

Terms and Definitions

3.02.01 PURPOSE

This order clarifies and standardizes the meanings of certain terms commonly used throughout the Department.

3.02.02 POLICY

The terms in this policy will be considered the controlling definition if a conflicting definition arises in other written directives adopted after this policy's effective date.

3.02.03 DEFINITIONS

Adult: Any person 18 years of age or older.

Barricaded Suspect Incident: A suspect, intent upon evading arrest, takes up a defensive position in a physical location that does not allow immediate police access, whether fortified or not, and is refusing or ignoring police orders to exit. The suspect may be armed with a gun, explosive, or weapon capable of harming others and presents a deadly hazard to arresting officers. For procedural details, see DGO 8.02, *Hostage and Barricaded Suspect*.

Bureau: A primary subdivision of the Department, usually commanded by a Deputy Chief or equivalent. A Bureau is primarily comprised of Divisions, stations, and Units.

Chain of Command: Hierarchy of authority.

Chain of Custody: A process that tracks the movement of evidence through its collection, safeguarding, and analysis lifecycle by documenting each person who handled the evidence, the date/time it was collected or transferred, and the purpose for any transfers. For procedural details, see DGO 6.02, *Physical Evidence and Scene Preservation*.

Charter: The Charter of the City and County of San Francisco that establishes the structure and operations of San Francisco Government.

Chief: The Chief of Police, or designee.

Child/Juvenile/Minor/Youth: Any person under the age of 18 years, unless otherwise specified by statute or law.

City and County: The City and County of San Francisco.

Commanding Officer: A member or non-sworn member, in charge of any Unit, Division, or station of the Department.

Command Post: A defined geographic location near a major incident, critical incident, or other event that is the centralized area of communication and decision-making for personnel and other agencies involved in the incident/event.

Command Staff: The leadership of the Department. The Command Staff consists of the Chief of Police, Assistant Chief(s), Deputy Chief(s), Commander(s), and may include non-sworn members as designated by the Chief of Police.

Commission: The San Francisco Police Commission.

Commissioned Officer: A member holding the rank of Lieutenant or higher.

Consensual Encounter: A consensual encounter occurs when a reasonable person would feel free to leave or to refuse to cooperate with the police, and no reasonable suspicion is required on the part of the officer. For procedural details, see DGO 5.03, *Investigative Detentions*.

Covered Incident: Any of the following (1) officer-involved shooting; (2) in-custody death; or (3) uses of force resulting in injury that requires admission to the hospital OR upon a SFPD supervisory evaluation, the use of force appears unreasonable and resulted in serious bodily injury ([Cal. Penal Code §243\(f\)\(4\)](#)). For procedural details, see DGO 8.11, *Investigation of Officer-Involved Shootings and Discharges* and DGO 8.12, *In-Custody Deaths*.

Critical Incident: Any incident with a life-threatening situation, a defined terrain objective, and requiring a coordinated tactical response. These incidents include but are not limited to active attackers, hostage subjects, barricaded subjects, or snipers. For procedural details, see DGO 8.01, *Major and Critical Incident Evaluation and Notification*.

Day: The twenty-four (24) hour period commencing at 0000 hours and ending at 2359 hours the same date.

Deadly Force: Any use of force that creates a substantial risk of causing death or serious bodily injury, including but not limited to the discharge of a firearm ([Cal. Penal Code §835a.\(e\)\(1\)](#)).

De-Escalation: The process of using strategies and techniques intended to decrease the intensity of the situation.

Department: The San Francisco Police Department.

Detention: A temporary restraint of a person's freedom by an officer through physical restraint, clear verbal commands, or authoritative conduct, making a reasonable person believe they are not free to leave.

District: A defined geographical area composed of patrol sectors and beats, commanded by a Captain or equivalent.

Division: A primary subdivision of a Bureau generally comprised of stations and/or Units.

Employee: Any full or part-time member or non-sworn member who receives wages from the City and County of San Francisco for duties performed for the Police Department.

Event Commander: The commanding officer of an event or incident, usually the commanding officer of the district of occurrence or, their designee.

Evidence: Testimony, writings, material objects, or other things collected to be offered to prove the existence or non-existence of a fact, in accordance with the California Evidence Code. Evidence can include, but is not limited to, physical evidence, digital evidence, exculpatory evidence, and direct evidence.

Exigency/Exigent Circumstances: A situation requiring swift action to prevent imminent danger to a person's life or safety, serious damage to property, imminent escape of a suspect, or imminent destruction or removal of evidence.

First Amendment Activity: All speech, associations and/or conduct protected by the First Amendment and/or California Constitution [Article I, Section 2 \(Freedom of Speech\)](#), and/or [Section 3 \(Right to Assemble and Petition the Government\)](#), including but not limited to expression, advocacy, association, or participation in expressive conduct to further any political or social opinion or religious belief.

Foot Beat: An area of foot patrol within a police district.

Imminent Threat of Death or Serious Bodily Injury: A threat of death or serious bodily injury is “imminent” when, based on the totality of the circumstances, a reasonable officer in the same situation would believe that a person has the present ability, opportunity, and apparent intent to immediately cause death or serious bodily injury to the peace officer or another person. An imminent harm is not merely a fear of future harm, no matter how great the fear and no matter how great the likelihood of the harm, but is one that, from appearances, must be instantly confronted and addressed ([Cal. Penal Code §835a.\(e\)\(2\)](#)). For procedural details, see DGO 5.01, *Use of Force Policy and Proper Control of a Person*.

In-Custody Death: Any death that occurs when a person is restrained by an on-duty member by means of (1) physical restraints and/or any use of force, as defined by SFPD policy; (2) detention or confinement in a SFPD vehicle; or (3) detention or confinement in a jail or detention facility while in the custody of a SFPD officer. For procedural details, see DGO 8.12, *In-Custody Deaths*.

Limited English Proficient (LEP): Individuals whose primary or preferred language is not English and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. For procedural details, see DGO 5.20, *Language Access Services*.

Major Incident: An event involving potential or actual injury, death, or property damage requiring an exceptional emergency response. This includes natural disasters and human-caused emergencies that require extensive response and commitment of resources to control or resolve.

May: Permissive.

Member: An employee, regardless of rank, who is a sworn peace officer of the Department, including reserve officers. The term ‘member’ can be used interchangeably with ‘officer’ or ‘sworn member’.

Non-Commissioned Officer: A member holding the rank of Police Officer, Assistant Inspector, Inspector, or Sergeant.

Non-Sworn Member: A full or part-time civilian employee of the Department, such as Police Services Aides (PSAs), 960’s/Prop F, Clerks, Executive Assistants, Analysts, Managers, Directors, and Executive Directors.

Officer-Involved Discharge: A member’s unintentional discharge of a firearm that does not cause injury or death to a person, OR a discharge that results in death or injury to themselves.

Shooting at, injuring, or killing animals also falls into this category. For procedural details, see DGO 8.11, *Investigation of Officer Involved Shootings and Discharges*.

Officer-Involved Shooting: A member's intentional discharge of a firearm with or without physical injury or death to another person, or an unintentional discharge that results in physical injury or death to another person. For procedural details, see DGO 8.11, *Investigation of Officer Involved Shootings and Discharges*.

Officer-in-Charge (OIC)/Platoon Commander: A member, usually a Lieutenant, serving as the highest-ranking member of a Unit or watch. OICs are typically in charge of administrative or investigative units; Platoon Commanders are typically in charge of crowd control and patrol units. This includes members working in acting assignments.

On-Duty: Scheduled paid work hours including details to events, conferences, seminars, meetings, training, "standby" pay status, and voluntary or mandatory overtime assignments.

Parent: Any adult who is legally responsible for the well-being, supervision, and care of a child. This individual is generally a biological or adoptive parent or guardian.

Person-in-Crisis: A person who is experiencing mental and/or emotional distress, including people suffering from the adverse effects of substance abuse, who is in need of assistance and/or poses a danger to the community or themselves.

Platoon: A group of members consisting of two to four squads, generally supervised by a Lieutenant.

Police Services Aide (PSA): A uniformed, non-sworn member who, under general supervision, performs a variety of police-related duties for the Department.

Policy: Overall plan, general goal, philosophy.

Post: A location to which a member is assigned.

Pressure: Continuous physical force exerted on or against a person or object by an opposing force in contact with that person or object.

Probable Cause: A set of specific and articulable facts that would lead a reasonable person to objectively believe and strongly suspect that a crime was committed by the person to be arrested. Under the Fourth Amendment, arrests must be supported by probable cause.

Procedure: A uniform process by which tasks are accomplished.

Protective Order: A court ordered injunction, regardless of form, content, length, layout, or type (i.e., stay away, restraining, criminal, civil, temporary, emergency order, gun violence restraining order), issued for the purpose of preventing interaction between a subject and a specific (“protected”) person(s).

Reasonable Force: Force that “from the perspective of a reasonable officer in the same situation, based on the totality of the circumstances known to or perceived by the officer at the time, rather than with the benefit of hindsight, and that the totality of the circumstances shall account for occasions when officers may be forced to make quick judgments about using force” ([Cal. Penal Code §835a](#)).

Reasonable Suspicion: A set of specific and articulable facts that would lead a reasonable person to believe that crime is, was, or is about to occur and the person under suspicion is reasonably connected to the crime. Reasonable suspicion cannot be based solely on a hunch or instinct.

Reserve Officer: A part-time member appointed by the Chief of Police ([Cal. Penal Code § 830.6](#)).

Sector: An area of responsibility within a police district.

Serious Bodily Injury: An impairment of physical condition, including but not limited to loss of consciousness, concussion, bone fracture, protracted loss or impairment of function of any bodily member or organ, a wound requiring extensive suturing, and serious disfigurement.

Shall/Will/Must: Mandatory.

Should: Recommended but not mandated.

Squad: A group of usually seven members, generally supervised by a Sergeant.

Superior Officer: A commissioned or non-commissioned member in charge of subordinates.

Supervisory Officer: A member, usually a sergeant, assigned to directly supervise subordinates.

Unit: A subdivision of section or a synonym for any organizational subdivision.

Watch: A tour of consecutive hours within a day or overlapping into another day.

Week: Seven (7) successive twenty-four (24) hour periods commencing at 0000 hours Sunday.

Written Directives: Includes General Orders, Manuals, Department Notices, Bureau Orders, Unit Orders, and guidelines that, once issued by the Policy Development Division, are official Department policy and procedure. Members are required to comply with applicable directives based on their assignment and responsibilities.