pertinent developments.

XI. Administration:

- A.** Shootings and other critical incidents can result in heightened physical and emotional reactions for the participants that require a brief respite from work to marshal natural coping skills and manage the emotional impact of the incident prior to a return to duty.
- B.** For those deputies directly involved in a death or serious injury to another person, a minimum of three (3) days leave, using either administrative leave or regular days off, will be granted.
- C.** Personnel who were present at the scene but, for example, did not discharge their weapons may in some cases, be placed on administrative leave.
- D.** Administrative leave is a routine procedure and not a disciplinary suspension.
- E.** While deputies may be asked to provide pertinent information soon after a shooting to aid the initial investigative process, whenever feasible, deputies will have some recovery time before providing a full formal statement. Depending on the nature of the incident, and the emotional and physical status of the deputies, this can range from a few hours to several days.

XII. Critical Incident Intervention:

- A.** Post-shooting and other critical incident interventions should be conducted only by licensed mental health professionals trained and experienced in working with law enforcement personnel and familiar with deputy-involved shootings and other critical incidents.
- B.** Deputies are required to participate in one individual post-shooting (or other critical incident) intervention with a qualified mental health professional so they can, at a minimum, be provided with basic education and coping skills to better manage their reactions. **It is not mandatory for them to discuss the event with the mental health professional.**

XIII. Media: Due to the overwhelming presence of social media, involved deputies should be reminded of the risks to their presence on social media, as there may be negative comments/postings/blogs. They should further be reminded that viewing media and/or community negativity through television and web-based postings may complicate post-incident thoughts and emotions.