



Foot Pursuits

In recent years, police foot pursuits have come under increased scrutiny; law enforcement officials, special councils, and other observers argue that officers, suspects, and bystanders are exposed to a heightened potential for harm when in foot pursuit, a law enforcement tactic that has little to no policy to limit its occurrence.

A study, conducted by researchers at the University of South Carolina and published in *Police Chief Magazine*, analyzed the occurrence of injury to officers and suspects during 267 Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) foot pursuits in an effort to understand the dynamics of foot pursuits and the associated injuries, to document the occurrences, and to examine the need for foot pursuit policies among police departments. Items of note from the study include:

- The majority of foot pursuits (82 percent) involved chases on foot without the use of a police vehicle.
- The number of deputies involved ranged from one to nine, though nearly half (48 percent) involved only two deputies. The number of suspects ranged from one to three, but the vast majority involved a lone suspect (96 percent).
- On average, suspects were younger than deputies (26.7 and 35.7 years old, respectively).
- Suspects were believed to be impaired by drugs, alcohol, or mental illness in 41 percent of pursuits.
- A majority of the foot pursuits analyzed involved suspects with a criminal history (72 percent); suspects were charged with a violent felony in one quarter of the cases.
- Deputies were assaulted by suspects in 42 percent of pursuits; deputies used "soft-hand" techniques in 72 percent of the cases, followed by "hard-hand" tactics: punching/kicking (38 percent), impact weapons (25 percent), pepper spray (18 percent), conducted energy devices (CEDs) (25 percent), and canines (9.4 percent).
- Deputies sustained injuries in 17 percent of pursuits; suspects were injured in 60 percent of pursuits. Deputy injuries were severe in 6 percent of pursuits, while suspects sustained severe injuries in 20 percent of pursuits.

As expected, the study concluded that deputies were substantially more likely to sustain injuries when hard-hand tactics were used to stop an assault or when the suspects were under the influence; however, researchers were surprised to find that suspects were more likely to sustain serious injury when deputies deployed CEDs during foot pursuits, but hypothesized that these injuries were most likely due to the suspect being "tased" while in forward motion.

As part of an ongoing effort to control losses and reduce injury to officers, suspects, and bystanders, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) recommends police departments devise a system to collect and analyze data on foot pursuits and related outcomes, develop a foot pursuit policy, and adopt safer foot pursuit tactics department-wide.

The IACP's model foot pursuit policy can be accessed at www.IACP.org; for questions or assistance with your department's policy, contact AMRRP's Eric Duthie or Mike Branham at 602-996-8810.