

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Patrol Rifle Program**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Law enforcement agencies continue to respond to critical incidents involving significant threats to first responders and the community. Some law enforcement agencies have adopted patrol rifle programs that allow their officers to carry various patrol rifles to proactively respond to these types of imminent threats. Some of these police departments have allowed officers to purchase individual rifles, while others have decided to purchase personal rifles for each officer. A few agencies have decided to not allow the deployment of patrol rifles for their field level first responders. The Cedar Hill Police Department should implement a comprehensive patrol rifle program. The research information includes journals, magazine articles, police department policies, quotes from expert sources, books, and internet sites. This paper examines the numerous advantages and disadvantages in implementing a comprehensive patrol rifle program for the police first responders to critical incidents, but the conclusion is to implement a comprehensive patrol rifle policy for the Cedar Hill Police Department.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement officers are continually confronted with violent threats while serving their communities. Public servants are expected to be the first responders to these types of high risk emergency calls. Communities and city managers expect first responders to be highly trained and dedicated professionals. Several police agencies throughout the nation have obtained some type of accreditation standards for their agencies that reinforces their abilities to engage in the best practices for progressive police departments. One of the most common accreditation programs utilized by several police agencies in Texas is The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). CALEA requires an agency to develop a comprehensive and well thought-out written directive for a program like the patrol rifle policy (“Law enforcement programs,” n.d.).

Another common accreditation program utilized by several Texas departments is the Texas Police Chief’s Association Foundation-Law Enforcement Agency Best Practices Recognition Program. This particular program allows Texas agencies to prove their compliance with over 164 Texas law enforcement best practices (“Law enforcement agencies,” n.d.). Every day, community heroes should be prepared to respond to these types of violent situations in a proactive manner. Arming police officers with some type of a patrol rifle, in to addition their standard duty weapon and shotgun, provides them the opportunity to respond to high risk incidents in a safe and efficient manner. Communities deserve a highly skilled, trained, and professional police department that has weapon capabilities to deter some types of violent crimes. Gaines (2008) stated that “It is imperative that officers be at the top of their game” (p. 2). This

statement is certainly true regarding community expectations for providing a proactive police response to violent incidents.

If a person watches the news or reads the newspapers in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, there are usually several reports of violent offenders utilizing high-powered rifles and body armor during the commission of violent crimes. A deadly force type of rifle assault incident occurred in McKinney, Texas on August 17, 2010 when “A gunman with an assault rifle was shot and killed...after opening fire at police headquarters” (Dallas Morning News, 2010, para. 1). Another violent incident involving a suspect with assault rifle occurred on March 24, 2007 in Dallas, Texas. A police officer was gunned down with an assault rifle after a high-speed chase. (The Dallas Morning News, 2007, para.1). According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) (2007), “criminals have been using military-style armament for years” (p. 70). These types of critical incidents are matters of serious concern for community leaders and citizens, who fully expect their police departments to respond to these types of challenging situations in a safe and proactive manner.

Even though most modern police departments provide shotguns as alternative weapons for patrol operations, rifles are still needed to confront these threats in a tactical manner. Another example of a violent encounter between the police and a criminal occurred in Chicago during 2005. A murder suspect shot the first responding officer, wounding him in his shoulder and arm. Even though the officer was shot, he continued to engage the suspect with his duty handgun. Gunfire was exchanged between the officer and the suspect. This incident continued until another officer arrived on the scene with a .223 carbine rifle. That officer’s initial rounds struck a barrier in

front of the suspect, distracting him from the area of the wounded officer. After the suspect ran from the cover of his vehicle, another officer, armed with a rifle, shot the suspect in the head. This round killed the suspect and prevented him from harming any others (Chudwin, 2005). This is an illustration of the significant importance of providing patrol rifles to all of first responding officers.

Police departments need to be capable of utilizing alternative weapons to effectively respond to constantly changing violent encounters with criminals. These alternatives should be in the form of a comprehensive written policy that is sound and well thought out. This research will focus on some of the types of patrol rifle programs that are currently utilized by other law enforcement agencies, specifically for the implementation of a patrol rifle program for the Cedar Hill Police Department that allows for the maximum available firepower on the streets at all times will be addressed. Current budgetary constraints do not allow for the purchase of additional rifles to equip all of the patrol officers with them, and the existing inventory of departmental rifles does not allow every officer to deploy a weapon while on patrol duty. The Cedar Hill Police Department should implement a comprehensive patrol rifle program. The implementation of this type of proactive program will provide Cedar Hill officers a tactical advantage during violent encounters with the deadly threats they face.

## **POSITION**

Significant threats exist today that require a tactical type of response to violent in-progress crimes. One particularly tragic incident that occurred in Oakland, California in 2009 is a perfect example of the violent threats that exist for patrol officers in this country. During this violent encounter between a disturbed individual and Oakland

police officers, the lives of four officers were lost. Scott (2009) stated, "Sometimes an officer can do everything right and still be a victim of ambush. But it is important that Oakland and other police departments take a look at these incidents and learn the lessons that they provide" (para. 3). Reports about these types of violent encounters between police officers and criminals are heard way too often. Police administrators need to have a viable response plan in place to respond to these types of critical incidents. The implementation of a patrol rifle program would accomplish this objective. Citizens deserve a highly trained police department with the right equipment to respond to these types of violent situations.

Another example of a current violent encounter between police officers and a violent individual occurred in Fresno, California in 2010. Burke and Cone (2010) stated, "The California man who authorities say killed a law officer and wounded two others in a gun fight at his mobile home was a paranoid private security guard who kept a gun collection" (para. 1). The report also stated, "eventually, the suspect" was found dead with six 30-round magazines for the rifle, three of them empty. He had three other rifles, a scope, and six handguns" (Burke & Cone, 2010, para. 1). This type of incident is a reminder of the constant threats that continually challenge law enforcement officers.

In most cities, the patrol officer is the first responder to these critical incidents. It seems that media exposure to various active shooter incidents occurring on school campuses is common. Unfortunately, most children have been exposed to some type of media coverage for a violent act on a school campus. This research discovered information about another tragedy that impacted the law enforcement community in Arizona in the annual Federal Bureau of Investigation 2008 summary of officers

feloniously killed (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009b, para. 2). Several law enforcement administrators read this annual review to stay in touch with the types of incidents where officers lose their lives in the line of duty. Some very valuable lessons from these types of annual summaries have been learned.

In Tucson, “An officer with the Tucson Police Department was shot and killed, and two deputy sheriffs with the Pima County Sheriff’s department were injured as a result of a felony traffic pursuit on June 1 in Tucson” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009a, para.1). The outcome of this violent encounter with a heavily armed criminal could have been different if the responding law enforcement officers had a patrol rifle. The availability of individual patrol rifles reduces the risk of harm for first responders to violent crimes. Their immediate availability to officers in the field also reduces the risk of harm to the members of community.

This research is not suggesting that traditional standard patrol-issued shotguns be removed from the patrol vehicles and replaced with rifles, but the benefits of having a patrol rifle are significant. Supporters advocate maintaining the shotguns in the cars in addition to some type of a .223 round semiautomatic rifle. This increased firepower immediately available to field level officers, in addition to their duty handgun, will allow for a better response to active shooter related incidents. Police departments should have a proactive response to these types of violent incidents and not simply respond in a reactive manner. The issuance of rifles to field officers increases their chances of a positive outcome while confronting violent offenders.

Increased ammunition capacity is one of the benefits of these types of weapons. Patrol rifles have more ammunition immediately available than shotguns. Santo (2008)

stated, “The patrol rifle also gives officers an increased ammunition capacity when compared to a shotgun. The shotgun has a limited magazine capacity and is more difficult to reload quickly” (para. 7). This weapon’s functionality is very important during critical incident encounters. For example, in the 1997 North Hollywood incident, the criminals obtained body armor, but “most soft body armor is not designed to stop rifle ammunition, so a rifle gives the responding officer a better tool to end an incident” (Santo, 2008, para. 9).

The increased capabilities of the patrol rifle compared to a shotgun or handgun reduce the risk to first responders. During some of these violent situations, multiple suspects are encountered by a single responding officer. An officer’s chances of survival during these life threatening incidents are greatly enhanced when they are equipped with a patrol rifle. Klein (2008) stated that The District of Columbia “police department’s decision to arm patrol officers with semiautomatic rifles is promoted by commanders as a way to stay ahead of criminals” (p. BO1). After September 11, 2001, the country in general is now aware of terrorism. Domestic related terrorism incidents are a real possibility in some cities. First responders need to be prepared for an appropriate response to these types of threats. The patrol rifle is an asset during these types of responses. Most cities do not have a full-time Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team on duty to respond to these types of violent encounters. This is another reason to ensure that patrol personnel are armed with some type of a rifle. Baker (2005) stated, “The change in patrol’s role has been motivated by many: the parents of the murdered school kids, the loved ones of the slain workers or church goers. No longer can patrol hold a scene down for the arrival of reinforcements” (p. 1).

The adoption of a patrol rifle also allows for the individual user to personally sight his weapon for improved accuracy and distance. This type of weapon functionality is very important to the individual user. In a research project conducted by Richard Fairburn in 2007, he found that doubling the distance from an adversary (10 feet opposed to 20 feet) greatly improved the odds of survival. He stated, "Since patrol rifles give us a dramatic advantage in distance, why not use it? I can easily imagine, even recommend, taking shots longer than 25 yards in an urban environment. For rural cops, the shots may be longer still" (Fairburn, 2007, para. 3). There are several police departments throughout the country that have recognized a need to implement a patrol rifle policy to increase the safety of their first responders. Their guidelines and written policies are usually similar to others.

A comprehensive patrol rifle deployment program will make the community a safer place to live and work. The numerous benefits of having field personnel equipped with a rifle will increase the safety of citizens and visitors to the community. The city of Cedar Hill also has a relatively new shopping mall. Regular meetings occur with the managers of this retail property to discuss tactical responses to any type of active shooter on the property. The managers are very aware of the potential for violent incidents at shopping malls in this country and fully expect first responders to be tactically prepared for initial response (J. Densmore, personal communication, July 9, 2009). This includes the immediate availability of a rifle. Several communities are faced with the challenges of keeping citizens safe from violent criminals. In DeKalb, Georgia, an incident occurred that reinforced the need for patrol rifles in police vehicles. Matteucci (2010) stated, "Gangs and drug traffickers have ditched their pistols for

assault rifles and other military-style firearms, leaving outgunned” (para. 1). This is another example of an immediate need for communities to provide rifles for their patrol personnel who have to deal with these types of significant threats to public safety. Another sobering reminder of a need to keep communities as safe as possible was illustrated by the annual report of officers killed in 2008. During this time period, “41 law enforcement officers were feloniously killed in the line of duty in 2008” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009b, para. 2).

Another way to make a community safer with this type of a program would be to educate community members about the importance of this policy to their personal safety. This would be accomplished with awareness programs, media outlets, and meetings with various community stakeholders. A primary goal would be to get the message out to potential criminals that patrol officers are armed with rifles to protect citizens. A department could also train with the local school district police department for a strategically balanced response to any active shooter type of incident on school property.

## **COUNTER POSITION**

The adoption of a patrol rifle program will increase the training requirements for the department during the implementation phase, as well as annually, as determined by their specific policies. The Cedar Hill policy proposal is recommending a 40-hour training class for every officer that is issued a rifle (Cedar Hill, Texas Police Department, 2010). There are similar policies utilized by other progressive departments that support this type of training requirement. The University of Texas at Austin Police

Department (UTPD) allows officers to carry either personally owned or department-issued patrol rifles after the officer demonstrates proficiency with the weapon during training. They are required to conduct training at least two times per year (UTPD, 2002).

Some of the costs associated with rifle training in police agencies includes: instructors, range safety personnel, the cost to utilize the range, transportation expenses, and paying the officers to attend the scheduled training times. Rifle training is expensive, and the expenses increase based upon the number of personnel in the department. The Cedar Hill Police Department would need to add an additional 30 patrol rifles to allow an individual weapon for every patrol officer. The estimated cost of an AR-15 .223 carbine rifle is \$1,000.00 for the law enforcement price from Rock River Arms. With conservative calculations, the department would need \$30,000 of available funding for this type of purchase. One viable option that is currently being considered by the department to offset these types of budgetary impacts is allowing officers to individually purchase a personal rifle for use on duty. A detailed comprehensive policy would regulate this type of a policy. This program would also require increased budgetary expenditures for ammunition, storage, and weapons maintenance. An article stated: "Rifle ammunition is expensive and ample supplies must be on hand" (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007, p. 86).

The on-hand supplies are essential to properly train and deploy the numerous rifles for field level personnel. Proper storage of these weapons is also costly. Some type of rifle rack will need to be purchased to store weapons in the current patrol armory location. The secure latching mounts, located inside every police patrol vehicle, would

also have to be purchased. The Cedar Hill Police Department has already invested in training weapons armorers who would maintain and service these rifles. There would also be increased expenditures for replacement parts as needed. The adoption of a rifle policy would also increase the civil liability for the police department. Law enforcement personnel are very cognizant of the daily exposure to liability associated with the profession. A Police Chief (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007) article stated: "It is felt by some that the issuance of rifles to patrol officers will increase the risk of civil liability for the department and the officers employing the rifles" (p. 75).

Some other concerns that might surface deal with the increased capacity of the ammunition for these types of rifles. Some people are naturally concerned that there would be a greater potential for friendly fire casualties based solely on the increased magazine capacities of the rifles. This seems to be a valid concern and will certainly be considered during the training and implementation phases of this program. These types of .223 rifles also have the capability of traveling greater distances than traditional weapons utilized by police departments. It has been found that "All ballistics can travel relatively long distances-buckshot for a quarter mile, a .40 caliber pistol for 6,800 feet, and a .223 caliber round up to 8,600 feet" (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007, p. 75).

Even though the implementation of a comprehensive patrol rifle program would increase the training requirements and associated costs for the department, the greater potential for a safer outcome certainly justifies this type of a policy. The increased budgetary expenditures for more ammunition, weapons storage, and rifle maintenance is a solid investment for a department. Bauldry (2003) made a profound statement

regarding increased expenditures. He stated, “ It will only take attending one police funeral to realize the additional costs and training is well worth it” (Bauldry, 2003, p. 5). The possibility of civil liability is constantly on the radar of most police agencies. This is just the way it usually is in society today. The possibility of increased exposure to legal actions is worth the investment. This research found supporting documentation for this particular opinion. Bauldry (2003) stated, “The failure to respond appropriately and within a reasonable time may subject police departments and their administrators to civil liability and negative criticism” (p. 55). However, in policing, it is usually difficult to gain total community approval for new practices that are implemented and cause organizational change.

This research discovered a publisher author who is a recognized authority on police patrol rifle programs. John Wills spent 33 years in law enforcement as a police officer and special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He is a published writer and speaker. Mr. Wills was contacted by email and asked questions pertaining to the topic of police patrol rifle policies (J. Wills, personal communication, March 5, 2010). When asked about the costs associated with implementing a patrol rifle program and if it was worthwhile, Willis replied, “what’s a life worth, of either your citizenry or your police officers?” He felt that the cost associated with this type of a program was certainly worth the expense.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research paper attempted to determine if there is a need to implement a patrol rifle program in most police departments. Significant threats exist today that require a tactical, proactive police response utilizing adequate weapons. The

immediate availability of a rifle to first responders significantly increases their safety and the safety of others. Patrol rifles provide several advantages to officers when they encounter violent criminals. They also have the ability to penetrate body armor if it is being worn by offenders during the commission of violent crimes. There are some situations where the first responding officer is faced with multiple heavily armed individuals. The patrol rifles are a tool to allow for a safer outcome and also provide a tactical advantage to first responders. The adoption of some type of a patrol rifle policy will make communities safer for residents and visitors. Several police departments have implemented these types of programs for their communities.

In Wisconsin, "Milwaukee police are trading shotguns for rifles in an effort to even the odds against criminals who Chief Edward Flynn said are increasingly likely to be toting their own assault-style rifles" (Spice, 2009, para. 1). This is another example of the need for these rifle programs. Most communities expect their police departments to be fully prepared for violent encounters. Stewart (2008) stated, "Patrol rifles considered as a viable tool for law enforcement agencies, is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the mindset of today's criminal element is becoming even more dangerous for law enforcement officers" (Stewart, 2008, Abstract). In Texas, "a gunman opened fire and is believed to have committed suicide on the University of Texas campus" (Garrett & Mulvaney, 2010, para. 1). This recent critical incident involving an armed suspect with a rifle is another example of the immediate need to implement a patrol rifle policy for first responders.

The Cedar Hill Police Department will utilize an action plan for the implementation of a patrol rifle policy. The proposed policy is in the attached

appendices. This research did not identify any type of compelling reasons to not proceed with the implementation of a patrol rifle policy. The counter positions noted issues associated with the adoption of this type of a program. However, numerous benefits of this type of a program outweigh the costs to implement and sustain the policy.

This position is very important to the law enforcement community. It provides strategic information to allow any police department to implement a comprehensive patrol rifle program. This type of a proactive rifle policy allows for a safer community. The skills and response capabilities for individual officers confronted with violent suspects is increased, and victims of violent in-progress crimes will have a greater potential for a positive outcome. The Cedar Hill Police Department should implement a comprehensive patrol rifle program that provides a rifle to every individual police officer.

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## APPENDIX

**Cedar Hill Police Department  
General Order**

## GO 105.00 RIFLE PURCHASE PROGRAM (TRP: 3.01.1, 3.03.1, 6.04.1)

## GO 105.01 PURPOSE

- A. The purpose of this directive is to provide officers strict guidelines for purchasing and carrying for duty use personally-owned semi-automatic assault rifles.
- B. The goal of the program is to provide officers the means to be better equipped to neutralize high risk situations that require superior firepower over both short and long distances.

## GO 105.02 POLICY

- A. Only those weapons, ammunition, and accessories approved by this directive may be used. (See Appendix I.) Failure to comply with the provisions of this directive may result in the loss of the privilege to participate in the program. (TRP 6.04.1)
- B. Due to the patrol rifle being a single user weapon system, sighted to one person, it may not be shared or utilized by any other officer, unless exigent circumstances dictate its use.

## GO 105.03 ELIGIBLE PERSONNEL

- A. Only officers who have achieved the Police Officer I status, and who have successfully completed a 24-hour basic patrol rifle course are qualified to purchase and carry their personal rifle.
- B. Department firearms qualifications are a scheduled event. Officers who fail to meet qualification requirements will not be allowed to carry department-owned or personally-owned rifles.

## GO 105.04 FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PURCHASE, REPAIR, AND MAINTENANCE

Except as provided in the section on "Limitations on Reimbursement" in AO 105.00 ASSET MANAGEMENT, any member who purchases a personal rifle shall be responsible for all costs associated with the purchase, maintenance, repair, or replacement of the rifle.

## GO 105.05 QUALIFICATIONS AND INSPECTIONS

- A. Each person carrying a personal rifle under this program shall qualify with the weapon at least once each year during the scheduled qualification period, as prescribed in GO 501.00 WEAPONS. (TRP 3.01.1)
- B. Qualifications will be scheduled by the department's firearms instructor.
- C. Any person failing a qualification will be given another opportunity to qualify during the scheduled department qualification period, but shall be prohibited from carrying the weapon until the person qualifies. If the person fails to qualify during the second attempt, the person shall be prohibited from carrying the weapon until the next scheduled qualification period.
- D. All rifles shall be inspected by the department's armorer during each qualification, as prescribed in GO 501.00 WEAPONS. (TRP 3.03.1)
- E. Personal rifles are also subject to inspections as provided in the section on "Personal Assets, Use of" in AO 105.00 ASSET MANAGEMENT.

## GO 105.06 MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

- A. The officer shall perform or cause to be performed all basic maintenance and function checks as recommended or required by the manufacturer and/or the department armorer.
- B. Only a certified department armorer or factory authorized repair center is permitted to repair or modify the rifle. All