Program Description

Subject Control: The Swarm Method — Each year a small number of people die suddenly while restrained, often while being taken into custody during a violent encounter. Factors such as fear, panic, exertion, exhaustion, medical problems, illicit drug use, and the restraint method of hogtying increase risk of custody death. This program examines the swarm method of subduing, securing, searching, and transporting subjects, including each officer’s role in controlling individuals and how the method reduces the risk of custody death.

This training program is for use by law enforcement agencies only.

Discussion Questions

- What is hogtying? What are the dangers associated with hogtying a subject? What other factors can increase the risk of sudden custody death?
- Describe the swarm method of subduing and securing a subject, including the role of each officer. Discuss the importance of giving the subject clear verbal commands. What type of hobble is used in the swarm method?
- Describe the swarm method procedures for searching and transporting the subject. Review department policies or state laws in relation to searches under these conditions.
- Why are medical evaluation and careful monitoring of a subject essential aspects of the swarm method? Review specific department policies that relate to providing medical assistance for individuals under similar conditions.

Lesson Plan

Performance Objectives

- Define positional restraint asphyxia.
- Recognize the relationship between hogtying, positional restraint asphyxia, and custody death syndrome.
- Recognize cocaine psychosis and agitated delirium as added factors involved in custody deaths.
- Learn about the swarm method of subduing, securing, searching, and transporting a subject.
• Understand the proper use of the hobble restraint.
• Identify each officer’s role in the swarm method procedure.
• Recognize the critical nature of obtaining medical back-up.
• Understand how the swarm method reduces the risk for custody death due to positional restraint asphyxia.

Materials

• Subject Control: The Swarm Method video

Procedures

Prior to viewing the program:

1. Preview the materials to be covered. To enhance the instructional value of this program for participants, the instructor or supervisor should preview it before using it in training. This ensures that the instructor or supervisor confirms the principles presented in the program, presenting them in such a way that trainees understand them properly.

2. Share performance objectives with participants. This will help them to identify the important points of instruction while viewing the program.

3. Administer an informal oral or written pretest. Whether trainees are viewing the program individually or in a group setting, it is important to determine participants’ current familiarity with the swarm method as well as with the less sophisticated restraint method of hogtying and its associated problem of positional restraint asphyxia. Ask questions or prepare a brief written pretest. Either approach will also stimulate thought and focus attention on the topic, providing a greater impact to the subsequent information.

After viewing the program:

4. Clarify information or vocabulary presented in the program as needed.

5. Review the discussion questions on page 1 of this guide.

6. Administer the Subject Control: The Swarm Method posttest. Participants may need a separate sheet of paper for answering the questions.

Vocabulary

agitated delirium

Definition: A syndrome characterized by a sudden onset of bizarre and violent behavior, generally accompanied by hyperactivity, combativeness, periods of seemingly superhuman strength, paranoid delusions, shouting, hallucinations or hyperthermia; sometimes referred to as excited delirium

Context: Possible underlying causes of agitated delirium include psychiatric disorders, drug abuse, alcohol withdrawal, and head injury.
cocaine psychosis

Definition: A condition that may occur during periods of cocaine intoxication or withdrawal—typified by transient paranoid ideation, persecutory trends, and perceptual disturbances

Context: Some in-custody deaths may be linked to cocaine psychosis or agitated delirium.

custody death syndrome

Definition: The phenomenon of sudden death that may strike subjects following violent struggles with law enforcement officers

Context: Custody death syndrome was first used to describe unexplained deaths when there was no apparent cause other than an arrest.

hogtying

Definition: A method for subduing individuals sometimes employed by officers in which the limbs of the subject are tied together, rendering him or her immobile

Context: Hogtying an individual can fatally interfere with that person’s breathing.

positional restraint asphyxia

Definition: A potentially life-threatening condition that occurs when the body’s position interferes with respiration

Context: Death from positional asphyxia most often occurs when an individual is placed in a prone position that does not permit adequate breathing.

hobble restraint

Definition: A retraining device that allows prisoners to be transported in vehicles in an upright, seated position but removes their ability to kick out doors and windows

Context: The RIPP hobble restraint provides officers with an essential tool for controlling subjects and will not cause undue discomfort by cutting into the subject’s legs.

Credit

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POSTTEST
Subject Control: The Swarm Method

1. What is positional restraint asphyxia?

2. How can the law enforcement practice of hogtying a subject result in positional restraint asphyxia?

3. How does using the swarm method help reduce risk of custody death due to positional restraint asphyxia?

4. What drug-related factors may be involved in a sudden custody death?

5. When using the swarm method, who is in charge of verbal communication? What are his or her objectives?

6. Why are medical backup and constant monitoring of the subject essential components of the swarm method?

7. How should officers seat and secure a hobbled subject in the passenger compartment of a squad car? Why?

8. In the swarm method, if a subject requires more than basic restraint, how should officers use body weight?

9. At what point during the restraint procedure should officers expect the most resistance from the subject? How should they respond?

10. Once an individual is ready for transport, what is the correct procedure for securing the hobble?
POSTTEST: ANSWER KEY

Subject Control: The Swarm Method

1. What is positional restraint asphyxia? (Positional restraint asphyxia is a potentially life-threatening condition that occurs when the body’s position interferes with respiration. Sudden in-custody deaths have been associated with this condition.)

2. How can the law enforcement practice of hogtying a subject result in positional restraint asphyxia? (In hogtying, the subject is face down, on his or her chest, handcuffed, with the legs restrained by a rope, belt, leg irons, or similar restraint. The restraint, in turn, is attached to the handcuffs in some fashion. Lying on the chest can interfere with breathing, resulting in potentially fatal positional restraint asphyxia.)

3. How does using the swarm method help reduce risk of custody death due to positional restraint asphyxia? (The takedown procedure that is used is designed not to interfere with the subject’s breathing. In addition the swarm method is designed to keep the subject seated in an upright position at all times so as not to restrict breathing.)

4. What drug-related factors may be involved in a sudden custody death? (Many sudden custody deaths have been linked to agitated delirium and cocaine psychosis.)

5. When using the swarm method, who is in charge of verbal communication? What are his or her objectives? (The point officer is in charge of verbal communication. The objectives are to launch the takedown procedure with a trigger word, to provide the subject with clearly voiced and comprehensible instructions and reassurance, and to demonstrate to any witnesses that the subject had every opportunity to cooperate and submit to the officer’s authority.)

6. Why are medical backup and constant monitoring of the subject essential components of the swarm method? (Subjects should receive the highest degree of medical care and monitoring possible for humanitarian and legal reasons. The subject may be subject to a drug-induced psychosis or delirium and require immediate medical treatment. In some cases a subject requiring this type of restraint is in need of psychiatric care. In either case, medical personnel are required to evaluate the subject’s condition, make recommendations, and transport the subject to a medical facility, if necessary.)

7. How should officers seat and secure a hobbled subject in the passenger compartment of a squad car? Why? (A hobbled subject should be in an upright position with seatbelt secured. This prevents subjects from lying on their stomachs or falling down in the passenger compartment and compressing their chests.)

8. In the swarm method, if a subject requires more than basic restraint, how should officers use body weight? (If more than basic restraint is needed, officers should kneel across the subject’s biceps and triceps. This will hold down the subject.)
9. At what point during the restraint procedure should officers expect the most resistance from the subject? How should they respond? (Once in the prone position but before being handcuffed or hobbled, the subject will offer the most resistance. Usually this lasts less than a minute. At this point, officers should avoid getting involved in a wrestling match and ease off while continuing to give the subject verbal commands and reassurances. This allows subjects to wear themselves out while the officers maintain a higher endurance level.)

10. Once an individual is ready for transport, what is the correct procedure for securing the hobble? (When the subject is inside the squad car with seatbelt secured, the officer should lay the free end of the hobble outside the lower frame of the passenger door, then close the door. Next the officer should pull the hobble tight, bring it around to and over the front door frame, get in, and close the door, thus securing the hobble.)