

# Law Enforcement Equipment Basics

This series of publications is designed to help community members better understand how and why law enforcement officers do their jobs. For more resources on law enforcement operations, policies, equipment, and community involvement, visit [discoverpolicing.org](http://discoverpolicing.org) or [theiacp.org](http://theiacp.org).

Law enforcement is a unique job that entails using different equipment for different situations. Officers typically have a standard set of equipment issued to carry while on duty. While not all of the equipment law enforcement officers have is used every day, they must have access to it in the event specific situations arise. Agencies vary on the exact equipment issued to officers, but the following list is typical of what is used to protect officers and help them protect their communities.

## Standard Equipment



**Baton:** A baton may be used for breaking through glass or other potentially harmful materials, or to create a police barrier line. There are different types of batons, some expandable. The use of a baton as a

defensive tool is considered a use of force and may only be used within the guidelines of force as laid out by the law enforcement agency.



**Radio:** Officers rely on their in-car and portable radios for communication with communications personnel—to request backup, report on the status of a call, request more information while in the field—or communicate with other agencies and officers during a large-scale situation.

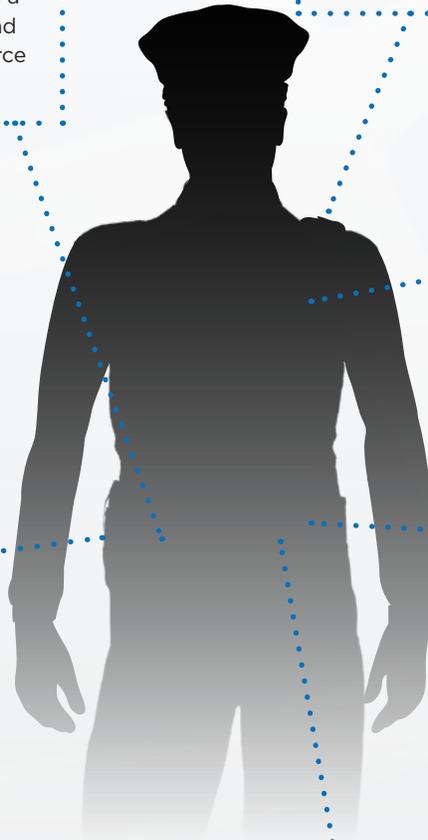


**Badge:** Law enforcement officers wear badges to identify themselves and their agencies. A badge may have an officer's identifying badge number and rank. The badge is a symbol of an officer's authority and of the oath to serve and protect which only sworn law enforcement take.



**Firearm:** Officers are required to maintain regular certification and training on firearm safety, safe maintenance, and storage of the firearm.

While on duty, officers are only permitted to use agency-authorized firearms and may be allowed to carry a back-up firearm. Officers may be required to carry their firearm while off-duty. While the typical firearm is a handgun of some kind, officers may also carry rifles or shotguns in their vehicles. These rifles come in various calibers to provide for a variety of operational capabilities. The use of firearms is strictly guided by an agency's policies.



### Electric Control Weapon ("Taser"):

Its use is considered a less-lethal use of force. It may

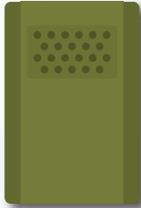
only be used in compliance with the agency's use of force policy. Such weapons can administer up to 50,000 volts of electricity. It is recommended that officers receive training on correct use, to include only one application of an electroshock weapon at a time, and on the health risks of repeat application.



**Handcuffs:** These are made of durable steel and used to restrain and control a person during an arrest or detention. Officers may carry more than one pair.



**Body Armor:** Body armor protects officers from bullets and other potential injuries during violent encounters. It is recommended that all officers wear protective armor while on duty or otherwise engaged in field activities, as body armor has saved thousands of lives. Soft body armor may be worn over or under the uniform shirt. Body armor carriers worn over the shirt often include pockets, which allow equipment to be stored on an officer's torso instead of on the duty belt, more evenly distributing the weight.



**Shield:** While not used daily, officers facing certain events—such as a potentially aggressive disturbance, riot, or barricade—may require the protection of a shield. Some agencies allow all officers to have access to a shield while on duty as a safety precaution, while in others they are issued to special tactical teams which are called out when a disturbance arises. Local agency policies will delineate who may use a shield, and when and where.



**Pepper Aerosol Restraint Spray (“Pepper Spray”):** Pepper Spray is considered a less-lethal use of force. It may only be used in compliance with the agency's use of force policy. This device provides officers with an additional tool to gain the compliance of resistant or aggressive individuals. Typical policies allow use when verbal dialogue has failed to gain compliance and when preceded by a verbal warning of use. Officers must complete training prior to carrying pepper spray. Officers should assure the suspect that symptoms are only temporary, but should make sure medical attention is provided to monitor symptoms as they arise.

## Use of Force

Many officers are trained in verbal de-escalation techniques, less-lethal weapons, and firearms to guide their decisions on which tool is most appropriate in a given situation. Agencies have strict guidelines for officers pertaining to the use of force. Generally, policies state that “officers shall use force only when no reasonably effective alternative appears to exist and shall use only the level of force which a reasonable prudent officer would use under the same or similar circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally,

“the ‘reasonableness’ of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. The question is whether the officers’ actions are ‘objectively reasonable’ in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them.”<sup>2</sup> Local agencies may share information about their policies on use of force and specific equipment regulations either publicly or by request.

### Endnotes

- 1 ASCIA, CALEA, FOP, FLEOA, IACP, HAPCOA, IADLEST, NAPO, NAWLEE, NOBLE, and NTOA, *National Consensus Policy on Use of Force*, October 2017, 2, [http://www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/pdfs/National\\_Consensus\\_Policy\\_On\\_Use\\_Of\\_Force.pdf](http://www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/documents/pdfs/National_Consensus_Policy_On_Use_Of_Force.pdf).
- 2 *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

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