**A Use-of-Force Continuum for Dealing with Dogs**

**There are many options for pacifying a hostile canine, including—when necessary—deadly force.**

Some dog behavior experts and police use-of-force specialists recommend that law enforcement officers and agencies consider adopting a use-of-force continuum for dealing with hostile canines.

Officer safety concerns have been raised about this idea, but it's important to remember it's a continuum and not a scale. If an officer is in reasonable fear of serious bodily injury or death, then deadly force is warranted, even if no other force options have been employed.

**Officer Presence—**You are on the scene. This is what is upsetting the dog. One of the best ways to deal with this is get someone the dog knows, preferably the owner, to restrain or lock up the animal.

If the owner or another person known to the dog is not available, you may be able to gain the dog’s acceptance by softening your approach. Dog experts recommend you stop moving toward the dog, assume a bladed stance sideways to the dog, and avoid eye contact, while talking to him in a strong, reassuring tone. This may have a calming effect that will allow you to safely conduct your business and leave.

**Verbal Commands—**Dog expert and former officer Jim Osorio, founder of Texas-based police training company Canine Encounters, says speak to the dog throughout the interaction in a firm, conversational tone. "If you yell and scream at a dog, you are asking to be bit," he warns.

**Soft Technique—**Draw a weapon with your weak hand, but don't show it to the dog. Osorio who teaches this use-of-force continuum in his classes, recommends a closed expandable baton. He says to keep it closed, unless you need to escalate.

**Hard Technique—**Deploy the tool once the angry dog gets within 8 to 10 feet of you. It could be a baton, TASER, or OC. If you choose a TASER or OC, then canine behavior expert and author Brian Kilcommons recommends you not push the weapon toward the dog. Doing so may force the dog to bite the tool and perhaps your hand and arm. In one case in California, an officer tried to strike a dog with his duty gun. The dog bit the gun and the officer’s arm, and the officer shot the dog to death.

The baton is a different story, however, because it gives you distance and you want the dog to bite it. Dog trainers say sometimes even the most hostile dog is happy biting anything and may withdraw after doing so. Osorio recommends that you move the baton side to side in a swinging arc while standing still. "Whatever is moving is what the dog will bite," he says.

If the dog comes in closer, you may have to strike it with the baton. Osorio recommends that you give the dog orders like "Stop!" and "Get back!" in a firm voice as you strike. This lets people know that you are being attacked by the dog, in case you have to use deadly force.

**Deadly Force—**Sometimes you have no other option. And remember you do not have to use all of the other options in the continuum before you shoot, if it's objectively reasonable to do so.

Just be sure other officers and civilians are not in your line of fire. And if you are in a building, give serious consideration to what may be behind the walls and in other rooms, including children.

One thing that is apparent in many reports of police shooting dogs is that officers often lose sight of the risks of firing at a dog when other officers and civilians are in the area. POLICE could not find evidence that anyone has been killed as a direct result of an officer shooting at a dog, but there have been close calls. And people have been hit.

Very few police officers have been trained to shoot fast-moving, low-to-the-ground animals. So it’s not uncommon for officers to fire many rounds before hitting the dog.

And sometimes they lose fire discipline. In a well-documented 2011 case in Camden, N.J., officers responding to a street fight between teenagers were approached by a dog described as an 8-month-old pit bull. When the dog, which had darted out of the owner’s door, came toward them, the officers opened fire. It is reported that more than [**30 rounds**](http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Puppy-Killed-by-Camden-Police-120070079.html) were expended. Bullets hit cars in driveways and houses on the street. No one was injured. The dog was killed.

*Source*: by [David Griffith](https://plus.google.com/102448734444325469614) <http://www.policemag.com/channel/patrol/articles/2014/11/a-use-of-force-continuum-for-dealing-with-dogs.aspx>