

Simulation training tests officers' skills under pressure

Wednesday, June 17, 2009
11:31 PM PDT

By [Amy M.E. Fischer](#)

The shooting range is great place for police to improve their aim, but firing at a paper target won't help police make the split-second decision of whether or not to shoot someone in a real-life situation. That's where Advanced Interactive Systems PRISim comes in.



Longview Police Sgt. John Reeves fires his gun Wednesday at a video screen during a situational training program that tests officers' reaction to potentially lethal encounters. This video clip simulates a man pulling a rifle during a traffic stop. Bill Wagner / The Daily News

This week, Longview police officers and Cowlitz County sheriff's deputies shot at bad guys on a video screen using an interactive shooting simulator that fired small plastic balls back at them from below the screen. Newly hired officers use the simulator at the police academy, but after that, such training often is sporadic because it's dependant on funding.

The last time local police used the AIS PRISim was six years ago. The Washington Cities Insurance Association paid for the current training session.

"It keeps the officers sharp," said Longview Police Chief Alex Perez. "This is pre-emptive. This is what progressive police departments do. We don't wait for a problem; we're in front."

During each half-hour training session at the Longview Police Department, AIS law enforcement training manager Rick Oberlander tracked the number of shots officers fired, the percentage of shots that struck a gun-wielding bad guy, exactly where the shots landed and the officers' reaction speed to perceived threats.

The experience is intended to help officers deal with their fight-or-flight reflex when being shot at and learn from their mistakes, Oberlander said.

"Do you want your pilot to experience an emergency for the first time with you as a passenger?" Oberlander asked. "It can go bad really fast."

Armed with either a Glock model 22 .40 caliber or a M-4 carbine .223 caliber rifle, officers went through simulations of confronting several gunmen who'd taken over a school and were shooting from stairwells, classrooms and hallways, a man who pulls a rifle during a traffic stop

and a homeless woman brandishing a big knife.

"It's not like TV," said Longview police Sgt. Steve Rheume.

Oberlander coached each officer through the simulation, held in a large, dimly lit room upstairs at the police department. Afterward, he asked them to explain their trigger-pulling decisions and then critiqued their performance. He emphasized that in a situation involving a potential use of lethal force, officers needed to issue clear commands and identify themselves as law enforcement agents, which would help them if there were witnesses present and the shooting case went to court.

Shooting someone in the head once he's already sprawled on the ground is a no-no, Oberlander told an overzealous reporter who tried out the simulator Wednesday.

Sheriff's Deputy Ryan Plank, however, "did a heck of a job," Oberlander said.

When gunmen in the school opened fire on him in the training simulation, Plank transformed from mild-mannered Toutle school resource officer into professional sharp-shooter, shouting at the screen and rattling off cop-talk into his shoulder radio as plastic balls ricocheted around the room.

"I could feel my heart racing," he said afterward. "I just wanted to go. Go in, go, go go. ... I was so focused on getting to where I needed to go that I didn't feel anything as far as getting hit, especially when people sounded like they were getting harmed."

It was one of the best trainings he'd had this year, said Plank, 33, who's been a deputy for seven years.

"It's a nice, controlled environment, so I can gain the skills without making fatal mistakes," he said.

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