

7 More Tips for Off-Duty Officer Safety

Several recent events served as a reminder that off-duty officers risk coming under attack, as well as coming into contact with crimes in progress while not in uniform. Here are seven thoughts on staying safe when you're not on the job.

**Doug Wyllie**

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How can officers stay safer while off duty? Here are seven tips. Source: POLICE

Several recent events served as a reminder that off-duty officers risk being attacked and being involved in crimes in progress while not in uniform.

Earlier this week, we reported on an off-duty officer with the Kansas City (MO) Police Department who

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With the Kansas City, MO, Police Department who reportedly responded to the sound of an intruder in his home and opened fire on the suspect.

The officer then ran from his home to his parked patrol vehicle, where he used his radio to summon assistance.

The intruder fled the scene—it was unclear whether or not he had been struck by gunfire—and eluded a police search of the area. Police canvassed local hospitals for anyone showing up with a gunshot wound, but nobody was found.

The incident in Missouri wasn't the only recent example of an armed confrontation involving an off-duty police officer.

Just last week, we reported on an incident in which an off-duty officer with the Chicago Police Department was followed from his police precinct while in his personally owned vehicle and fired upon in an apparent ambush attack.

The three-year officer left the station after his shift and soon noticed he was being followed by someone in a grey Dodge Caravan.

A gunman reportedly jumped from the vehicle and opened fire multiple times. The gunman then got back in the Caravan and fled the scene.

The officer was not struck, despite the fact that his vehicle was described as "bullet-riddled."



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Last week, we also reported on an off-duty officer with the California Highway Patrol who was severely beaten by a mob of teens during an altercation at a shopping mall in a suburb of Oakland on the day after Thanksgiving.

The crowd of teens then turned their attention to the officer, surrounding him and unleashing a vicious attack, during which the officer sustained a concussion, a broken finger, and bruises.

There was also the incident in which an off-duty officer with the Washington DC Metro Police Department was reportedly working a part-time security job at an apartment complex when he encountered a group of individuals, at least one of whom was reportedly armed with a weapon.

The officer said in a statement he feared for his life when he discharged his department-issued service weapon, striking a man and a teenager.

Those two individuals were transported to a nearby hospital where they were treated for wounds not considered to be life-threatening.

Off-duty officer safety is an important topic—one I've written about before—that should be revisited on a regular basis.

Here are seven thoughts on staying safe when you're not on the job.

1. Be Discreet

That Thin Blue Line sticker on your personally owned

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That thin blue line sticker on your personally owned vehicle or the Thin Blue Line flag flying from the front of your house is a matter of deep pride, but it is also an advertisement alerting possible attackers of your law enforcement status. So is that take-home patrol vehicle in the driveway.

It might be wise to cover that squad car and fly the flag in the backyard.

You already have the haircut announcing to the world what you do for a living—don't make matters worse by wearing an agency T-shirt when you go out to dinner with the family.

2. Family Plan

Speaking of family, make sure they know what to do if an off-duty incident occurs. Talk with your spouse and your kids about getting to safety if something suddenly happens. As I mentioned in my previous article, it's a good idea to have a code word that tells them to run to cover and call for help.

When they do call for help, they also need to remember to tell the call-taker on the other end of the line that their loved one engaged in the incident is an off-duty officer. Have them describe you, your clothing, and the like.

You don't want to turn your family into a paranoid wreck, but you don't want them to completely seize up if something bad happens.

3. Side Jobs

Many officers have side jobs like the DC Metro cop mentioned above. Most entail being in full uniform, but some do not. In either case, you still have the responsibility to yourself and your family to be on alert for possible assault. Working "security" is an activity usually involving very little actual activity. This can lull an individual into a condition of complacency.

Remember that complacency kills—stay alert.

4. Good Witness

The temptation to intervene in an incident in which someone is being obviously victimized—such as the California woman whose mobile phone was stolen by a group of thugs at a shopping mall—is pretty strong for most officers. You are crimefighters and witnessing a crime unfold before your eyes and doing nothing about it is anathema to you.

If someone is in physical peril, by all means, get in there and get to work. However, be practical and tactical about what you can actually accomplish by intervening in the situation.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is to be the best witness a responding on-duty officer has ever encountered.

5. Hands Up

Let's say you do get into an off-duty incident. You draw down on a suspect and order them to the ground. Maybe you even had to shoot the subject in

order to gain compliance.

You're almost certainly in civilian clothes, so when the cavalry eventually arrives, communicate clearly your law enforcement status as you place your weapon on the ground and comply with the commands of the responding uniformed officers.

You know you're the good guy or gal in this situation, but they don't.

6. Carrying Concealed

Do you carry a gun off duty? If so, is it the same as your service weapon? Do you carry it in the same place as your duty gun? The odds are that if the answer to the first question is yes, the answer to the second and third questions is no.

This can be problematic because you may not be as well practiced at drawing from an ankle holster as you are from a duty belt or drop-down holster. Practice draws and dry fire drills. Get out to the range and press the trigger every other month—even if it's just a

box of 20 rounds you will remain proficient and ready for an incident everyone hopes never occurs.

7. Down Time

Yes, you are always a sworn peace officer, even when you're off duty.

But it's also a good idea to be "dad" or "mom" or "best friend" or "sibling" when you're out of uniform.

Use your downtime to decompress from what is inarguably a stressful occupation that places you at scenes of terrible human tragedy—sometimes multiple times a day.

Go fishing. Go hunting. Go to the movies. Go to supper. Go for a run.

Do whatever off-duty activity that makes you happy.

Final Words

Off-duty safety should be a topic of discussion at roll call. It should be top of mind for every officer in America as the tidal wave of anti-police sentiment that crashed upon our shores following Ferguson seems to remain relentless. Individuals and organized groups alike remain a threat to you and your loved ones.

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you. Stay safe out there.

[5 Things to Know When Buying Concealed-Carry or Off-Duty Holsters](#)

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Doug Wyllie has authored thousands of feature articles, opinion columns, news reports, and tactical tips with the goal of ensuring that police officers are safer and more successful on the streets. Doug...

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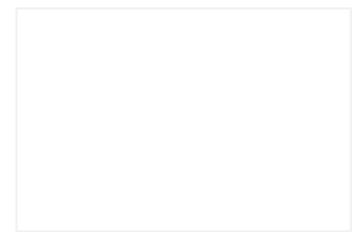
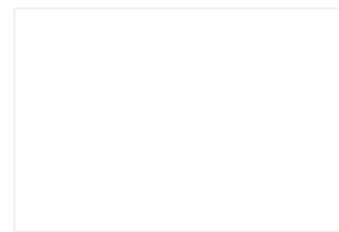
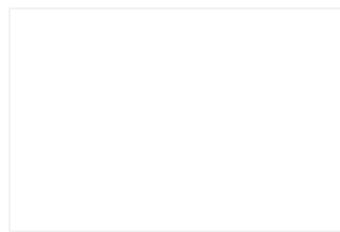
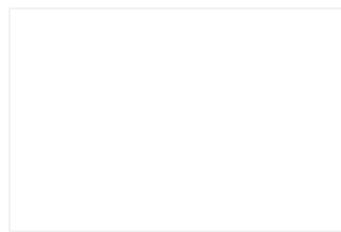
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