

OpTac International News Bulletin

Critical Elements of Tactical Team Policy

An overwhelming majority of SWAT team members would opt for training in skills such as tactical entries or firearms instead of writing/reviewing tactical team policy. However, tactical policy and skill training are equally important when attempting to increase the consistent likelihood of successful outcomes on SWAT operations. This edition of the **OpTac International News Bulletin** presents critical elements of tactical team policy.

A tactical team policy manual should contain the following pre-incident organizational conditions: a team's selection process, group development: command and team structure, frequency and type of training, and prescribed critical incident operational procedures. These conditions specify team organization, definitions, documentation/ reporting, standards (firearms qualification, fitness testing, etc.), selection of team members, training, officer safety, team activation/deployment procedures, search and arrest warrant service, tactical specialities (breaching, chemical munitions, low lethality, etc.), and equipment (procurement, issuance, and maintenance).

While tactical team policy should protect law enforcement agencies from increased liability, its primary purpose must be to improve team safety, preparation, and operational effectiveness. Such improvement occurs through functional pre-incident organizational conditions, which prepare tactical teams for their respective missions, and include prescribed critical incident operational procedures.

Prescribed critical incident operational procedures detail SWAT team activation and response to a target location, priorities and assignments upon arrival, team communication, selection and use of equipment, and Tactical Team Operating Directives (TTODs). TTODs are a combination of specific instructions and guidelines that can include any changes to the department deadly force policy, suspect and hostage descriptions, procedures to be followed if team members come in contact with suspect(s), hostage(s), members of the media, or hostile civilians unrelated to the incident, along with any other pertinent information.

Effective prescribed critical incident operational procedures allow team members to take decisive action if a window of opportunity is presented in a given situation. Consequently, tactical team policy that includes functional pre-incident organizational conditions plays an integral role in a team's operational success.