LOS ANGELES POLICE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS

REVIEW OF SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS TRAINING

Conducted by the

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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REVIEW OF SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS TRAINING

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in November 2024 and continuing through April 2025, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) undertook a limited-scope review of the training standards, training performance, and administrative recordkeeping practices of the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD or Department) Metropolitan Division "D Platoon," commonly known as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). Within the LAPD, SWAT fulfills a highly specialized role focused on resolving high-risk incidents that typically exceed the capabilities and resources of front-line patrol officers. These include, but are not limited to, hostage situations, armed barricaded suspects, high-risk warrant service, counter-terrorism operations, dignitary protection, and incidents involving suicidal individuals. What distinguishes SWAT from other LAPD units is its emphasis on tactical operations and strategic resolution over traditional patrol or investigative functions. The SWAT officers are specially selected, highly trained, and equipped with advanced tools and techniques to operate in high-stakes, dynamic environments. Their primary objective is to resolve critical incidents with the highest possible degree of safety for officers, suspects, and the public in the least confrontational manner possible.

Because of the breadth and complexity of SWAT's responsibilities, as well as the extensive and ongoing nature of its training requirements, the OIG plans to release several reports examining different aspects of SWAT. This first report is focused on SWAT training. Specifically, the OIG assessed SWAT training for three foundational elements that represent the core competencies of SWAT officers: a) Movement – which includes team tactics, room entry, coordinated maneuvering, and real-time decision making under pressure; b) Firearms – emphasizing advanced weapons handling, marksmanship, and use-of-force decision making; and, c) Crisis Negotiations – focused on de-escalation, communication techniques, and integration with tactical teams to achieve peaceful resolutions when feasible. This first report assessed not only the content and structure of training in these key areas but also the Department's adherence to established professional standards practices in documentation, accountability, and oversight. Future reports will examine SWAT's operational deployment and decision making, the SWAT employee selection process, and SWAT School.[1]

Findings and results from the OIG's review are as follows:

- SWAT's operational training is consistent and well structured, but limited administrative support affects SWAT's ability to evaluate and improve its training program.
- The SWAT Guidebook does not fully reflect current Department policies and procedures or current SWAT standards and practices; and it lacks a formal process for its regular review and revision.
- SWAT's training demonstrated clear and professional instruction, incorporated opportunities for feedback and discussion of lessons learned, and emphasized adherence to Department policies and procedures.

[1] The OIG conducted a limited review of SWAT and SWAT School previously in 2016. That report, titled "Investigation of the Los Angeles Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics Selection Process," was presented to, and adopted by, the Board of Police Commissioners (BOPC) on December 16, 2016. A copy of the report can be found here: https://www.oig.lacity.org/_files/ugd/b2dd23_7c69896fcf8840708dde47306f111ecc.pdf.

- SWAT's Crisis Negotiation Training emphasized communication and de-escalation and is a valuable resource for officers in patrol divisions and other field assignments.

The OIG has previously conducted reviews of SWAT, including a 2016 assessment of the SWAT selection process.[2]

The OIG's recommendations from the current review include:

1. Fill the SWAT administrative sergeant position to ensure that critical administrative responsibilities, such as training documentation, deployment logs, performance tracking, and compliance with Department and state reporting requirements, are managed with consistency, accuracy, and accountability, thereby enhancing the unit's overall effectiveness and freeing operational personnel to focus on readiness and deployment.

2. Establish a process for ongoing coordination between SWAT and Training Division to regularly review and discuss SWAT's training activities, share feedback and lessons learned, and work together to enhance the overall effectiveness of training. This collaboration should focus on strengthening individual and team performance and identifying opportunities to refine training content, methods, and standards.

3. Update the 2020 SWAT Guidebook to ensure alignment with current Department policies and procedures, as well as with SWAT's training standards and administrative practices. The revised Guidebook should establish clear requirements for training curriculum and mandate the regular review and updating of training materials to reflect current professional standards, Department policy, and applicable state and federal laws. The Guidebook should also clearly distinguish between Department policies and procedures.

II. BACKGROUND AND SWAT OVERVIEW

The LAPD's SWAT, housed within Metropolitan Division's "D Platoon," is a specialized tactical unit responsible for resolving high-risk incidents beyond the scope of front-line patrol officers. According to the Department, SWAT's operational philosophy emphasizes the preservation of life, strategic de-escalation, and resolution with minimal force. Key responsibilities include hostage rescue, responding to and resolving armed barricaded suspect tactical situations, high-risk search warrant service, suicidal subjects, and more. On average, SWAT responds to over 150 incidents per year, though they receive many more calls than that, including from patrol officers and supervisors across the Department, requesting their guidance or possible response.

SWAT is organized under a clearly defined command and operational structure that balances leadership oversight with field-level agility. The unit is led by two lieutenants (Lieutenant II) and supported by seven sergeants (Sergeant II), six of whom act as squad leaders overseeing each of the six tactical squads. The seventh sergeant would normally serve in an administrative

[2] Investigation of the Los Angeles Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics Selection Process, Office of the Inspector General, December 6, 2016. A copy of the report can be found here: https://www.oig.lacity.org/_files/ugd/b2dd23_7c69896fcf8840708dde47306f111ecc.pdf.

role; however, the administrative sergeant position was vacant at the time of the OIG's review. Each squad consists of two five-member elements each led by a Police Officer III+1 (PO III+1) element leader and comprising four POs III.[3] According to SWAT personnel, this configuration allows for flexibility, deployment of adequate resources, and specialization within each team.

A defining aspect of LAPD SWAT is its decentralized decision-making model. Tactical plans are often initiated at the element level, where on-the-ground decisions are made collaboratively between element leaders, squad leaders, lieutenants. Final tactical approval rests with the Incident Commander (IC), who is not typically within SWAT. Generally, the IC may be an Area captain, a bureau commanding officer, or sometimes an assistant chief. At the time of this report, SWAT maintained a total of 12 POs III+1 (element leaders) and 48 POs III (element members).

In addition to the squads and elements, SWAT enhances its operational versatility by maintaining specialty cadres, where select officers receive additional training and responsibilities. These include:

- Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT)
- Snipers/Advanced Precision Marksmen
- Climbing Cadre
- Explosive Breachers
- Tactical Waterborne
- EMTs/Tactical Emergency Medical Support (LAFD TEMS)
- Defensive Tactics
- Firearms Training
- Counter-Terrorism Cadre/Contaminated Environment Searches
- Small Unmanned Aerial System (sUAS)/Electronics Techs
- Heavy Equipment Operators

For off-hours standby staffing, SWAT maintains a continuous state of readiness to ensure rapid and comprehensive deployment capability, including both tactical response and critical support services such as mental health and medical assistance.

[3] The career progression within the LAPD begins with the entry-level position of Police Officer (PO) I, assigned to all new recruits at the Academy. Upon completing their probation, officers automatically advance to the PO II paygrade—note that this is a paygrade, not a rank. Some may further progress to PO III based on additional qualifications or duties. The term "promotion" is specifically used to describe the advancement from one Civil Service classification to another, such as moving from Police Officer to Detective or Sergeant, based on an eligible list formulated by the Personnel Department through a Civil Service examination. An "assignment to a higher paygrade" involves taking on a role with greater responsibilities or more expertise, without a change in Civil Service classification. Examples include advancing from a Police Officer II to a Police Officer III in roles such as a Field Training Officer (FTO). These assignments are generally the result of internal selection procedures within the LAPD.

The following personnel and resources are maintained on standby for 24/7 deployment:

- 1 lieutenant
- 2 sergeants (tactics)
- 16 tactical officers
- CNT (1 sergeant and 2 police officers)
- 2 TEMS medics
- 1 Behavioral Science Services (BSS) psychologist
- 1 detective
- SWAT Armory personnel

This comprehensive standby team ensures that the Department can respond effectively to a wide range of critical incidents at any time.

SWAT training is extensive, structured, and continuous. SWAT follows a monthly training cycle designed to maintain proficiency in perishable skills and reinforce the principles of safe, strategic decision making. Officers train in realistic, scenario-based environments that reflect the complex nature of modern tactical operations. One recent example of a four-week training cycle is as follows:

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Figure 1. Typical Four-Week SWAT Training Cycle

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Week 1	Firearms – Stress Courses	Firearms – Qualification Courses	Platoon Movement – Covert	Platoon Movement; Explosive Breaches	Platoon Movement – Opposing Force; Explosive Breaches
Week 2	Counter-Terror Cadre (Contaminated Environmental Searches)	Aerial Platform Snipers; General Fallback Platoon Movement	Lead Climbers Platoon Movement	Sniper – Range Qualifications Platoon Movement	Technology Cadre Platoon Movement
Week 3	Tactical Waterborne Platoon Movement	Tactical Waterborne; General Fallback Platoon Movement	CNT Platoon Movement	Explosive Breaches Platoon Movement	EMTs/TEMS Medics (with LAFD Paramedics) Platoon Movement
Week 4	Explosive Breaches Platoon Movement	Aerial Platform Snipers; General Fallback Platoon Movement	Technology Cadre Firearms – Fallback Qualifications	Snipers – Range Qualifications Platoon Movement	 Platoon Movement

III. OIG REVIEW METHODOLOGY

To conduct its limited-scope review of SWAT's training standards and practices, the OIG employed a multi-faceted methodology designed to provide both contextual understanding and detailed insight into SWAT's operations. As an initial step, the OIG met with SWAT personnel and leadership from the Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau (CTSOB), which oversees SWAT and the rest of Metropolitan Division. These meetings included a formal presentation outlining SWAT's organizational structure, operational philosophy, and deployment capabilities, as well as a guided tour of the Metropolitan Division and SWAT facilities, armory,

equipment, vehicle bay, and administrative offices. These engagements were critical in establishing foundational knowledge of the unit's internal systems, physical resources, and command hierarchy.

In addition to these meetings, OIG staff attended and observed seven SWAT training sessions. These sessions provided a firsthand view of how SWAT officers prepare for, conduct, and reflect on tactical training. The OIG personnel were present for the full progression of the training cycle, including pre-training briefings, live training exercises, and post-training debriefing sessions. These observations offered valuable insight into the unit's emphasis on communication, safety, tactical decision making, and professional standards.

To supplement these observations, the OIG also conducted a thorough review of LAPD's internal training standards and curriculum as they relate to SWAT, including expanded training outlines that detail the objectives, instructional content, and evaluation metrics used during both initial and ongoing training. The OIG compared these materials with training requirements and standards established by the California POST, to assess alignment with statewide benchmarks and identify any areas where LAPD practices may exceed, meet, or fall short of POST guidance.

This combination of interviews, direct observation, and document review allowed the OIG to evaluate not only whether training occurs, but also how effectively it is delivered, documented, and integrated into SWAT's broader operational philosophy. The OIG also assessed SWAT's administrative practices and oversight mechanisms pertaining to training compliance, preparedness, and accountability.

IV. STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKING ORGANIZATIONS FOR TACTICAL OFFICERS/UNITS

SWAT Guidebook

The OIG reviewed the most recent version of the SWAT Guidebook, dated 2020. Although not a formal policy manual, the Guidebook codifies SWAT's day-to-day operations, training, and administrative practices and is intended to align with Department objectives, policies, and procedures, as well as recognized standards from the broader law enforcement and tactical communities. It includes several operational components, with a dedicated section on training, which is the primary focus of this review.

According to the SWAT Guidebook, SWAT is expected to develop an annual training calendar organized around the Department's standard four-week Deployment Periods (DP), to ensure consistent training in core functions, tactical skills, and operational competencies. However, the OIG found that SWAT does not maintain a single, consolidated annual calendar. Instead, training is planned on a DP-by-DP basis. SWAT personnel explained that this approach offers greater flexibility and better accommodates the need to maintain constant operational readiness, including responding to spontaneous missions and deployments. They noted that developing an

annual training calendar can be impractical given the frequency with which it would require modification. According to SWAT, shorter planning intervals allow them to adapt to evolving needs and incorporate missed or postponed training into future cycles.

While the OIG acknowledges the challenges associated with long-term training planning in a dynamic operational environment, the absence of a broader framework may limit SWAT's ability to ensure comprehensive and balanced training across all required tactical and operational areas. If SWAT believes that shorter training cycles are more appropriate, the Guidebook should be updated to reflect current practice.

The SWAT Guidebook also outlines proficiency requirements for SWAT officers and specifies procedures for addressing failures to meet or maintain required standards. Section 119, titled "Failure to Maintain Competencies," states that officers who are unable to meet required competency levels will be removed from SWAT in accordance with Department procedures. For example, firearms training is conducted twice per DP to ensure ongoing proficiency. Officers who fail to meet the required standard receive immediate remediation. If they continue to fall short after remediation, they are restricted from deploying with the specific firearm until they achieve qualification. Continued failure results in the officer being designated non-deployable until they pass the qualification test.

According to the Department, while some officers have been removed from SWAT School for not meeting proficiency requirements, no officers have been removed from SWAT after graduating from SWAT School, for failing to maintain required competencies. The OIG observed that instructors regularly assess officers' performance during daily training through visual observation, feedback, and post-scenario debriefing. However, based on available documentation and discussions with SWAT personnel, the OIG found that individual officer performance is evaluated through established Department procedures, such as the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) process, and not through SWAT-specific procedures or documentation.

The Guidebook also addresses training methods used by SWAT. It requires that SWAT conduct reality-based, force-on-force training every DP but does not specify the exact structure or evaluation criteria for such training.[4] In practice, platoon movement and force-on-force training are conducted on a near-daily basis. SWAT also uses supplemental instructional materials outside the Guidebook and formal training sessions—including PowerPoint presentations and scenario-based modules—to support training in areas such as hostage rescue, high-risk warrant service, and general movement tactics. According to the Department, SWAT regularly discusses current case law and debriefs Department critical incidents, including those in which SWAT was not directly involved. The OIG noted that these types of discussions and debriefs, which are valuable teaching tools, are also referenced in the Guidebook.[5]

[4] SWAT Guidebook 2020, Section 117.13.

[5] SWAT Guidebook 2020, Section 100.11.

The Guidebook identifies the Department's specialized SWAT cadres and outlines the competencies and oversight responsibilities associated with each. It states that SWAT supervisors, who are cross trained in the various tactical disciplines within SWAT, are assigned to a specific cadre. These supervisors are responsible for overseeing training, maintaining records, and ensuring that cadre members achieve and maintain the required core competencies. SWAT personnel reported that all specialized cadres train regularly and maintain any necessary certifications or accreditations relevant to their functions. Additionally, SWAT provided the OIG with examples of training outlines completed following individual sessions, including those specific to specialized cadres. According to the information provided, certifications are also uploaded into the Department's training database.

State and National Tactical Officer Standards and Associations

There are three key organizations that play a significant role in establishing standards, providing training, and promoting best practices for tactical law enforcement operations in California: the California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (California POST), the California Association of Tactical Officers (CATO), and the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA). Each of these organizations contributes to shaping the foundational expectations for tactical units such as LAPD SWAT, both in terms of core competencies and evolving professional standards.

California POST[6]

California POST is the regulatory body responsible for setting minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement. It develops and maintains comprehensive guidelines for peace officer training, including topics specific to tactical operations such as high-risk warrant service, active shooter response, and crisis intervention. California POST's SWAT Guidelines (e.g., POST Guidelines 1084 and 1085) outline recommended practices for tactical operations, including selection processes, team composition, training frequency, and documentation protocols. California POST emphasizes not only tactical proficiency but also risk management, de-escalation, and accountability in high-risk operations.

LAPD SWAT submits their expanded training outline to California POST for approval.[7] According to the 2019 California POST SWAT Operational Guidelines, SWAT teams should participate in "monthly" documented training. Based on its review, the OIG found that LAPD SWAT training exceeds California POST minimum training requirements.[8]

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[6] California POST serves as the primary standard-setting authority for law enforcement training and certification in California. It establishes minimum selection, training, and professional development requirements for peace officers, dispatchers, and law enforcement agencies statewide.

[7] LAPD SWAT Basic Expanded Course Outline (1850-23000).

[8] California POST Operational Guidelines 2019, pages 24-26. The California POST guidance does not include a detailed breakdown of specific training content. Instead, it offers recommendations for broad training categories, leaving the development of specific training curricula to individual agencies. Additionally, California POST does not prescribe specific SWAT tactics in its guidelines. Rather, it allows each SWAT team the discretion to determine

California Association of Tactical Officers (CATO)

The CATO is a professional organization dedicated to improving tactical team performance through training, research, and the sharing of best practices. The CATO focuses on preparing tactical personnel for real-world challenges through annual conferences, leadership courses, and scenario-based training. It advocates for structured decision-making models, incident command integration, legal updates, and the responsible application of force. The CATO also publishes the *CATO Journal* and other resources to support continuous learning and the professional development of SWAT and tactical officers across California. The CATO does not produce a SWAT training guide or manual. During its review, the OIG engaged in discussions with LAPD SWAT leadership regarding their relationship with CATO. SWAT personnel reported that LAPD SWAT standards often serve as templates to inform CATO's training curriculum for tactical units and officers statewide. However, since CATO does not produce specific, codified standards that could be evaluated, the OIG was unable to substantiate this assertion through direct documentation.

National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA)

The NTOA operates at the national level and serves as a leading authority on tactical law enforcement practices. The NTOA provides training, certification programs, and standards for SWAT teams across the United States. Its *SWAT Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies* offer comprehensive guidance on team structure, training minimums, supervision, mission planning, operational risk assessment, and post-incident accountability. The NTOA places strong emphasis on de-escalation; mission planning; interoperability with other agencies; and maintaining detailed records of training, deployments, and team readiness. The NTOA also facilitates peer review and self-assessment tools to help agencies evaluate their tactical units against national benchmarks.

To maintain readiness, NTOA's Tactical Response and Operations Standard document[9] outlines minimum training hours and recommendations for tactical team members across various capability tiers. These recommendations apply to SWAT operators and those with specialty roles. The NTOA guidelines recommend an average of 8-16 hours per month for entry training. Since LAPD SWAT trains daily, it exceeds this national recommended standard. For specialized skills, the NTOA guidelines recommend an average of 8-16 hours per month. LAPD SWAT meets those requirements for specialized skills such as CNT, Sniper, and several others.

Together, these three organizations serve as foundational resources for law enforcement agencies seeking to maintain effective, accountable, and professional tactical teams. Their standards and training resources help ensure that tactical operations are conducted with consistency,

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which tactics are most appropriate for their operational needs, based on local policies, capabilities, and community expectations.

[9] NTOA Tactical Response and Operation Standard for Law Enforcement Agencies document, page 22 to 24.

transparency, and a commitment to the preservation of life. For oversight bodies like the OIG, these resources provide important reference points when evaluating SWAT programs for compliance, effectiveness, and alignment with professional standards.

V. LAPD SWAT TRAINING, DOCUMENTATION, AND EVAULATION

LAPD SWAT operates as a full-time tactical unit and conducts training daily, setting it apart from many other law enforcement agencies across California and the country where SWAT responsibilities are often part-time and training occurs only occasionally. According to LAPD SWAT's training schedule, daily training emphasizes movement and decision making using a scenario-based methodology that mirrors real-world operational challenges. The unit maintains a California POST-approved expanded SWAT training outline, which guides the instruction received by SWAT officers. The OIG examined this outline as a part of its review. With its daily training schedule, LAPD SWAT significantly exceeds the California POST recommended minimum of one training session per month.[10] All LAPD SWAT officers are trained in the foundational core competencies recognized by California POST to ensure they are aligned with statewide tactical standards.

SWAT maintains a rigorous and ongoing training regimen; however, the administrative responsibilities associated with preparing, documenting, and evaluating training largely fall to unit supervisors, with occasional support from element leaders. As a result, supervisors are responsible for planning and conducting training, maintaining records, and ensuring operational readiness, in addition to their other duties. At the time of the OIG's review, the administrative sergeant position within SWAT remained vacant. Based on discussions with personnel both within SWAT and elsewhere in the Department, this vacancy has been a recurring concern. Without it, SWAT lacks dedicated administrative support necessary to thoroughly document, track, and regularly evaluate training at both the unit and individual officer levels. However, SWAT personnel also noted that filling POs III+1 element leader positions remains a higher priority when vacancies arise, given the critical role these positions play in maintaining operational readiness and deployment capability.

Within the unit, officers may be assigned to specialized cadres—subgroups of officers with expertise in specific tactical disciplines. These cadres play a critical role in enhancing the team's overall capabilities, particularly given the demands of operating in a large, urban environment with diverse terrain and operational scenarios. SWAT officers who are not assigned to a cadre participate in daily movement training. Officers assigned to cadres typically train in their area of specialization once per week or once per month, depending on the discipline and operational needs. When not engaged in cadre-specific training, these officers also attend the team's daily movement sessions. As a result, participation in movement training can fluctuate based on cadre training schedules.

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[10] California POST Operational Guidelines 2005, Section 10.2.1, "SWAT teams should participate in documented and verifiable monthly training to maintain individual and team core competencies as determined by the type and extent of SWAT missions and operations performed."

To ensure cohesion and cross-functional readiness, all SWAT members—including cadre specialists—participate in a weekly team training known as a "core day," during which they all train together. This structure supports both individual specialization and team-wide tactical consistency.

As outlined above, the OIG observed SWAT training in three key areas: Movement, Firearms, and Crisis Negotiation. Detailed observations and findings related to each of these training components are provided in the sections below.

Platoon Movement Training

SWAT movement is a structured tactical technique designed for navigating and addressing threats in confined spaces such as buildings, vehicles, and dense urban environments. It requires coordinated team movements, rapid decision making, and precise execution to effectively manage situations while minimizing risk to officers and civilians.

The OIG requested and received documentation on LAPD SWAT movement tactics as it pertains to hostage rescue, movement, and warrant service.[11] The training materials document LAPD SWAT's concepts and principles for movement.

LAPD SWAT movement training materials incorporate cover and concealment strategies, the use of ballistic shields, less-lethal force options, de-escalation tactics, legal definitions, and controlled weapon handling to maintain situational awareness and operational effectiveness. These principles and training concepts support precision-based interventions in dynamic and high-risk environments. Additionally, LAPD SWAT training materials document movement techniques, such as room entry, searching, equipment, roles and responsibilities, and more. Movement emphasizes efficiency, adaptability, and strategic positioning. Officers are trained in entry techniques, room clearing, and target identification – to ensure safe and controlled operations. Clear communication and synchronization among team members are essential, as quick decision making can influence the outcome of an operation.

As a foundational element of SWAT, LAPD SWAT dedicates significant portion of training hours to movement tactics. The OIG observed five movement training sessions conducted by LAPD SWAT, each of which provided a detailed view of the unit's approach to tactical readiness and instruction. These sessions were consistently supervised by at least one SWAT lieutenant and several sergeants, ensuring that training remained aligned with Department policies and professional standards. The primary instructors during these sessions were POs III+1, who served as subject matter experts in SWAT tactics. POs III occasionally led training blocks under the guidance of POs III+1, which according to SWAT, fostered their professional development and prepared them for future leadership roles.

[11] Materials reviewed by the OIG included the 2020 SWAT Guidebook; the California POST Certified LAPD SWAT Basic Expanded Course Outline; and three SWAT-created PowerPoint presentations on movement, hostage rescue procedures, and high-risk warrant service.

In addition to their operational duties, POs III+1 handled critical administrative functions related to movement training, such as securing training facilities and procuring necessary equipment and materials. For each DP, a designated PO III+1 was responsible for developing the daily movement training curriculum, supported by other element leaders, element members, and supervisory personnel. Each day, the designated training lead sent a detailed e-mail to all SWAT members outlining the next day's training objectives, location, required equipment, and other logistical details.

SWAT's training observed by OIG personnel also emphasized knowledge sharing. Instructors regularly incorporated real-world lessons learned from other LAPD units and external SWAT teams into their movement training scenarios. Most training sessions were conducted at LAPD's Elysian Park facility. The facility included movable walls to simulate different internal layouts; an elevated catwalk for observation; and realistic furnishings, hallways, doors, and windows to replicate operational environments.

Each movement training session began with a briefing led by a PO III+1, covering the training objectives, followed by safety and medical briefings. The training scenarios themselves were designed to reinforce tactical decision making, coordination, and operational discipline. Once a scenario commenced, instructors refrained from intervening until the exercise concluded. Afterward, debriefings were held to evaluate performance and discuss key takeaways. On average, each scenario lasted 15 to 20 minutes, though this varied depending on the complexity of the exercise. Multiple scenarios were conducted in each session.

During the scenarios, SWAT teams moved through simulated environments such as homes or office spaces, advancing toward their objectives while applying core movement principles. Officers also utilized diversionary devices, such as flash-bang grenades and noise-making tools, to distract suspects and reduce the likelihood of detection when entering occupied rooms.

To enhance realism, some SWAT officers were assigned as role players, portraying suspects, victims, or bystanders. In these scenarios, Simunition firearms—specially modified weapons that fire paint rounds and are clearly marked with blue training bolts and magazines for easy identification—were used. In sessions without role players, live-fire exercises were conducted using real ammunition with paper targets. In such cases, an extensive safety and medical briefing preceded the training.

PO III+1 instructors, with occasional support from POs III, typically led post-scenario debriefings that lasted 10 to 20 minutes. Instructors maintained a constructive and professional tone and avoided harsh or demeaning language. They encouraged officers to reflect on their decision making, tactical choices, and areas for improvement. Officers actively engaged with one another to share insights and clarify tactical concepts. Element leaders guided the discussions and reinforced the key training objectives for the day. Instructors also emphasized risk mitigation and, in particular, the importance of avoiding overly aggressive tactics that could endanger hostages or bystanders. They consistently warned officers about the dangers of taking questionable or overly difficult shots that could lead to unintended harm. Rest breaks were regularly provided to allow officers time to hydrate and recover between exercises. Scenarios

were designed to replicate real-world crises. One common scenario involved a hostage-taker using a victim as a human shield—referred to as a "hostage overlay"—while making threats of imminent violence. Due to the complexity and severity of these situations, SWAT trains extensively for hostage overlay events. Other frequently practiced scenarios included active shooter incidents, armed barricaded suspects, and high-risk warrant service.

LAPD SWAT also conducted nighttime movement training to ensure officers were proficient in operating with Night Optical Devices (NODs), which are vital tools for low-light or no-light environments. In addition to NODs, SWAT officers trained while wearing gas masks, preparing them for situations involving chemical agents. SWAT also trained at least once per DP with Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) equipment to enhance their operational readiness for a range of hazardous conditions. Based on its observations, the OIG found LAPD SWAT's movement training to be well structured and comprehensive.

Following each training session, SWAT personnel completed a standardized training outline document. This outline captured key information about the training, including the names and serial numbers of instructors and supervisors, along with approximately 30 training categories. Relevant categories were checked to reflect the skills and topics covered during that day's session. A narrative section was included to describe the training objectives and summarize the scenario-based activities conducted. These documents were then archived as part of SWAT's training records. While the OIG found that SWAT consistently documented relevant information about each training session, the outlines generally lacked detail regarding lessons learned, challenges encountered, and opportunities for improvement. While the OIG acknowledges that training debriefs serve this function, incorporating additional input—particularly from SWAT supervisors and element leaders who frequently lead the training—could further strengthen the documentation and tracking of this information over time by providing a broader perspective and deeper analysis of individual officer and unit performance.

Platoon Firearms Training

LAPD SWAT conducts firearms training several times per DP. LAPD SWAT uses a combination of internal, private, and public ranges for firearms instruction. The OIG observed several firearms training sessions. One session focused on qualifying with all weapon systems, while the other incorporated tactical shooting exercises based on real-world scenarios. These scenarios included moving and shooting, engaging targets in and around vehicles, and competition-based shooting—each designed to enhance officer preparedness for operational environments. In addition to direct observation of the training sessions, the OIG also reviewed the documented qualification courses for all of LAPD SWAT's weapon systems.
SWAT officers assigned to the Firearms Cadre, led the firearms training. Qualified POs III also supported these sessions as assistant instructors. According to SWAT, the primary instructor role rotates each DP. Firearms instructors administered the qualification courses for all SWAT weapon systems. Sergeants attended each training to qualify and supervise; and typically, a

SWAT lieutenant was also present to provide an additional layer of oversight. Department-certified firearms instructors had approved all qualification courses, and SWAT maintained over a dozen certified instructors. The current course structure has been in place for approximately 30 years.

SWAT officers were required to qualify with four primary weapon systems: pistol, carbine, MP5, and shotgun.[12]

- The pistol qualification consisted of two separate 50-round courses of fire—one drawing from the holster and one starting from the low-ready position. These courses involved multiple distances, time constraints, and shooting sequences.
- The carbine qualification required 100 rounds and was conducted while officers wore a tactical vest, pistol, gloves, and carried three magazines. The course tested marksmanship, weapon manipulation, reloading efficiency, and movement across various distances and time constraints.
- The MP5 qualification, also a 100-round course, followed a similar format to the carbine course but differed in its specific sequences, round distribution, and time parameters.
- The shotgun qualification involved 20 rounds using a mix of rifle slug and buckshot ammunition, emphasizing proficiency at shorter distances.

In addition, SWAT officers had to qualify with all weapon systems while wearing a gas mask, simulating chemical-agent environments.

One of the firearms training the OIG observed was conducted at a designated area of a public shooting range. Following setup, officers assembled in the briefing area where a PO III+1 presented an overview of the day's training objectives. Another SWAT officer then conducted a safety briefing and outlined the medical plan. Approximately 30 officers participated in the training session. The training included close-distance rifle accuracy exercises. The training then transitioned to pistol handling, with an emphasis on grip control, sight alignment, vision management, and shooting speed.

The OIG observed that the training was facilitated in a highly professional and organized manner. Instructors demonstrated subject matter expertise and maintained a supportive, collaborative environment throughout the session. They were consistently attentive to participants' questions and concerns, offering clear explanations and constructive feedback when needed. Instructors emphasized safety at every stage of the training, beginning with a thorough safety briefing and continuing with reminders and supervision during live-fire and scenario-based exercises. They also reinforced adherence to Department policy and tactical principles, ensuring that training scenarios reflected not only operational realism but also alignment with

[12] A carbine is a shorter, lighter version of a full-sized rifle, designed for greater maneuverability while typically firing rifle-caliber ammunition like the 5.56×45mm NATO. It offers effective range, stopping power, and versatility for mid- to long-distance engagements. In contrast, the MP5, developed by Heckler & Koch, is a submachine gun that fires 9mm pistol-caliber rounds. It is optimized for close-quarters environments but is generally more expensive than a carbine.

LAPD's expectations for discipline, accountability, and risk mitigation. Overall, the instructional approach reflected a commitment to officer development, operational readiness, and the responsible application of tactical skills.

Platoon Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT) Training

The OIG observed LAPD SWAT's one-day CNT course, which included participants from the LAPD, other law enforcement agencies, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, and the United States (U.S.) Department of State. The training is California POST certified and consisted of a structured eight-hour program with a morning classroom session followed by scenario-based practical exercises in the afternoon.[13,14]

The course was supervised by an LAPD SWAT lieutenant and several sergeants. Primary instruction was delivered by SWAT sergeants and POs III+1. One instructor began the day with a historical overview of SWAT's CNT program, tracing its origins to the 1970s and reinforcing tactical de-escalation as a foundational principle.

A central topic of instruction was tactical de-escalation, a Department directive introduced in 2016 aimed at reducing the intensity of interactions with suspects and gaining voluntary compliance when feasible.[15] The accompanying PowerPoint presentation incorporated case studies, discussion prompts, and question and answer sessions to foster engagement. Instructors emphasized that most SWAT incidents are resolved without the use of force.

Following the discussion of de-escalation, the SWAT lieutenant delivered a focused lecture on tactical disengagement, which was presented as a specific form of de-escalation requiring careful planning to avoid exacerbating the situation.[16] The lieutenant underscored the high standard of justification required for SWAT to use force, given the unit's extensive training and advanced tactical tools. He shared Department statistics showing that over a ten-year period, SWAT used force in only 8 percent of approximately 1,500 total incidents and deadly force in just 1.5 percent of the 1,500 total incidents. In some incidents, SWAT may deploy only CNT personnel, calling in a tactical team only if circumstances escalate. Unlike in many departments where CNT operates as a separate unit, CNT is fully integrated within LAPD SWAT. To close out the morning classroom session, a PO III+1 instructor presented on the use of active listening in CNT operations. The instructor emphasized that every individual in crisis presents unique needs and challenges and that the ability to listen effectively is essential for successful resolution.

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[13] LAPD POST Certified Crisis Negotiation De-escalation 1-day course, Expanded Course Outline1850-49100.

[14] In addition to the one-day CNT course, SWAT also intermittently integrates CNT scenarios into its movement training days. Additionally, SWAT dedicates one full day per DP exclusively to CNT training. Currently, SWAT utilizes the one-day CNT course to meet that obligation.

[15] Use of Force-Tactics Directive No. 16, Tactical De-escalation Techniques, dated October 2016.

[16] Training Bulletin Volume XLVIII, Issue 5, Tactical Disengagement, dated July 2019.

In the afternoon, participants were divided into small groups and rotated through a series of role-played crisis negotiation scenarios. These included encounters involving barricaded suspects, suicidal individuals, domestic disputes, and welfare checks. Each scenario was designed to test the participant's ability to apply de-escalation strategies, manage stress, and maintain rapport using active listening techniques. Instructors served both as role players and facilitators, offering real-time guidance and feedback during the simulations.

Participants were challenged to navigate complex emotional dynamics and respond with empathy, patience, and composure. The scenarios incorporated key psychological principles and crisis intervention strategies, providing a strong foundation for understanding the behavior and mindset of individuals in crisis. Instruction also included guidance on strategic disengagement and civil liability considerations, ensuring participants recognized when de-escalation efforts may no longer be effective or appropriate.

At the end of each scenario, groups engaged in debriefing sessions led by instructors—often the same individuals who acted as role players. The tone of these discussions was constructive and supportive, with instructors facilitating participation and reinforcing key takeaways from both the scenario and the morning's lecture content. The day concluded with participants submitting evaluation forms to provide feedback on the course.

All LAPD SWAT officers are required to complete a 40-hour CNT course as part of their entry into SWAT school. The Department has developed a comprehensive, POST-certified CNT course outline that is mandatory for all SWAT personnel. A psychologist from the Department's Behavioral Science Services (BSS) assists in developing CNT training and regularly participates in training sessions in both instructional and observational roles.

The OIG observed that the CNT training was delivered in a highly professional, well-structured, and collaborative manner. Instructors demonstrated deep subject matter expertise in crisis negotiation and consistently fostered a learning environment that encouraged participation and engagement. They were attentive to participants' questions and concerns, offering thoughtful explanations and practical feedback throughout both the classroom and scenario-based portions of the course.

Although the training did not involve live-fire exercises, instructors maintained a strong emphasis on safety, professionalism, and adherence to Department policies and negotiation protocols. Scenario-based training exercises were thoughtfully designed to reflect realistic crisis situations while reinforcing core LAPD values—particularly de-escalation, accountability, and sound decision making under pressure.

The OIG found that the instructional approach emphasized officer development and emotional intelligence, equipping participants with the communication skills and critical thinking necessary to navigate complex and high-stakes interactions. The course reflected a clear commitment to preparation, professionalism, and the Department's broader goals of resolving incidents safely and effectively.

Platoon Training Documentation and Evaluation

The LAPD SWAT training activities are documented and tracked through daily training outlines and qualification score sheets. These outlines are stored at the SWAT office and are reviewed periodically by a supervisor. The outlines are used to monitor that the necessary skill sets are being trained and maintained in accordance with SWAT's internal standards. Officer performance is evaluated through the Department's routine employee evaluation procedures, such as the SBA process, as well as Physical Fitness Qualification scores, firearms qualification scores, Learning Management System transcripts, TEAMS II training records, and California POST training records. These evaluations are conducted in accordance with Department guidelines and provide a general assessment of employee performance.

VI. OIG REVIEW FINDINGS AND RESULTS

1. SWAT's operational training is consistent and well structured, but limited administrative support affects SWAT's ability to evaluate and improve its training program.

The LAPD SWAT maintains an intensive and well-organized training regimen that includes daily scenario-based exercises, frequently focused on tactical movement, firearms proficiency, and crisis negotiation. These sessions are developed and led by experienced officers with subject matter expertise and are regularly supervised by sergeants and lieutenants. Training scenarios emphasize communication, team coordination, and effective decision making, with an emphasis on compliance with Department policies and procedures. The OIG observed that training sessions were grounded in real-world applications and designed to reinforce officer readiness and discipline.

Despite this high level of operational preparedness, the OIG identified opportunities to strengthen the administrative infrastructure supporting SWAT's training program. Documentation and tracking of training activities are not consistently subject to formal supervisory review, and the absence of a standardized review process has contributed to variability in documentation practices. As a result, the Department may encounter challenges in assessing long-term training outcomes, monitoring individual officer development, and confirming compliance with training requirements.

At the time of the OIG's review, the administrative sergeant position within SWAT remained vacant. Interviews and documentation indicate that this position is intended to support a range of key administrative functions, including the coordination and management of training records, oversight of documentation, and support for planning and evaluation activities. The absence of this role places a significant administrative burden on supervisors and limits the Department's ability to conduct routine, data-informed assessments of SWAT's training program. Filling this position would likely improve recordkeeping, including promoting consistent documentation, as well as allow the operational sergeants the opportunity to focus more fully on training and operational readiness and deployment. Without dedicated administrative support, the

Department, and SWAT specifically, lacks a reliable mechanism to evaluate trends in officer performance, identify training gaps, or document changes in response to critical incidents or policy or procedural changes.

2. **The SWAT Guidebook does not fully reflect current Department policies or procedures, or current SWAT standards and practices; and it lacks a formal process for its regular review and revision.**

The SWAT Guidebook serves as SWAT's primary internal reference for operational protocols, training expectations, and administrative practices. While not a formal policy manual, the Guidebook is intended to align SWAT's day-to-day operations with Department policies and procedures and recognized tactical standards. However, the OIG found that the Guidebook does not fully reflect the Department's current operational realities or training practices. For example, it lacks specificity on the structure and evaluation of key training activities, including force-on-force and reality-based scenarios, which are core elements of SWAT's daily training. While the OIG noted that the SWAT Guidebook was not updated, the OIG also noted that SWAT has continued to receive and implement other Department rules and regulations, including administrative and operational notices from the Office of the Chief of Police, Office of Special Operations, Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau, and others. SWAT's standards and practices were consistent with these directives.

Also, the Guidebook does not include a defined process for its regular review and revision. As a result, there is no mechanism to ensure it remains current with evolving Department policies, legal standards, or tactical best practices. This increases the risk of outdated or incomplete guidance persisting, particularly in high-risk operational settings where clarity and standardization are critical. The lack of alignment between the Guidebook and actual training practices also complicates administrative review and impacts the ability to evaluate training content against Department expectations.

3. **SWAT's training demonstrated clear and professional instruction, incorporated opportunities for feedback and discussion of lessons learned, and emphasized adherence to Department policies and procedures.**

The OIG observed multiple SWAT training sessions across three primary domains: tactical movement, firearms, and crisis negotiation. Each session was led by experienced instructors who demonstrated professionalism, preparedness, and subject matter knowledge. Briefings and debriefings were conducted in an organized and collaborative manner, with officers encouraged to engage, ask questions, and reflect on tactical decisions.

During tactical movement training, the OIG observed structured scenario-based exercises that simulated real-life incidents such as hostage rescues, barricaded suspects, and high-risk warrant service. These scenarios were realistic, varied, and carefully designed to reinforce decision making under pressure. Instructors provided guidance without relying on punitive or critical language and emphasized safety and adherence to tactical principles.

Firearms training was conducted with similar rigor and attention to detail. Officers qualified on multiple weapon systems under realistic conditions, including movement drills and equipment constraints. Debriefs emphasized marksmanship and situational judgment. Across all training areas, instructors reinforced Department policies, particularly regarding tactical de-escalation and proportional use of force.

4. SWAT's Crisis Negotiation Training emphasized communication and de-escalation and is a valuable resource for officers in patrol divisions and other field assignments

The CNT training observed by the OIG was facilitated in a structured, professional environment and included participation from LAPD officers, other law enforcement agencies, the Department of Mental Health, and the U.S. Department of State. The curriculum emphasized communication, de-escalation, and emotional intelligence—core components of the Department's tactical philosophy.

The classroom curriculum covered tactical de-escalation strategies and the concept of strategic disengagement. Instruction highlighted the importance of resolving incidents without force whenever feasible. Lectures were supported by visual materials, case studies, and interactive discussion. In the scenario-based exercises, participants applied negotiation techniques to realistic crisis situations, and instructors guided participants through complex emotional dynamics and reinforced active listening, rapport-building, and strategic planning. Feedback was delivered constructively, and the training environment was consistently professional. The integration of BSS psychologists into both training and curriculum development further enhanced the interdisciplinary strength of the program.

VII. OIG RECOMMENDATIONS

The OIG recommends that the Board of Police Commissioners direct the Chief of Police to take the following actions:

1. Fill the SWAT administrative sergeant position to ensure that critical administrative responsibilities, such as training documentation, deployment logs, performance tracking, and compliance with Department and state reporting requirements, are managed with consistency, accuracy, and accountability, thereby enhancing the unit's overall effectiveness and freeing operational personnel to focus on readiness and deployment.

2. Establish a process for ongoing coordination between SWAT and Training Division to regularly review and discuss SWAT's training activities, share feedback and lessons learned, and work together to enhance the overall effectiveness of training. This collaboration should focus on strengthening individual and team performance and identifying opportunities to refine training content, methods, and standards.

3. Update the 2020 SWAT Guidebook to ensure alignment with current Department policies, operational procedures, training standards, and administrative practices. The revised Guidebook should establish clear requirements for training curriculum and mandate the

regular review and updating of training materials to reflect current professional standards, Department policy, and applicable state and federal laws. The Guidebook should also clearly distinguish between Department procedures and policies.

VIII. APPENDIX

The Department's response to this report may be found attached.

APPENDIX: LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL'S REVIEW OF THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT'S SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS TRAINING.

INTRADEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

November 20, 2025
1.1

TO: Office of the Inspector General

FROM: Chief of Police

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE INSPECTOR GENERAL'S REVIEW OF SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS TRAINING STANDARDS, TRAINING PERFORMANCE, AND ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDKEEPING PRACTICES

The Department has reviewed the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) report of their review of the training standards, training performance, and administrative recordkeeping practices of the Department's Metropolitan Division Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Platoon.

The OIG report made the following three recommendations:

1. Fill the SWAT administrative sergeant position to ensure that critical administrative responsibilities, such as training documentation, deployment logs, performance tracking, and compliance with Department and state reporting requirements, are managed with consistency, accuracy, and accountability, thereby enhancing the unit's overall effectiveness and freeing operational personnel to focus on readiness and deployment.

2. Establish a process for ongoing coordination between SWAT and Training Division to regularly review and discuss SWAT's training activities, share feedback and lessons learned, and work together to enhance the overall effectiveness of training. This collaboration should focus on strengthening individual and team performance and identifying opportunities to refine training content, methods, and standards.

3. Update the 2020 SWAT Guidebook to ensure alignment with current Department policies, operational procedures, training standards, and administrative practices. The revised Guidebook should establish clear requirements for training curriculum and mandate the regular review and updating of training materials to reflect current professional standards, Department policy, and applicable state and federal laws. The Guidebook should also clearly distinguish between Department procedures and policies.

Department Response

The Department generally concurs with the OIG's findings and is fulfilling the intent of each recommendation as follows:

Recommendation No. 1

The Department intends to fill all vacant positions as personnel resources allow. Recognizing overall resource constraints may limit when this position may be filled, the Department has established procedures to ensure all administrative responsibilities are tracked and documented appropriately:

A. Each employee's daily Training and Deployment details are documented on the Deployment Planning System (DPS) sheet for each workday. The various work or training assignments are identified with the personnel who participate.
B. Performance tracking is captured in three standard mediums.
    i. The quarterly Physical Fitness Qualification (PFQ), required by each SWAT Platoon member, is documented on the internally-maintained PFQ Log.
    ii. The weapons qualifications, which occur during the first week of every deployment period, have the scores recorded on the Qualification Log, which is maintained internally at Metropolitan Division.
    iii. Each SWAT Platoon member's attendance at platoon movement training days and cadre training days are documented on the daily DPS sheets log to ensure compliance with frequency of training.
C. Compliance with internal Department and State, California Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST), reporting requirements are recorded in every Platoon member's Training Evaluation and Management System II, Learning Management System, POST training transcript, and yearly Standard Based Assessment.

These procedures provide reliable, accessible records that are available for internal documentation inspections or audits

Recommendation No. 2

The SWAT Platoon will meet with the appropriate Training Division personnel annually to research their methods for capturing related outcomes. In that meeting, SWAT personnel will share the following methods currently in place:

A. For training activities, the SWAT Platoon has a list of competencies that must be exercised at various intervals to ensure currency in various skills.
B. Regarding evaluating the overall effectiveness of training on individual and team performance, performance tracking and compliance with training mandates are recorded as mentioned in Recommendation No. 1 above. Additionally, SWAT personnel thoroughly debrief every training vignette. These debriefs are critical for individual and team development and evaluate the overall effectiveness of training.
C. Special Weapons and Tactics Platoon instructors regularly incorporate real world lessons learned from other LAPD units and external SWAT teams into their movement training scenarios, as referenced in the OIG's report. Additionally, the SWAT Platoon sends officers to a variety of training outside the Department to enhance perspectives. Moreover, the SWAT Platoon hosts members of other tactical teams during week A of most deployment periods throughout the year. This directly influences information

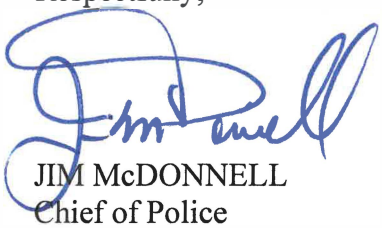
sharing and development of best practices by collaboration with various teams every year.

Recommendation No. 3

A draft revision for a 2025 SWAT Guidebook has been completed and is currently under Department review.

Should you have any further questions, please contact Deputy Chief David J. Kowalski, Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau, at (213) 486-8780.

Respectfully,



JIM McDONNELL
Chief of Police