

Vehicle pursuits and the Safety of Society

Vehicle pursuits are dangerous as they place those involved in jeopardy, however the actual risks are only marginally higher than not pursuing, and they are vital to the apprehension of suspects and overall safety of society. Three specific claims used to support my stance on police pursuit policy include statistics showing that dangers in pursuits are not as high as currently believed, that training should be an investment as it heavily influences chases, and that there are more ways to limit liability than creating a “No pursuit” policy.

Many believe that vehicle pursuits are wildly dangerous and are responsible for several deaths each year. The truth is that studies have shown just the opposite. According to the California Highway Patrol, a nation leader in pursuit policy and handling, out of 683 vehicle pursuits studied, 198 ended in accidents causing 6 fatalities (1983). Recent studies of over 80 law enforcement agencies in Illinois showed that out of 875 pursuits and 297 accidents, 14 fatalities were reported (1994). These statistics assert that while fatalities do occur as a result of motor vehicle pursuits, they are dwarfed by other occurrences such as DUI and speed related accidents. Police driving training covers everything from “running code” (driving fast to a high priority emergency call with lights and sirens) to standard pursuit training. Even though recruits learn about pursuit theory and tactical driving, some agencies devote less than 14 hours to this training (US Department of Justice, 1997). Others, in the case of the Washington State Patrol, spend much more time on this, and have also recently instituted mandatory refresher courses relating to police driving—including pursuit techniques—at least bi-yearly (Washington State Patrol, 2006). These courses include vehicular force techniques (such as the famed PIT

Thesis and Claims

3

maneuver), inclement weather and crowded road condition driving, as well as training on the newest pursuit technologies. Training is the key to helping officers understand in-depth pursuit theory and practices which allow them to enter into and end vehicle pursuits quickly and

efficiently. An officer's state of mind is a strong tool in resolving pursuit situations safely.

Besides instituting a "No pursuit" policy, there are many solutions to helping lower liability from pursuit related incidents. Many agencies, such as the Dallas, Texas Police Department, have relied on a partial pursuit policy, allowing officers to chase suspects committing violent crimes (Associated Press, 2007). New technology has also helped improve liability dramatically in the pursuit scenario: Stop Sticks® have replaced the older tire chains, and are small tubes of plastic with spikes inside, thrown under the passing vehicle by a stationary officer. These devices slowly deflate the tire helping the pursued vehicle to slow before stopping (StopTech, 2007). Air surveillance helps track suspect vehicles allowing police cruisers to slow and allow suspects to feel they have gotten away, encouraging them to slow down to avoid drawing more attention.

References

Petrocelli, Joseph (March, 2007). Are motor vehicle pursuits dangerous? Officer.com/Cygnus Business Media. Retrieved March 20, 2007, from web site <http://www.officer.com/article/article.jsp?siteSection=19&id=35345>.

Associated Press (April, 2007). Dallas Police Chief Defend Chase Policy Officer.com/Cygnus Business Media. Retrieved April 13, 2007, from web site <http://www.officer.com/article/article.jsp?id=35710>.

Fakkema, F. (November, 2006). Washington State Patrol Biannual Driver Qualification _____ Program. The Police Chief, Vol. 73, No. 11. International Association of Chiefs of _____ Police.

StopTech, Ltd. (2007). Stop Stick Tire Deflation Device. Retrieved April 19, 2007, from _____ StopTech web site <http://www.stopstick.com/stopstick.html>.

Alpert, G. (1997). Police Pursuit: Policies and Training. NIJ Research in Brief, May 1997.

US

_____ Department of Justice.