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Getting Ready for the Real Thing

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Homeland Security and the FBI have been training their recruits on video simulators for years. Now, the same technology is available to deputies in Kanawha County. The video simulator at the Kanawha County Sheriff's Department is about testing the officers' judgment more than their marksmanship.

"We take it very seriously and we want the officers to have the best judgment and best training we can get," says Sheriff Mike Rutherford.

Officers stand in front of a large screen and move through different scenarios. In one of those scenarios, an officer is responding to a domestic dispute taking place at a local gym. He walks in with his video partner and sees a couple yelling with onlookers watching. The officer notices a gun in the man's back pocket.

That scenario can go a number of ways. The man can pull the gun, surrender, or pull out a wallet that looks like a gun at first glance. Another one places the officers behind the wheel and makes use of the counties driving simulator.

"We have it set up where the driving simulator that can do a pursuit or do a traffic stop or whatever we put in the machine. They'll step out of it and step into a life-size, full size screen that will actually shoot back at you if the case may be for that particular incident," says Sheriff Rutherford.

The simulator shoots what is called simunition. Those plastic pellets are about the size of a marble.

"When it shoots back at you, if you don't take cover and you get hit by the simunitions it can really leave a welt on you," explains the Sheriff.

No one was hit during Tuesday's demonstration, but some deputies have taken a marble or two the shoulder. Sheriff Rutherford says that's better than taking a bullet in real life.

"It's very, very effective and makes the officers take care and take care of themselves which is what we want them to do."

The simulator can train officers on a number of weapons including tasers, pepper spray, and firearms. Some training sessions in the area can last up to three hours.

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