



Jeffrey R. Gahler,  
Sheriff

# HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE OPERATIONAL POLICY

## Use of Firearms

<b>Distribution:</b>	<b>All Personnel</b>		<b>Policy Number:</b>	<b>OPS 0507</b>
<b>Responsible Unit:</b>	<b>Administrative Services Division</b>		<b>Rescinds:</b>	<i>MAN 0700</i>
<b>Original Issued Date:</b>	<b>06/15/18</b>	<b>Revision #:</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Latest Revision Date:</b> <b>N/A</b>
<b>Required 3-Year Review was Completed:</b>	<b>10/09/25</b>		<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<b>10/31/28</b>

### 1. Purpose

To provide Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) employees with guidance on proper procedures regarding situations when firearms must be used.

### 2. Policy

Deputies have been given the responsibility to protect and serve all citizens while balancing the need for officer safety and are granted the authority to use force when necessary to accomplish lawful ends. This authority is grounded in the laws of the State of Maryland, the United States Constitution, Court rulings and the provisions of this policy. Recognition of, and respect for the dignity of all persons and the value of human life will guide all training, leadership, and procedures, as well as guide deputies in the use of force.

### 3. Definitions

**AGGRAVATED AGGRESSION:** when a subject's actions create an objectively reasonable perception on the part of the deputy that the deputy or another person is subject to imminent death or serious physical injury as a result of the circumstances and/or nature of an attack. Aggravated Aggression represents the least encountered but most serious threat to the safety of law enforcement personnel or another person.

**DEADLY FORCE:** a degree of force applied which is intended to cause death or serious injury; or force which creates some specified degree of risk that a reasonable and prudent person would consider likely to cause death or serious physical injury.

**DEPLOYMENT:** the visible presence of a firearm, shotgun, or rifle for an operational purpose. A deployment is not considered a use of force or display, and no report will be required.

**DISPLAY:** pointing a firearm, shotgun, or rifle at a subject or in the direction of a subject will be considered a "display", not a use of force; therefore, will be recorded as a "Display Only" in the Use of Force Module of the Law Enforcement Records Management System (RMS).

**DISCHARGE:** the firing of a firearm, shotgun, or rifle at or in the direction of a subject.

**IMMINENT DANGER:** actions or outcomes that may occur during an encounter which places a fear for safety of the deputy or others.

USE OF FORCE: any execution of a physical act to control a person, overcome resistance and/or defend oneself or another. The force may entail the use of body parts, issued Agency defense equipment, an instrument of necessity, or deployment of a K-9.

#### 4. References

[OPS 0501](#) Use of Force

[OPS 0502](#) Issued and Approved Firearms and Ammunition

[OPS 0503](#) Qualification and Remedial Firearms Training

#### 5. Procedures

##### A. Use of Force

1. Deputies will use only the force objectively reasonable to resolve an incident effectively and safely, while protecting the lives of the deputy or others. When practical, deputies should announce that force will be utilized prior to the application of such force.
2. Deputies will utilize their approved weapons in accordance with established HCSO policy and training for that particular item.
3. Carrying of weapons will be consistent with [OPS 0502](#) Issued and Approved Firearms and Ammunition.
4. A deputy may use deadly force when they reasonably believe such action is immediately necessary to protect a deputy or another person from imminent danger of death or serious physical injury.
5. Deputies will always consider the potential consequences of their actions when making the decision to use a firearm, shotgun, or rifle.

##### B. Primary and Secondary Handgun

1. The deployment and/or discharge of an approved primary or secondary handgun will be consistent with Agency training.
2. Deputies will take into consideration the potential background targets and the likelihood that rounds may pass through walls, etc. when deciding to utilize the handgun.
3. Secondary handguns are authorized for use only in those critical situations when the primary weapon has been taken, lost, emptied, or disabled. Approval, inspections, qualifications, and training will be done in accordance with [OPS 0502](#) Issued and Approved Firearms and Ammunition.

##### C. Shotguns and Rifles

1. Operational Guidelines
  - a. The primary function of the shotgun and rifle is that of a perimeter weapon. The decision to deploy a shotgun or rifle will be in conformance with the training provided by the Training Academy and based upon the resources available to the deputy at the time, the risks created by the use of the shotgun or rifle and the danger posed by the suspect. Such situations may include, but are not limited to:

- i. Response to an active shooter or a major criminal incident such as a barricaded subject;
- ii. High-risk traffic stops or roadblocks ;
- iii. Any situation where a deputy reasonably believes there is a high likelihood that weapons may be encountered or a potential of encountering an armed subject;
- iv. Provide cover for a police K-9, or another deputy, in the search for an armed subject;
- v. Incidents in which suspects are believed to have weapons superior to the issued handgun;
- vi. Incidents where suspects are believed to be wearing body armor;
- vii. Destruction of animals in situations where the handgun would not be effective; or
- viii. Any situation where the supervisor of an operation deems the shotgun or rifle to be necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of this policy.

#### D. Reporting Requirements

1. Deputies must immediately report to their supervisor or the on-duty supervisor whenever they discharge or display a handgun, shotgun, or rifle for any reason other than training purposes or target practice at an established firing range.
2. Deputies must document the event in an Incident Report for the original call for service or a Supplemental Report prior to the end of that deputy's tour of duty.
  - a. In instances whereby a deputy is injured or otherwise unable to complete an Incident Report, his supervisor will complete that report.
  - b. In the event that the deputy's supervisor is also unavailable, the on-duty supervisor will complete the report.
  - c. Discharge of firearms to humanely destroy an injured animal will be documented by a CAD entry.

#### E. Supervisory Responsibilities

1. Any supervisor who is notified of a use of a firearm must follow the guidelines established in [OPS 0501 Use of Force Policy](#).
2. The deputy's supervisor or an on-duty supervisor must report to the scene of any firearm use or display (except when firearm discharge was used to humanely destroy an injured animal).
3. The responding supervisor will assist the deputy as necessary and will review the circumstances of the incident.
4. The responding supervisor must complete the Use of Force Module in RMS for each deputy involved in any incident described in D.1. above before the end of that supervisor's tour of duty and forward it through the chain of command (except when firearm discharge was to humanely destroy an injured animal).

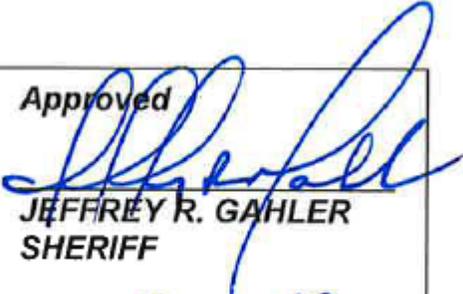
5. The supervisor completing the Use of Force Module will verify that the deputy made the appropriate entry on an Incident Report or Supplement Report as required above.

F. Chain of Command Review

1. Shift Lieutenants, Duty Officers and Division Commanders will ensure the use of force reporting requirements, training, investigations, and review process are conducted in accordance with the procedures established in [OPS 0501](#) Use of Force.

## 6. Summary of Changes

- A. On 10/09/25 the 3-year Agency review was conducted, and no changes or edits were made to this policy.

Approved  
  
JEFFREY R. GAHLER  
SHERIFF  
DATE 6-1-18