

Code Enforcement Officer Safety Standards

Senate Bill 296 requires each local jurisdiction that employs code enforcement officers to develop safety standards appropriate for the code enforcement officers employed in their jurisdiction. Local jurisdictions must evaluate the safety hazards and risks applicable to their code enforcement officers and develop appropriate safety standards.

Penal Code Section 829.7 of the California Legislature finds and declares that code enforcement officers are disproportionately at risk for threat, assault, injury, and even homicide due to the nature of their obligations.

For the purposes of this document Code Enforcement Officer will mean Code Compliance Officer and Investigator (Code Enforcement) as those are the positions held within Humboldt County where these standards will apply.

1.1 Officer Safety

The safety and welfare of our personnel is extremely important and a high priority for management and supervision. Code Enforcement Officers are expected to act in a professional manner when dealing with the public; however, if they are dealing with hostile individuals, officers are expected to avoid confrontation and remove themselves from the situation as quickly and safely as possible.

Many potential officer safety issues can be avoided by following proper investigative techniques:

- Reviewing prior cases to determine any potential safety hazards or potential hostile individuals.
- Becoming familiar with the geographical area of the complaint, prior to initial contact.
- Speaking with officers who investigated previous complaints.
- Having additional resources available, such as a second code officer, a supervisor, law enforcement or animal control when warranted.

Supervision will be made aware of all potentially harmful situations, prior to any initial contact, in order to develop strategies to best address those hazards.

1.2 Threats, Assaults and Batteries

All threats, assaults and batteries directed at Code Enforcement Officers, shall be reported to supervision, management, and law enforcement immediately. Officers should obtain information as safely as possible about the subject making the threat, assault, or battery, including their intent, ability, and desire to carry out their actions. This information will be vital for law enforcement and Code Enforcement supervision.

The Code Enforcement Unit and Sheriff's Office are expected to share information regarding known and potential dangerous occupant(s) of properties under investigation by code

enforcement, and take necessary steps to mitigate risk of harm to the inspectors, including but not limited to, obtaining assistance from law enforcement in making any and all contacts with such individual(s), reporting location prior to making contact and after completing the inspection or other contact, and adhering to safety standards, training, and protocols.

1.3 Use of Force

Code Enforcement Officers will exercise good judgment at all times if force is necessary. The ability to leave the location prior to any confrontation taking place is the best course of action. In cases of immediate and direct threat, the Code Enforcement Officers may use the minimum force necessary to mitigate the threat and safely leave the area.

Mere verbal threats of violence, verbal abuse, or hesitancy in following commands does not necessarily justify the use of physical force without additional facts or circumstances substantiating an imminent potential for physical harm. However, if a Code Enforcement Officer is receiving threats, particularly threats of violence even without additional manifestations of intent to carry it out, the Code Enforcement Officer should immediately retreat to a safe location and notify the law enforcement and a code enforcement supervisor.

1.4 General Safety

SELF-DEFENSE

Code Enforcement Officers have two defense options:

1. Leave the scene (walk, run, crawl, drive, etc.) and call for help.
2. If the Code Enforcement Officer cannot leave the scene, such as being cornered or held, the Code Enforcement Officer may defend him/herself until able to leave the scene or assistance arrives. The Code Enforcement Officer may use defensive tactics skills, as well as issued equipment as reasonable and not excessive to defend against an attack.
3. Code Enforcement Officers may carry pepper spray in accordance with the pepper spray policy.

Unreasonable application of physical force on a person is a violation of law, which may result in criminal prosecution of the Code Enforcement Officer and potential civil liability to the Code Enforcement Officer and the County.

PRIORITIES

1. Code Enforcement Officer safety is the first priority. The Code Enforcement Officer cannot help anyone if they are hurt or incapacitated, and if they are injured it compounds the original problem.
2. The safety of other people is the next priority. Assistance should come from other department employees, or emergency service agencies, including the Sheriff's Office.

ALERTNESS

A crucial part of officer safety is staying alert and anticipating potential risks. This requires the use of all the senses to observe the surroundings, hear a threat, speak persuasively, or feel that attack is imminent. Being alert applies not only in the field, but also at the office.

- Pay attention to the people who come to the office. Making eye contact and greeting them tells them that they have been noticed.
- Watch for unusual circumstances and check into them. If there is someone in a restricted area, ask him or her why s/he is there. If there is a strange package in an unusual place notify a supervisor and don't touch it until it can be confirmed to be harmless.
- Plan an escape route. Consider the escape options available if something goes wrong. This is extremely important when dealing with hostile people.
- Know the area/location. If help is needed quickly, there won't be time to look at the map.
- When talking to people try to maintain at least an arm's-length of distance and a balanced, balanced stance on firm ground to be able to dodge a sudden lunge, punch, or kick.
- Avoid standing downhill, facing the sun, or at the edge of something that could cause someone to trip.
- Be aware of nearby objects that could be used as weapons, such as garden tools, screwdrivers, knives, 2x4's, pipes, etc. Move these kinds of objects out of reach or ask the person to step to a more neutral area.

The decision to use physical force places a tremendous responsibility on Code Enforcement Officers. Code Enforcement Officers should clearly understand that the standard for determining whether the force applied is that conduct which a reasonable Code Enforcement Officer would exercise based upon the information the officer had when the conduct occurred.

1.5 Reporting

Code Enforcement Officers are required to immediately report all officer safety issues to a supervisor. This includes any force used in self-defense, verbal altercations, or incidents where a police officer had to arrest a party. After notification, the Code Enforcement Officer will also submit a written report of the incident to a supervisor.

1.6 Use of Radio/Cell Phone Communications

Code Enforcement Officers are required to advise office staff and/or supervisor of where they generally will be during the course of a shift. Officers shall keep their electronic calendar up to date.

All Code Enforcement Officers will be trained to use a radio in case assistance is needed.

Code Enforcement Officer will limit their use of the radio to only essential information to ensure the channel remains open for priority traffic.

1.7 Missing Officer

Code Enforcement Officers are required to advise office staff and/or supervisor of where they generally will be during the course of a shift. Officers shall keep their issued cell phones charged and on their person while in the field. If a Code Enforcement Officer fails to promptly respond to phone calls, texts or radio communication, a search team should immediately be dispatched with at least one, and if feasible, two Code Enforcement Officers to check the last known and future locations.

If met with negative results, conduct a systematic search of the area to help locate the missing Code Enforcement Officer's vehicle and/or person. If the Code Enforcement Officer still is not located, begin to call the Code Enforcement Officer's personal emergency contacts to verify the Code Enforcement Officer did not leave abruptly without notifying staff. If still unable to locate, notify law enforcement and provide the information attained above, to help locate the Code Enforcement Officer.

1.8 Service of Inspection and/or Abatement Warrants

Code Enforcement Officers may need to obtain inspection and/or abatement warrants from time to time. Prior to serving or executing such warrant(s), the Code Enforcement Officer shall notify the supervisor and coordinate with the Sheriff's Office to ensure law enforcement is present at the service or execution of the warrant(s). The officer shall coordinate with law enforcement on how to make contact with the occupant(s) and the best method for entry. Forcible entry shall not be used unless a judge has authorized it in the warrant(s). Code Enforcement Officers shall not serve or execute an inspection warrant without the presence of law enforcement, unless prior approval from the supervisor is obtained. The Code Enforcement Officer shall report his/her position when arriving and leaving the location subject to the warrant(s).

1.9 Protective Equipment

Code Enforcement Officers may encounter environmental conditions which may be hazardous, such as mold, asbestos, insect infestation, feces, and airborne illnesses. As such, each vehicle used by the Code Enforcement Officer will be provided with an emergency medical kit and protective equipment. Based on the known or reasonably anticipated situation, each officer is required to wear or utilize the most appropriate equipment when entering hazardous areas. The protective equipment should be worn at all times until the Code Enforcement Officer believes hazardous conditions have been abated or when the officer has left the hazardous area or property. Below is a list of essential equipment provided in each vehicle. The supervisor or

his/her designee will periodically inspect and inventory the equipment. If the equipment is found to be defective or requires replacement, the supervisor will be notified immediately. Listed below is the county provided protective equipment:

1. KN95 face masks
2. Disposable gloves and hand sanitizer
3. Potable water
4. Basic first aid kit
5. Work gloves
6. Shoe coverings (booties)

1.10 Personal Vehicle Use

A Code Enforcement Officer shall not utilize his/her personal vehicle in the performance of job duties.

1.11 Training

Continual training is essential for code enforcement staff to maintain the skills required for their individual positions. All code enforcement staff will receive initial training essential to perform their duties. This will be on-the-job training given by supervisors and experienced Code Enforcement Officers.

As time and resources permit the department encourages Code Enforcement Officers to attend training opportunities provided by the California Association of Code Enforcement Officers (CACEO), and other organizations and become Certified Code Enforcement Officers. Once certified, officers are encouraged to attend continuing education courses to maintain their certification.