
408 – Special Operations Unit

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408.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

To establish guidelines for the structure, supervision and utilization of the Special Operations Unit. The Special Operations Unit (S.O.U.) will consist of the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (S.W.A.T.), the Hostage Negotiations Team (H.N.T.), the Tactical Dispatch Team (T.D.T.), the Technical Team, and the Explosive Ordinance Detail Unit.

408.2 POLICY

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office will maintain a highly trained, highly skilled and well-equipped Special Operations Unit to reduce the risk of injury or loss of life of citizens and members of this Sheriff's Office in response to critical incidents.

408.3 MISSION

To contain, control, and resolve a critical incident while minimizing the risk to bystanders and law enforcement as well as to the criminal suspect.

408.4 DEFINITIONS

- (a) **CRITICAL INCIDENT:** Critical Incidents are defined as those law enforcement situations that are characterized by significant or imminent criminal behavior, dangerous circumstances or threatening conditions created by the suspect(s) or other factors that exceed the capabilities of patrol deputies to resolve. Examples include, but are not limited to:
1. **HOSTAGE SITUATION:** The holding of any person(s) against their will by an armed or potentially armed suspect.
 2. **BARRICADE SITUATIONS:** The standoff created by an armed or potentially armed suspect in any location, whether fortified or not, who is refusing to comply with law enforcement demands for surrender.
 3. **SNIPER SITUATIONS:** The firing upon citizens and/or Deputies by an armed suspect, whether stationary or not.

4. **HIGH RISK APPREHENSIONS:** The arrest or apprehension of armed or potentially armed suspect(s) where there is a potential for armed resistance.
 5. **HIGH RISK WARRANT SERVICE:** The service of search or arrest warrants where there is a potential of armed resistance or other factors that demonstrate a need for S.W.A.T. assistance.
 6. **CROWD CONTROL:** The deployment of the S.W.A.T. team to assist or augment the Tactical Team for purposes of crowd/protester(s) control, multiple arrests, area containment, riots and special event management.
 7. **SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT:** Any assignment, incident, or emergency situation approved by the S.O.U. Commander or higher authority, which exceeds the capability and/or capacity of the agency's first responders or investigative units, based upon a high level of threat, the need for specialized equipment or skill, or rapid deployment capabilities.
- (b) **SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMANDER:** A Lieutenant charged with overall management responsibility of all of the teams that fall under the Special Operations Unit. The Special Operations Commander reports directly to the Patrol Bureau Captain.
- (c) **S.W.A.T. TEAM:** The Special Weapons and Tactics Team.
1. **S.W.A.T. TEAM LEADER:** A Sergeant charged with overall supervisory responsibility of the S.W.A.T. Team. The S.W.A.T. Team Sergeant reports directly to the Special Operations Commander.
 2. **S.W.A.T. TEAM SCOUT:** A member charged with the immediate supervision of a unit during training or any operation. The S.W.A.T. Team Scout reports directly to the S.W.A.T. Team Leader.
 3. **S.W.A.T. TEAM MEMBER:** A member who performs a team function as a member of a sniper team, entry/apprehension/rescue team, or containment team.
 4. **SPECIAL WEAPON:** Any weapon issued by the Office to a S.W.A.T. Team member for use during their official duties on the S.W.A.T. Team. Sheriff's Office issued duty weapons (handguns) are not considered special weapons for the purpose of this policy.
- (d) **H.N.T.:** The Hostage Negotiation Team.
1. **H.N.T. SERGEANT:** A Sergeant charged with overall supervisory responsibility of the H.N.T. Team. The H.N.T. Sergeant reports directly to the Special Operations Commander.
 2. **H.N.T. TEAM LEADER:** A member charged with the immediate supervision of a unit during training or any operation. The H.N.T. Team Leader reports directly to the H.N.T. Team Sergeant. In the absence of the H.N.T. Sergeant, a H.N.T. Team Leader will assume the role of the H.N.T. Sergeant.
 3. **NEGOTIATOR:** A member who negotiates with a barricaded or recalcitrant subject, or who assists in the negotiation process.
- (e) **TACTICAL SUPPORT UNIT:** The Tactical Support Unit consists of the Technical Team and Tactical Dispatch Team.
1. **TECHNICAL TEAM LEADER:** A Sergeant charged with the supervision of the Technical Team and Tactical Dispatchers. The Technical Team Leader reports to the Special Operations Commander.

2. **TECHNICAL TEAM MEMBER:** A member who provides technical assistance to the different teams of the Special Operations Unit.
 3. **TACTICAL DISPATCHERS:** A member who performs a team function at the Command Post. Tactical Dispatchers report to the Technical Team Leader for training, equipment and support. During an operation, Tactical Dispatchers may be assigned directly to a variety of roles in and around the Command Post. Dispatch Supervisors may be part of the Tactical Dispatch Team and assigned a Team Leader function under the Technical Team Leader.
 4. **TACTICAL MEDIC:** A person certified as a paramedic or an Advance Life Support Emergency Medical Technician who provides medical assistance, when necessary, at a critical incident. The Tactical Medic is supervised by a S.W.A.T. Team Leader
- (f) **INCIDENT COMMAND STRUCTURE:** The command structure for each special operations unit shall be as follows.
1. **INCIDENT COMMANDER (IC):** Highest ranking Sheriff's Office member, normally a Lieutenant or above, responsible for the overall operation, to include all tactical, field and support resources committed to the incident site. The IC will manage and conduct operations from the Incident Command Post. The IC assumes overall responsibility for the incident once on scene and provides the authority for all operational efforts necessary to resolve the incident. Depending on the size and scope of the operation, the IC may also assume the role of the Tactical Commander.
 2. **TACTICAL COMMANDER (TC):** A Sheriff's Lieutenant assigned to the Tactical Operations Center. When available, the S.O.U. Commander will normally assume this role. The TC is responsible for the oversight of tactical planning and execution of authorized courses of action that are put into effect to resolve an incident. The TC controls tactical units, negotiators, and any other units directly committed to the objective sight. The TC coordinates tactical operations at the objective site with the IC on a continual basis through the entire operation.
 3. **TACTICAL SERGEANT (Ops):** S.W.A.T. Team Leader assigned to the Tactical Operations Center. The Tactical Sergeant reports directly to the Tactical Commander. The Tactical Sergeant is responsible for the overall supervision of the tactical aspects of the operation. The Tactical Sergeant is responsible for deploying S.W.A.T. Team resources and providing the Tactical Commander with tactical options. Once authorized courses of action are established, the Tactical Sergeant is responsible for executing those authorized courses of action. The Tactical Sergeant is responsible for keeping the Tactical Commander advised of the progress of the Tactical Operations.
 4. **NEGOTIATIONS SERGEANT (Intel):** A H.N.T. Sergeant assigned to the Tactical Operations Center. The Negotiations Sergeant reports directly to the Tactical Commander. The Negotiations Sergeant is responsible for the overall supervision of the negotiations aspects of the operation (i.e. H.N.T. Team). The Negotiations Sergeant is responsible for ensuring equipment requested by the Tactical Sergeant (throw phone, passive overhear devices, etc) is available upon request. The Negotiations Sergeant is responsible for keeping the Tactical Commander advised of the progress of the negotiations and any gathered intelligence.
 5. **TACTICAL SUPPORT SERGEANT (Logistics):** The Technical Team Sergeant is assigned to the TOC. The Technical Team Sergeant reports directly to the Tactical Commander. The sergeant is responsible for the overall supervision of the Tactical

Dispatchers and Technical Team. The sergeant is responsible for equipment needs of the Special Operations Unit and any outside resources requested by the Tactical Commander.

6. **INCIDENT COMMAND POST (ICP):** The on-scene command post from which the Incident Commander functions. The ICP provides operational control over the entire incident, including the Tactical Operations Center. Depending on the size of the incident, the ICP may be established separately or in the immediate vicinity of the Tactical Operations Center.
7. **TACTICAL OPERATIONS CENTER (TOC):** The on-scene command post from which the Tactical Commander and/or first supervisor on-scene functions. The TOC provides operational control, from the inner perimeter forward, over teams directly committed to tactical actions or negotiations. The TOC is generally established at the outside edge of the inner perimeter.

408.5 PROCEDURES FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNITS

408.51 ACTIVATION OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIT

The Special Operations Commander or his designee shall notify the Patrol Captain of any activation of the Special Operations Unit, S.W.A.T. or Sniper Team.

- (a) **Emergency Situations:** A Watch Commander can activate the Special Operations Unit for a critical incident. If time permits, a call will be placed to the Special Operations Unit Commander or his designee prior to activation. The process of activation for urgent matters will be through the S.W.A.T. Team "Call-Out Procedure" established in Dispatch.
- (b) **Planned Event:** Requests for use of the S.W.A.T. Team for planned events can be made by any Sheriff's Supervisor, manager or outside agency through the Special Operations Commander or S.W.A.T. Team Leader. A threat assessment checklist should be completed prior to initiating a tactical action to determine the appropriate response and resources necessary, including the use of SWAT.
- (c) **Critical Incident:** These incidents shall be handled in a manner consistent with Sheriff's Office policies, utilizing a team approach employing techniques appropriate for the known circumstances and predicated on the experience, training, and resources of the team.
- (d) **Hostage Negotiations Team Call-out:** A Watch Commander can activate the Hostage Negotiations Team separate from the S.W.A.T. team or other S.O.U. groups, for emotionally disturbed or suicidal subjects who have not committed a crime and are not an immediate threat to others, or calls for service where the H.N.T. Team would be appropriate. The process for activation of H.N.T. will be through the Hostage Negotiations "Call-Out Procedure" established in Dispatch. The Special Operations Commander shall be notified of any H.N.T. activation.
- (e) **S.W.A.T. Snipers:** By Mutual Agreement, Sheriff's Office S.W.A.T. Team Snipers may be called out by the Watch Commander to assist the Santa Rosa Police Department with a critical incident that their department is handling. After receiving the request from the Santa Rosa Police Department, the Watch Commander should contact the Special Operations Commander, or in his absence, a S.W.A.T. Sergeant. If a S.W.A.T. Sergeant is not available, contact a S.W.A.T. team Leader as designated on the Dispatch S.W.A.T. call-out procedure.

408.52 MUTUAL AID REQUESTS

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office may respond to approved outside agency requests for S.O.U. for critical incidents. Outside Agency requests for S.O.U. shall be approved by the Special Operations Commander, or in his absence, the Watch Commander. The Watch Commander should consult with the S.W.A.T. Sergeant prior to activation of S.O.U. If the request is only for H.N.T., the Watch Commander should consult with the H.N.T. Sergeant prior to activation.

- (a) All out-of-county requests for S.O.U. shall be approved by the Patrol Captain, or his designee, prior to activation.
- (b) If S.O.U. responds to an outside agency's request to handle a critical incident in the outside agency's jurisdiction, S.O.U. will normally take over the entire event (perimeter, H.N.T., etc). A supervisory or command level member of the outside agency should remain in the S.O.U. command post as a liaison. Requests to integrate various S.O.U. teams with another agency's personnel will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- (c) Nothing in this policy is meant to prohibit or discourage S.O.U. personnel from responding to an in-progress emergency such as an Active Shooter where time does not permit waiting for an S.O.U. response.

408.53 INCIDENT COMMAND STRUCTURE DURING S.O.U. ACTIVATION

The following is meant to provide a structure for managing a critical incident that requires an S.O.U. response. It is understood that these are difficult situations, involve rapidly changing events, and members may have to assume roles outside their normal duties.

- (a) The first on-scene supervisor shall, as soon as practical, establish a TOC. The TOC should be located at the outer edge of the inner perimeter, in a location safe from possible suspect's fire.
- (b) The first on-scene supervisor is responsible for conducting operations at the incident site until relieved by the Tactical Commander, or higher ranking member. The first arriving S.W.A.T. Sergeant may assume the role of Tactical Commander until relieved by a Lieutenant, or higher ranking member.
- (c) If the S.O.U. Commander is available, he will normally assume the role of Tactical Commander. Otherwise, the on-call Sheriff's Lieutenant shall become the Tactical Commander.
- (d) Depending on the size, scope and duration of the operation, the roles of the Tactical Commander and Incident Commander may be combined. If the situation dictates, and there is only one Lieutenant on-scene, he may call in another Sheriff's Lieutenant (or higher ranking member) to become either the Tactical Commander or Incident Commander, depending on the member's experience in these situations.
- (e) If there is a separate Incident Commander, he shall establish an ICP. The ICP may be at a separate location or co-located near the TOC, depending on the size and complexity of the operation.
- (f) The IC may call in additional resources consistent with the Incident Command System, to assist with the overall operation.

408.54 USE OF FORCE

While the Incident Commander may exercise specific rules of engagement, in all cases they will comply with the Sheriff's Office Use of Force and Firearms policies. In the event that no specific rules of engagement have been specified, members shall operate under the Sheriff's Office Use of Force and Firearms policies and do not need the Incident Commander's prior approval to do so.

408.55 OPERATIONAL ORDER

Operational orders shall be developed and implemented for all operations where prior notice allows sufficient time for the formation of an order. Operations orders shall be reviewed and approved by a S.W.A.T. Sergeant. Operational Orders shall be filed with the incident's After Action Report. A copy of the current Operations Order form shall be included in the S.W.A.T. team's Training File.

408.56 AFTER ACTION REPORT

Each operation shall have an After Action Report that will be approved and maintained by either the S.W.A.T. or the H.N.T. Team Sergeants, dependent on the respective call.

408.57 REPORT RETENTION PERIOD

With the exception of cases that are involved with civil or criminal litigation, After Action Reports shall be retained for five years. In January of each year, the S.W.A.T. or H.N.T. Sergeant shall review the After Action Reports and purge reports over five years old.

408.58 DEBRIEF

Upon completion of all operations and significant training events, the S.O.U. Commander, or his designee, will conduct an after action debrief with all team members present. The purpose for this review is to discuss the events of the overall tactical operation and create a forum for team members to offer constructive criticism to improve the effectiveness of the team.

408.6 S.W.A.T. SPECIAL WEAPONS STORAGE POLICY**408.61 ON-DUTY S.W.A.T. MEMBERS**

S.W.A.T. Members are encouraged to carry their assigned special weapon in their vehicle during their shift. These weapons shall be locked in the trunk, unless their vehicle has an electro-lock for the weapon, in which case it may be secured in the electro lock.

408.62 OFF-DUTY S.W.A.T. MEMBERS

(a) Special Weapons shall be stored in the S.W.A.T. Locker, except under the following conditions:

1. Assigned Vehicle: S.W.A.T. members with assigned vehicles may store their special weapons in the locked trunk or vehicle electro-lock if so equipped.
2. Member's residence: Members are discouraged from storing special weapons in/at their residences. A member may choose to store a special weapon in/at their residence if it is securely locked in a gun safe or similar secure, theft resistant device.

408.7 SELECTION AND PROFICIENCY STANDARDS

408.71 S.O.U. COMMANDER

The S.O.U. Commander shall be appointed by the Patrol Captain.

408.72 S.W.A.T. TEAM MINIMUM QUALIFICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

- (a) S.W.A.T. Team candidates must be a Deputy Sheriff II off probation at the time of appointment. The testing process will consist of an oral board, physical agility, and a weapons proficiency evaluation. Candidates who meet the standards of the S.W.A.T. testing process will be placed on an eligibility list.
- (b) Candidates are required to reside within one hour's driving time to the Main Office.
- (c) S.W.A.T. members shall be selected from the eligibility list by the Special Operations Unit Commander.
- (d) S.W.A.T. Sergeants shall be appointed by the Patrol Captain.

408.73 S.W.A.T. TEAM PROFICIENCY STANDARD

A S.W.A.T. Team member is required to respond to critical incidents that often require physical and mental conditioning above and beyond the normal expectations of a Deputy Sheriff. Therefore, S.W.A.T. Team members are expected to maintain a high degree of physical fitness and firearms proficiency.

- (a) S.W.A.T. team members are expected to meet the standards set forth in the S.W.A.T. Training File and earn at least a standard evaluation in all aspects of their employment. Members who fail to meet this performance standard may be dismissed from the team.
- (b) Physical agility and firearms testing will be conducted at least once per year.
- (c) Physical agility and firearms testing requirements shall be maintained in the S.W.A.T. Training File.
- (d) Members who are unable to pass the firearms proficiency exam shall be given four weeks to remediate. Failure to successfully pass the test after such time may be cause for dismissal from the team. Members who fail to pass the firearms proficiency exam may be used in an administrative role, but shall not be deployed tactically until they successfully pass the test.
- (e) Members who fail to pass the physical agility test due to poor conditioning shall be given four weeks to remediate. Failure to successfully pass the test after that time may be cause for dismissal from the team. Members who fail to pass the physical agility test may be used in an administrative role, but shall not be deployed tactically until they successfully pass the test.
- (f) Members who are unable to complete the physical agility test due to an industrial injury/illness:
 - 1. Members shall immediately notify their S.W.A.T. Sergeant of any industrial injury/illness that prevents members from completing the S.W.A.T. physical agility test and provide medical documentation in support. The S.W.A.T. Sergeant shall so notify the S.O.U. Commander as soon as practical.
 - 2. If a member has not been approved for Transitional Duty, he may not participate in call-outs and/or training.
 - 3. If a member has been approved for Transitional Duty, or cleared for "regular" duty, but restricted by their physician from completing the S.W.A.T. physical test,

- the S.O.U. Commander may place the member on an Inactive Status, depending on the severity of the injury/illness and the restrictions placed by a physician.
4. Inactive members may, consistent with the above-listed restrictions and Sheriff's Office policy, be used in administrative roles during call-outs or training.
 5. Once cleared for full, unrestricted duty (including the S.W.A.T. physical agility test), members will be given at least four weeks to complete the S.W.A.T. physical agility test. Members may be in an Inactive Status for up to one year if supported by a physician's note. At the conclusion of one year from date of injury/illness, members will be given four weeks to complete the S.W.A.T. physical agility test. Failure to complete the S.W.A.T. physical agility test after one year plus four weeks shall be cause to remove the member from the team.
 6. Members who are removed from the team under this section may apply for future team openings.
- (g) Members who are unable to complete the physical agility test due to a non-industrial injury/illness:
1. Members shall immediately notify their S.W.A.T. Sergeant of any non-industrial injury/illness that prevents members from completing the S.W.A.T. physical agility test, and provide medical documentation in support. The S.W.A.T. Sergeant shall so notify the S.O.U. Commander as soon as practical.
 2. If a member has not been approved for Transitional Duty, he may not participate in call-outs and/or training.
 3. If a member has been approved for Transitional Duty, or cleared for "regular" duty, but restricted by a physician from completing the S.W.A.T. physical agility test, the S.O.U. Commander may place the member on an Inactive Status depending on the severity of the injury/illness and restrictions placed by the physician.
 4. Inactive members may, consistent with the above restrictions and Sheriff's Office policy, be used in administrative roles during call-outs or training.
 5. Members shall be given six months from the date of injury/illness to successfully complete the S.W.A.T. physical agility test. The S.O.U. Commander may extend the recovery time an additional six months depending on the severity of the injury, prognosis for recovery, and needs of the Sheriff's Office (e.g., whether other S.W.A.T. members are injured). The total time from the date of the injury shall not exceed one year.
 6. Members who are removed from the team under this section may apply for future team openings.
- (h) Members who are removed from the S.W.A.T. Team pursuant to this policy may appeal the decision to the Law Enforcement Assistant Sheriff.

408.74 H.N.T. MINIMUM QUALIFICATION SELECTION PROCESS

- (a) Candidates must have a minimum of three years law enforcement experience and be off probation at the time of appointment to the team.
- (b) Candidates are required to reside within one hour's driving time to the Main Office.

- (c) Candidates shall participate in an interview and skills test consistent with the duties of a negotiator. Candidates who pass the testing process will be placed on a list.
- (d) H.N.T. Team members shall be selected by the Special Operations Commander.
- (e) H.N.T. Sergeants shall be selected by the Patrol Captain.
- (f) H.N.T. members who fail to maintain the standards of the H.N.T. may be dismissed from the team.

408.75 TACTICAL SUPPORT SELECTION PROCESS

- (a) Technical Team Members shall be selected by the S.O.U. Commander based on the recommendations from current Technical Team Members of the individual's technical skills and suitability for the position.
- (b) Tactical Dispatchers shall be selected by the S.O.U. Commander based on recommendations of the Technical Team Leader regarding the individual's skills and suitability for the position. The Technical Team Leader may conduct testing necessary to evaluate candidates.
- (c) Tactical Medics shall be selected by the S.O.U. Commander based on recommendations from the S.W.A.T. Sergeant(s) regarding the individual's skills and suitability for the position. S.W.A.T. Sergeant(s) may conduct testing necessary to evaluate the candidates.
- (d) Tactical Support Members or Tactical Medics who fail to maintain the standards of their unit may be dismissed from the team.

408.8 TEAM TRAINING FILES

S.W.A.T. and H.N.T. Sergeants shall maintain Team Training Files for their prospective team.

408.81 THE TEAM TRAINING FILE SHOULD INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING:

- (a) Locally identified specific missions the team is capable of performing
- (b) Team organization and function.
- (c) Personnel selection and retention criteria.
- (d) Training and required competencies (i.e. minimum monthly training standards, physical standards, shooting test standards, and yearly training plan);
- (e) Procedures for activation and deployment.
- (f) Command and control issues, including a clearly defined command structure.
- (g) Multi-agency response
- (h) Out-of-jurisdiction response
- (i) Specialized functions and supporting resources
- (j) Equipment and vehicles. (I.e. authorized uniform and equipment, required safety equipment, and equipment replacement schedule);

408.82 REVIEW

Team Sergeants shall review their manuals annually and update them as necessary to ensure they remain current with POST standards and best practices. As necessary, a self-critical analysis of completed operations may be conducted to ensure best practices are reviewed and maintained.

408.83 APPROVAL

The S.O.U. Commander shall approve the Team Training File and any changes thereto, prior to distribution to team members.

REVISION HISTORY

06/28/2006

04/17/2014

02/22/2016