

Kansas City Missouri Police Department Badge Placement Study 2011-2012

In recent years there have been a number of high profile incidents involving on-duty personnel shooting officers taking enforcement action while either off-duty or in plain clothes. The repercussions of an incident such as this are far reaching, potentially devastating, and can not only cause serious trust issues within an agency, but within a community as well.

During preparations for In-service Training for the Kansas City Missouri Police Department in 2011, one of the main training concepts we wanted to concentrate on was prevention of incidents where on-duty officers shoot an off-duty or undercover officer in plain clothes (Blue on Blue shootings).

In designing our training we intended to leverage the collateral benefit of ensuring identification of a threatening target rather than shooting at whatever shape happened to turn toward the shooter. A vital component of this training was addressing poor performance, providing meaningful and accurate training, and holding students accountable.

In constructing shooting scenarios we divided the Indoor Range into eight shooting bays, with a total of sixteen (16) targets. Training participants were asked to perform several different shooting tasks, designed as skill building exercises. The exercises involved movement, movement to cover, and engagement of multiple targets. In addition a significant amount, approximately 50%, of the exercises were conducted in "Low Light" conditions. The targets were programmed to face the officers for a variable amount of time from between one (1) to three (3) seconds.

Of the sixteen (16) targets posted for the exercises, four (4) of the targets were altered by affixing a full color/full size Kansas City Missouri Police Department badge, silver in color, to the targets designating them as "No-Shoots". Two (2) of the "No-Shoot" targets had badges affixed to the beltline of the humanoid illustration, and the other two (2) had badges hanging from a simulated chain around the target's neck. The placement of the chain was designed to place the badge center chest of the targets.

Our first hypothesis was the "No-Shoot" targets with the badges along the beltline would be shot more often than the targets with badges that appeared in the "center mass" of the targets, and the second hypothesis was more "No-Shoot" targets of both types would be shot during the low light portion of the exercise than during the full light portion.

During In-service 2011 each participant fired approximately 125 rounds during the exercises conducted, and on average we had 23 participants during each of the 40 sessions sampled for a total of 920 officers sampled.

During In-service Training 2011 we observed the following results on each of the

“No-Shoot” targets during the 40 sessions we examined;

The Belt Badge Targets under full lighting conditions were hit a total of 1,272 times for an average of 31.8 hits per In-service session in 2011.

The Neck Badge Targets under full lighting conditions were hit a total of 196 times for an average of 4.9 hits per In-service session in 2011.

The Belt Badge Targets under low lighting conditions were hit a total of 5,288 times for an average of 132.2 hits per In-service session in 2011.

The Neck Badge Targets under low lighting conditions were hit a total of 843 times for an average of 21.07 hits per In-service session in 2011.

During the training we called the participants attention to the fact the “No-Shoot” targets were being hit, and provided training and techniques to prevent this from reoccurring.

In looking at the data gathered, we found the following results as it pertained to this exercise over the 40 training sessions;

When we compared targets in Low Light conditions to targets in Full Lighting, Fully lighted targets were hit 1,468 times versus 6,131 times for targets under low light, making it **4 times more likely a “No-Shoot” target will be shot in Low Light versus a Fully Lit target during these exercise in 2011.**

In comparing Belt Badges to Neck Badges, Targets with Belt Badges were hit a total of 6,560 times versus 1,039 times for targets with Neck Badges, making it **6 times more likely a “No-Shoot” target with a Belt Badge will be shot compared to a target with a Neck Badge during these exercise in 2011.**

As the data indicates, lighting conditions were a significant factor in how our personnel performed, but the actual location of the placement of our badge on the target proved to be an even bigger determining factor as to whether a target was engaged or not by our officers. To some extent this matched our hypothesis, but it was surprising to see badge placement was as big a factor as it turned out to be.

After looking at the results of our study for 2011, I wanted to see if we had affected our member’s ability to evaluate and scan targets under short time constraints, and prevent officers from shooting unintended targets. The decision was made to design a nearly identical training session for In-service 2012, and track the same data, comparing the two years head to head.

In-service training for 2012 involved the use of the same number of hostile targets and the same number of “No-Shoot” targets used during the 2011 In-service session.

Included in the training topics for 2012 were movement, low light drills, a precision review, and transitions from a hands-on application to a shooting situation.

Once again a significant amount of the exercises were conducted in “Low Light” conditions, (approximately 50%). Targets were programmed to face the officers for a variable amount of time from between one (1) to three (3) seconds. The number of participants per session was nearly identical to 2011.

When we evaluated the “No-Shoot” targets of an identical sampling of 40 sessions during 2012 In-service Training, we discovered some interesting information;

The Belt Badge Targets under full lighting conditions were hit a total of 240 times for an average of 6 hits per In-service session in 2012. Down from a total of 1,272 hits for an average of 31.8 hits per In-service session in 2011.

A reduction of 82%.

The Neck Badge Target under full lighting conditions were hit a total of 25 times for an average of .625 hits per In-service session in 2012. Down from a total of 196 times for an average of 4.9 hits per In-service session in 2011.

A reduction of 88%.

The Belt Badge Targets under low lighting conditions were hit a total of 525 times for an average of 13.125 hits per In-service session in 2012. Down from a total of 5,288 times for an average of 132.2 hits per In-service session in 2011.

A reduction of 90%.

The Neck Badge Target under low lighting conditions were hit a total of 71 times for an average of 1.775 hits per In-service session in 2012. Down from a total of 843 times for an average of 21.07 hits per In-service session in 2011.

A reduction of 92%.

When we compared the 2012 In-service statistic, targets in Low Light conditions to targets in Full Lighting, Fully lighted targets were hit 265 times versus 596 times for targets under low light, making it **2.25 times more likely a “No-Shoot” target will be shot in Low Light versus a Fully Lit target during these exercises in 2012.**

In comparing Belt Badges to Neck Badges, Targets with Belt Badges were hit a total of 765 times versus 96 times for targets with Neck Badges, making it **8 times more likely a “No-Shoot” target with a Belt Badge will be shot compared to a target with a Neck Badge during these exercises in 2012.**

Looking at the results we obtained, I believe we can draw a few conclusions;

- Lighting conditions make a significant difference in target identification and engagement
- Placement of Identification and Badges/Shields makes a significant difference in target identification and engagement
- The compressed time frame designed into the training places pressure on the participants similar to actual real-world shootings
- From comments and information obtained from the participants, peer pressure added a positive element of pressure to the training
- There was a residual effect from training similarity year to year, resulting in a higher level of proficiency and target identification capability
- Because we train to shoot center mass, officers are able to readily see identification/badges suspended in the middle of the chest
- As officers access their weapons and come to a ready position with their pistols, the humanoid target is covered or obscured by the shooters hands and weapon, greatly hindering their ability to see anything below mid-chest, to include a belt mounted badge
- Our members improved by an average of 88% in the categories evaluated indicating a remarkable improvement in their threat assessment abilities

Based on the results of our study it was recommended and adopted as Policy by the Kansas City Missouri Police Department that wearing of badges around the neck would be the exclusively approved manner of display, and to discontinue the wearing of badges along the beltline.

Our information was shared with our Missouri State POST manager, Mr. Jeremy Spratt, who had the forethought to share the information with trainers within our state and each of the other POST program providers in the other 49 states, and several federal agencies. Officers have continued to share this information with their fellow trainers, and we have been contacted by law enforcement members from as far away as Canada, Europe and Australia for validation and permission to use the information gathered.

Our intention is that trainers will use this information to provide their students with meaningful strategies to prevent another of these tragedies.

Any requests for information or questions for clarification can be directed to any of

the numbers or contact information below.

Sergeant Ward Smith
Supervisor
Firearms Training Section
Kansas City Missouri Police Department
6885 NE Pleasant Valley Road
Kansas City Missouri 64119
Ward.Smith@kcpd.org
816-413-3540 (work)
816-719-8428 (cell)
816-413-8577 (fax)