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LVMPD Revised Use of Force Policy Just Weeks Prior to Mass Demonstrations

Just weeks before mass protests began sweeping the nation--prompting a national conversation about methods of policing--the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department made major updates to its policies dealing with de-escalation, positional asphyxia, and the duty for officers to intervene when another officer is using unnecessary or excessive force.

The issue of policing has come to the forefront following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis. Despite the Use of Force policy being posted on its website, recent events prompted the LVMPD to ensure as many Clark County residents as possible have access to information about its policing methods.

“We have worked very hard over the past eight years to build trust and have a department that reflects our community,” said Deputy Chief John McGrath. “But, sadly yesterday as I walked through a crowd of demonstrators, I realized that we need to do more to educate our citizens about our reforms efforts that we’ve worked so diligently on. The more point of views we have, the more we strengthen our community.”

The LVMPD is always undergoing small changes and clarifications in its Use of Force policy, but on May 15, 2020, it underwent a major overhaul. The updates were guided with input from the American Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP, academia, and published assessments on other police departments. Chief among the changes are:

- De-escalation and the Duty to Intervene were given more importance in the updated policy. The LVMPD was the first agency in the nation to create policies of this kind and have become a model for the rest of the nation.
  - De-escalation is a set of tactics and decision-making that officers can apply to diminish the likelihood of the severity of force.
The Duty to Intervene is when an officer observes another officer using force that is clearly beyond what is objectively reasonable. That officer has a duty to intercede to prevent the use of unreasonable force.

- Officers will not restrain subjects who are in custody and under control in a manner that compromises their ability to breathe. An officer is assigned to monitor the subject’s breathing and place them in a recovery position immediately. Furthermore, officers and supervisors formulate a tactical plan before arriving at the scene…”
- The policy outlines supervisory responsibilities for overseeing officers’ tactics.
- There is now a clearer Use of Force Model, which gives a clear indication of suspect action to officers’ reactions.
- New general rules on force options, such as “Officers will not use physical force solely to stop a person from swallowing a substance that is in their mouth or to retrieve evidence from a person’s mouth.”
- There is a completely new section that provides expectations on officer presence and verbal commands and the utilization and importance of communication skills, such as speaking calmly and showing empathy to diffuse conflict and reduce the need to use force.

The last time LVMPD’s Use of Force policy underwent a major revision was in 2012 under the U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office Collaborative Reform Model. The Department encourages the public to read through the policy. The newest version of the policy can be found at: