

A Snapshot in Safety and Risk

Security Officers: Use of Force

Often, situations with patrons can escalate from verbal instruction to physical use of force.

A security officer's actions are and should be restricted to a combination of their department's written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and the security officer's training. Within the written SOP it must spell out the permitted levels of Use of Force, and when and how they may be used.

Five Levels of Force

Typically, there are five levels of Use of Force for a security officer. The level of force should be based on escalating and de-escalating contacts the security officer encounters. The level of force, security tools, and procedure must be identified in a written SOP that outlines:

1. The individual level of training for security officers
2. When and what level of force is necessary to neutralize situations, using the least amount of force possible

Example: not all security officers are authorized to carry or use a firearm; lower levels of security officers might only be authorized to use up to non-lethal force, and supervisors and managers might be authorized up to and including deadly force based upon the policies and procedures.

The Standard Operating Procedure should be written so that another reasonable person would also believe or consider it necessary if they were in the same situation.



Source: GAO analysis of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) use of force procedure; Art Explosion (clip art). | GAO-20-599

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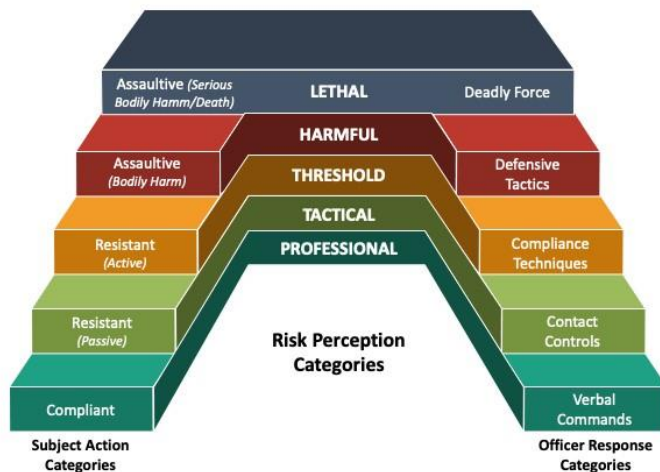
Prior to deciding your policy on the level of force used by any security officer, have your legal department carefully review and approve the policy or written operating procedures. As a best practice, *the LOWEST* possible level of force should be used.

Excessive Use of Force

Excessive Use of Force refers to a situation where the officer is entitled to use force to diffuse or neutralize an incident but exceeds the minimum amount of force needed to do so. Excessive Use of Force should be prohibited, and the SOP should specifically state that excessive force should not be used as well as highlight prohibited types of forces, such as chokeholds. The security department’s written procedure should state that only the minimal force necessary to diffuse or neutralize an incident is to be used. Excessive Use of Force includes:

- Physical force against someone already in custody and not resisting
- Use of a weapon against someone who is not armed
- Use of a higher level of force when a lesser level of force would have controlled the incident

Use of Force Continuum Model



A Use of Force Continuum provides a cross reference for when and what use of force is acceptable based on the subject’s actions, this allows the officer to match the subject’s actions with the officer’s needed response.

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Training

Above all, security officers require training, and refresher training on an ongoing basis. Many states have statutes related to required training, including Use of Force, for security guards. If this isn't a requirement, consider it a best practice to train your security staff on the following:

- Written Policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
- The proper use and care of any tools provided such as radios, handcuffs, Tasers, pepper spray, and security batons
- Officers should receive oral de-escalation training, verbal judo training, conflict resolution training
- Contact control training for any open-handed control techniques
- Local jurisdictional required training for the use or deployment of security tools

Use of Force Reviews

The final step in the Standard Operating Procedure should be to include a review process for Use of Force incidents. Every Use of Force should be followed by an incident review by a Review Board. The Board should be three to five professionals with knowledge of Use of Force and security procedures and should include a representative from law enforcement and/or an attorney and the Director of Security.

Checklist

- Implement written Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
- Make sure all written SOPs should first be reviewed and approved by legal counsel prior to implementing
- Check state, county, and local jurisdiction requirements for standards, training, and/or rules
- Identify what level of force may be used and by whom and document it in the SOP
- Identify what security tools are authorized for use
- Identify what procedures such as chokeholds, and tools such as personal equipment, are prohibited
- Identify what use of force training will be provided to what officers (if different)
- Train all security staff on the Standard Operating Procedures
- Provide security officers annual refresher training, and retrain them when the SOP has been revised
- Develop a Use of Force Review Board to review all use of force incidents