

December 2021

The ACO Voice

A Monthly Magazine from the Animal Control & Care Academy
The Only National Monthly Magazine Dedicated to Animal Control

Situational Awareness in Animal Control

Eden, Texas, May 10, 2021 – A complaint about a dog caused an altercation that led to the deaths of Concho County Sheriff's Deputies Samuel Leonard and Stephen Jones. An Eden city employee also sustained serious injuries.

**UPDATE: Texas Rangers say deputies killed in
Concho County during altercation that began
with dog complaint**



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Situational Awareness in A/C

By Mark Kumpf

For many in the law enforcement and the military professions, “Situational Awareness” comprises part of everyday life and operations. Its importance to Animal Control Officers is no less important than for other professionals. The term’s origins are found in early aerial combat where it was used to describe a pilot’s ability to know where he was in relation to his wingmen and the enemy. In the purest sense, this was actually “positional awareness”; however, when the pilot’s knowledge of enemy planes capabilities and tactics was combined with his personal skill and aptitude, this moved from a simple sense of location to the more complex ability to perform three critical processes: Interpretation, Comprehension and Anticipation. Situational awareness is the ability to observe your surroundings and those in it, comprehend their actions and intentions in relation to the surroundings, and then anticipate potential actions/events that may occur.

How do you use it each day? Every time you respond to a call for service and evaluate the circumstances when reaching for either reasonable suspicion or probable cause, you are using situational awareness. Your training, knowledge, and experience all contribute to the ability to make informed, well-reasoned and correct decisions. When you consider entering a yard and look for signs of dogs, use your senses, and then decide on whether you should enter, you have practiced situational awareness. This is not “ESP” or precognition although many experienced officers have claimed to develop a “spidey sense” that tingles when something is not quite right. When it comes to doing our jobs safely, it literally can be the difference between life and death.

Take situational awareness apart and you end up with three levels. The first centers on the ability to perceive critical factors. With so much information coming at you, the well-trained and experienced officer must be able to quickly analyze the information coming to him/her from their senses and categorize it as a critical or noncritical factor. An individual sitting on the front porch on a hot summer day wearing a bandanna may not represent a threat. Place that person in a known gang area, make the bandanna a recognizable gang color(s) and you may now change your evaluation of that individual from “non-threat – general citizen” to “possible threat – potential gang member.” This example leads to the second level, which is being able to understand the factors. Having training on

gang identification helps the officer make sense out of his/her observations. Finally, the third level focuses on understanding what those critical factors will cause to happen in the immediate future. Given the individual’s possible gang affiliation, he/she may be reluctant to cooperate with authorities and you may need to call for assistance.

Situational awareness can keep you out of serious issues. As has been stated before, the best way to avoid safety threats is to avoid placing yourself at risk in the first place. This does NOT mean that we should not do our job and hide in a truck for the entire shift! Rather, officers should take every opportunity to avail themselves of training and knowledge that will help them in their daily tasks. Do not discount veteran officers who may be able to share important information on “how things work around here” nor should you blindly follow those teachings. Be smart and make your decisions based on as much information as you can gather. You will find that your decisions will come faster and be more appropriate as you become more experienced. When you make a mistake, learn from it and then share it with everyone so that they may learn and not have to make the same mistake you made.

Know your areas. Know your citizens. Know your animals. Know your laws. Know your limitations. These are five simple tenets to live by in the Animal Control field that you can practice each day and help improve your personal safety. Officers should network with others to gain critical information that would otherwise be learned the hard way. Many departments have pipeline chain-of-command communication that sends info up-and-down but usually not too far or wide. Keeping regulations in mind, sharing as much information with coworkers and co-professionals is highly advisable for anyone who wants to see to his/her own safety and the safety of others. If you have been to a house with several aggressive dogs, pass that information on to the law enforcement dispatchers and even the beat officer or sergeant as quickly as possible. They can then add this information to their knowledge base and improve their situational awareness.

The late Jeff Cooper developed a color code system to highlight the stages of situational awareness. We all have lots of experience with different colors these days, but this is a basic way to look at your daily surroundings.

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Condition White – Unaware, Potential Victim

White is the lowest level on the escalator. In Condition White, one is unaware, not alert and oblivious to all around you. This state can be characterized as “daydreaming” or “preoccupied”. People in Condition White tend to walk around with their heads down, as if watching their own feet. They do not notice the impending danger until it literally has them by the throat.

So, when would it be acceptable to be in Condition White? When in your own home, with the doors locked, the alarm system on, and your dog at your feet. Then, you can turn off your mind, if you wish, because you have sufficient layers of protection and warning to enable you to get up, get your gear, and get your head running. If you leave your home, you leave Condition White behind. The instant you leave your home, you escalate one level, to Condition Yellow.

Condition Yellow – Situationally Aware

This is a relaxed state of general alertness, with no specific focal point. You are not looking for anything or anyone in particular; you simply have your head up and your eyes open. You are alert and aware of your surroundings. You are difficult to surprise, therefore, you are difficult to harm. You do not expect to be attacked today. You simply recognize the possibility.

Anything or anyone in your immediate vicinity that is unusual, out of place, or out of context, should be viewed as potentially dangerous, until you have had a chance to assess it. Someone who looks out of place, or someone engaged in activity that has no obvious legitimate purpose, should be looked over carefully. When your mental radar picks up on a blip, you immediately escalate one level on the scale, to Condition Orange.

Condition Orange –

Recognize a Specific Potential Threat

Condition Orange is simply when you notice something that could potentially be a threat, although you do not have enough information yet. This is a heightened state of alertness, with a specific focal point. The entire difference between Yellow and Orange is this specific target for your attention. Your focal point is the person who is doing whatever drew your attention to him/her. It might be the fact that the individual is wearing a field jacket in August. It might be that the subject is standing by a column in the parking garage, instead of going into the building, or getting in a car and leaving. It might be that you have been in five stores at the mall, and saw this same guy in every

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- Colonel Geoff Cooper

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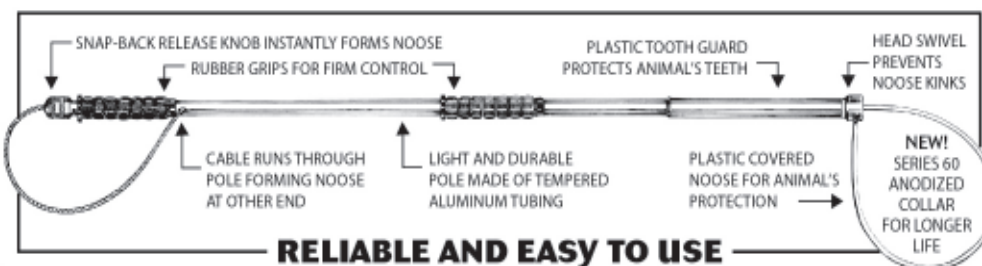
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one of them. His actions have caused you to take note of him, so you must assess him as a potential threat.

Condition Red – Ready to Fight

Condition Red is where you need to be when you recognize an actual legitimate threat. In Red, you are ready to fight! You may, or may not, actually be fighting, but you are MENTALLY PREPARED to fight. In many, or perhaps even most, circumstances where you have gone fully to Condition Red, you will not actually physically do anything at all. The entire process of escalating from Yellow, to Orange, to Red, then de-escalating right back down the scale as the situation is resolved, occurs without any actual physical activity on your part. The key is that you are mentally prepared for a conflict, and thus could physically act if the situation demanded.

This is the time to be ready - put a plan into action. Your plan may include:

- * Verbal commands.
- * Using your weapon.
- * Using a nearby item as a weapon if you are not armed.
- * Retreating if you are able to (“getting out of Dodge”).
- * Calling for assistance.

Any of these can be legitimate actions to take depending on your situation. It is imperative that you mentally prepare and train for these situations so that you know how you will respond BEFORE you end-up in these situations.

When it comes to a threat on your life or those of your fellow ACO's, Condition Red is when you have formulated your defense plan and are ready to execute it at a second's notice against a real, verified threat.

Condition Black – In the Fight

You are in Condition Black when you are in a defensive fight or combat, delivering enough force to end the threat (Condition Black was not part of Jeff Cooper's original color code). This is why you need training and practice. You want to be prepared and skilled with empty hands, baton, or whatever you have available to use as a defensive tool.

When you believe a threat is real, and you have escalated to Condition Red, you are waiting on the Mental Trigger, which is a specific, predetermined action on his/her part that will result in an immediate, positive, aggressive, defensive reaction from you. This is how you achieve the speed necessary to win. By having a “pre-made decision” already set up in your mind, you can move physically fast enough to deal with the problem. Without

that pre-made decision, the precious time in which you could have acted was wasted on trying to decide what to do after he/she starts their attack.

The Mental Trigger will differ depending upon the circumstances. Whatever trigger is selected; it is a button that, once pushed, results in immediate action on your part. Your main enemy is reaction time. If you are not aware of your surroundings, and fail to see the suspicious character, he/she may overwhelm you before you can marshal an effective defense. On the other hand, if you are thinking to yourself, “I may have to hurt this person if he/she doesn't wise up”; you have probably already won that fight, because you have a better understanding of what is transpiring than he/she does! The best fight is over before the loser fully understands what just happened. If you are caught in Condition White, you will need five to six seconds to realize what is happening, get your wits together, and respond. You simply don't have that much time.

In this case, being “Yellow” doesn't equate to being a coward, it means you are situationally aware of your surroundings and constantly vigilant which enables you to move up and down the color scale and protect your safety. Part of being “Yellow” means taking care of all those things in life that you need to have ready at a moment's notice in case it turns RED. Did you remember to check your baton, pepper spray, Ketch-pole, leash and vehicle BEFORE you hit the street? Does your radio have a fresh battery and is your cell phone charged? All are simple steps to improve your chances of coming home each day with no more holes in your body than which you arrived with that morning!



ACCA Training Schedule

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Schedule of Training: Laws and Enforcement Procedures; Interpersonal Communication; Officer Safety and Protection; Basic Animal Control Officer Investigations; Evidence Law and Collection; Courtroom Testimony and Report Writing; Canine Behavior and Aggressive Dogs; Safe Animal Handling/Capture and Restraint Equipment

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Hosted by Greene County Animal Control

January 21, 2022 - Xenia, Ohio

Comprehensive Animal Management Certification

Hosted by the North Kansas City Police Department

January 24-26, 2022 - North Kansas City, Missouri

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February 21-25, 2022 - Mt. Juliet, Tennessee

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