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HOW SIMULATION TRAINING CAN
IMPROVE OFFICER PERFORMANCE



13-20

**CAN SIMULATION REPLACE
LIVE-FIRE TRAINING?**

A man in a white shirt and tie is wearing a black tactical vest and holding a black rifle with a scope. The background is dark.

HOW SIMULATION TRAINING

CAN IMPROVE OFFICER
PERFORMANCE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Training to keep your skills sharp is necessary to succeed in any profession. In law enforcement, however, it can mean the difference between life and death. Video-based simulation training has become a key solution for departments to expand the scope of their training without breaking the budget.

In this eBook, you'll learn the three main features to look for in a simulation system, as well as how simulation training can help prepare officers for active shooter response and appropriate use of force. You'll also read how one training officer is working to bring the technology he used to build a successful program at one department to his new agency.

- Nancy Perry, PoliceOne Editor-in-Chief

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Steve Tracy recently retired from the Park Ridge Police Department (which borders the northwest side of Chicago) after 30 years of service, 28 as a firearms instructor. Rachel Zoch is a writer and editor for PoliceOne's BrandFocus division. Previously, she worked the copy desk of a local daily newspaper and served as managing editor of a trade magazine for the multifamily housing industry.

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Laser Shot has led the cutting edge of virtual firearms training systems since 1999 and is the virtual range technology depended upon by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). This same technology is used by departments and agencies worldwide in the form of Laser Shot's affordable, portable solutions, which feature the fastest setup time, smallest footprint and the largest judgmental scenario library available in the industry at over 900 and counting. Visit Laser Shot online for more information.

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3 FEATURES YOU NEED IN A TRAINING SIMULATOR

By Steve Tracy

Virtual reality training simulators are an excellent means of achieving training goals for police departments. Not every scenario ends with a “shoot” outcome. Scenarios can be resolved by means other than force, and virtual reality scenarios provide an excellent means of testing an officer’s ability to use persuasive verbal commands and Crisis Intervention Team techniques.

Branching scenarios – where what’s presented next is based on the officer’s responses thus far – are what makes simulation training a realistic experience. When an officer gives the command, “Drop the knife!” and anticipates a response, the trainer has the option in real time of making the subject obey the directive or advance on the officer.

With a training simulator like a Laser Shot system, hundreds of scenarios, ranging from domestic calls to suspicious persons to building searches to active shooters, are at your instructors’ fingertips.

To get the biggest bang for your buck while spending taxpayer dollars, look for these three features when choosing a training simulator for your department.

1 // SMALL FOOTPRINT

First, since training space is usually at a premium, a system with a small footprint that can be scaled to fit your department’s available space is a definite advantage. While some departments have training rooms where a simulator can be stationed permanently, others may need to repurpose the space for classroom or physical tactics training or other uses.

This is where setup time is a critical feature in portable systems: It’s the difference between spending valuable time training versus calibrating the system. Choosing the simulator with the fastest setup time will maximize the training your officers receive.

Your department only needs a room that can be darkened (preferably one without windows) where the computer/projector can be set up to establish a simulation station. Many systems include a screen or screens, but a white wall works just as well for projecting the video images. Systems with almost 360-degree surround screens are also available for full immersion.

Look for a system that is small and rugged so you can set it up for training anytime, anywhere. For example, Laser Shot’s SimRange package includes the console (computer/projector), wireless tablet and router, simulated weapons, speakers and a carrying case.





LOOK FOR A SYSTEM THAT IS PORTABLE, EASY TO USE, & THAT PROVIDES A REALISTIC EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING WEAPONS.

2 // EASE OF USE

The second consideration is ease of use. A system that's a hassle to set up and operate probably won't be used to its full potential. Look for a system that doesn't require a great deal of training or time to get up and running. For example, the SimRange can be set up and ready to use in 10 minutes.

As great as the interaction can be between an officer and the subjects projected on the screen, the ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses that become apparent during the exercise is of the utmost importance. Just going through the scenarios is not enough. A plug-and-play system that requires little to no training for the trainers means they can focus on instruction, feedback and evaluation, as well as after-action advice.

3 // REALISTIC WEAPONS SIMULATION

Inert firearms that fire lasers to track shots (along with every option in the use-of-force continuum, such as electronic control devices, batons, handcuffs and OC spray) should be part of any simulation training system. Skeptics might question whether laser-based training provides enough muscle memory when it comes to weapons, but many simulated weapons provide recoil and lifelike sound effects for a realistic but safe experience.

Consider what kind of weapon simulation best fits your department's needs. For example, Laser Shot offers a variety of simulated firearms, including:

- **Sensored:** Provide data feedback to instructor for weapon state, aiming data, and firing.
- **Recoil:** Use compressed air to action the bolt.
- **Dry-fire:** Simulated weapon without action or recoil (laser only).

The company also offers recoil conversion kits and laser modules to transform your own weapons into simulated recoil or dry-fire weapons.

Virtual reality scenario training offers a safe and scalable option for police departments to make sure their officers are prepared to handle life-or-death incidents in the real world. Choose a system that is durable, fits your available space, allows quick setup and easy use, and provides realistic weapons handling to take full advantage of this technology.

USING SIMULATION TRAINING TO PREPARE YOUR OFFICERS FOR **ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE**

By Steve Tracy

Law enforcement agencies today face great pressure to fully and continually train officers in a wide variety of responses, from computerized incident reports to sexual harassment training to Crisis Intervention Team training.

Perhaps most important is training to respond to an active shooter situation, where many lives are at stake and each second is critical.



THE EVOLUTION OF ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

Since the Columbine shooting in 1999, the role of the patrol officer has changed dramatically. Rapid response training, in which patrol officers are trained to enter a building and confront the shooter, began just months later. Officers were taught to enter in pairs or diamond formation in small groups and take the fight to the offender.

The rapid response approach took hold nationwide and transformed law enforcement's reaction to an active shooter incident from waiting for SWAT arrival to making quick entry to eliminate the threat as soon as possible.

Today's active shooter training emphasizes the necessity to engage the shooter as swiftly as possible, even if only a single officer is on scene. The public's expectation of quick confrontation and the fallout if it does not happen is evidenced by the aftermath of the 2018 Parkland school shooting, where the response was widely criticized as too little too late, and the local sheriff was suspended by the governor after parents accused him of failing to prevent the tragedy.

THE GOALS OF ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING

The key objectives of any activity-based training program are to induce a stress response, test the officer's decision-making and build officer confidence. Using a virtual reality training system with scenario-based simulations can help achieve all these goals.

For example, Laser Shot offers a library of more than 900 branching scenarios in its Judgmental Training Software to train officers for rapid decision-making in a wide variety of situations. Custom scenarios can also be filmed in public places within a department's jurisdiction, such as local schools or government buildings, providing ultimate realism based on worst-case scenarios that officers may encounter in the future.

Branching scenarios – meaning the outcome of the exercise changes based on the choices made by the instructor in response to the officer's actions – immerse officers in realistic portrayals of incidents lifted from recent headlines and FBI statistics. Each situation can be caused to branch in a multitude of options, allowing for an exponential number of variations.

**BRANCHING
SCENARIOS OFFER
AN EFFECTIVE AND
ECONOMICAL MEANS
TO PREPARE POLICE
OFFICERS FOR THE
RAPID DECISION-
MAKING REQUIRED
TO SAVE LIVES
AND ACHIEVE
A QUICK
RESOLUTION.**

INDUCING A STRESS RESPONSE

Active shooter training through virtual reality is able to induce psychological stress that is not usually available with other standard methods of training. Screaming and panicked victims and bystanders are real considerations that police officers deal with in genuine incidents. Explosions and gunfire are made more realistic with sound and special effects.





Faced with professionally written, acted and filmed scenarios that change according to how the officers react to the on-screen events, officers find themselves reacting as they would in real-life encounters – with raised voices, faster heartbeats, sweat and tunnel vision.

Many officers who have participated in virtual reality training and then faced a similar real-world incident have said that the experience felt just like the training.

TESTING DECISION-MAKING WITH VARIED SCENARIOS

Virtual reality allows for training in multiple settings and situations, and the branching scenarios play out in reaction to officers' actions. Officers can respond to a school shooting or an office building attack in a safe training environment while still being confronted with victims, employees, bystanders and witnesses fleeing the building as they rush to make entry.

Running toward the sound of gunfire, bypassing the injured to address an active shooter and engaging the shooter are all decisions made by a trainee officer. An instructor can respond to each decision by choosing different branches of the video presentation in order to make the training unpredictable and as close to the real thing as possible.

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

A police department would be hard-pressed to achieve the level of training that can be achieved with a simulator. The ability to organize together enough people and equipment to simulate a realistic active shooter incident at a real-world location would be an enormous task at an extraordinary cost.

Simulation training offers a much more efficient way to conduct active shooter training. The system can be used during any shift, and officers can attend the training in place of their regular duty time if staffing allows. Individual officers can go through numerous scenarios (school, office, warehouse, etc.) in a relatively short amount of time.

To keep it fresh, software updates with new scenarios will continue to make the training unpredictable – just like a real shooter – even after an entire department's staff has gone through the training several times.

Virtual reality simulation training using branching scenarios offers an effective and economical means to prepare police officers for an active shooter, especially the rapid decision-making required to save lives and achieve a quick resolution.

BUILDING OFFICER CONFIDENCE

The chief goal of any training program is to build the trainee's confidence in his or her skills, and that confidence is especially important when training to prevent a potential mass casualty incident. The realism and instant feedback available with simulation training that gives officers faith that they can handle a seriously dangerous response.

TRAINING TO **REDUCE USE OF FORCE** THROUGH SIMULATION

By Steve Tracy

Use of force is often debated, but it remains a necessary option for officers. The public requires trust in their protectors and demands that the police use only the force necessary to make an arrest or stop a deadly assailant. Consistent training is needed to make sure officers understand when and how to apply the use of force.

Training to reduce the use of force is difficult to teach in a classroom or roll call environment. The idea of proper use of force can be taught in a teacher/student setting and a written test can be given, but receiving a 100 percent score on a written test is not a true measure or indicator of an officer's future performance in the field.

TESTING DECISION-MAKING WITH SIMULATION TRAINING

It's one thing to pass a written test and another to make the right choices under stress in a reality-based scenario. Simulation training offers a realistic experience to test each officer's ability to make use of classroom training as he or she makes decisions in the moment. Simulation training requires officers to demonstrate what they know in action. Participants often exhibit physical stressors during the training, which makes it a realistic and valuable teaching tool.

Judgmental training software that provides a variety of scenarios with different outcomes can be tailored to the officer's actions to keep things unpredictable, just as they are in the field. An instructor observing an officer's verbal commands and physical interaction (such as movement, hand gestures and presentation of weapons) can choose different branches of the scenario to test the trainee's responses.

For example, if an officer asks a subject to take his hands out of his pockets, the instructor can respond by pressing a command key to cause the subject on the screen to remove his hands from his pockets.

Other options may include having the subject withdraw a knife or a gun from his pocket, or an ordinary item like a cellphone or a pack of cigarettes.

How the trainee responds will help identify if further training is necessary or if the officer is equipped to handle calls in a manner that ensures his or her own safety and the safety of others. Simulation allows mistakes to be made during training instead of in the field, helping officers to only use force when necessary and lawful.

TEACHING COMMAND PRESENCE

Virtual reality training may simply be thought of by many as “shoot/don’t shoot”, but it is much more nuanced than a Hogan’s Alley video game. Officers immersed in the training scenario can have access to an impact weapon, handcuffs, OC spray, an electronic control device or a firearm (pistol, rifle or shotgun). All of these tools mimic what the officer carries every day, and how he or she chooses to use any of them is a critical part of the training.

However, the most powerful item in an officer’s toolbox is his or her voice. Appropriate verbal commands can often de-escalate situations, and virtual reality training can remind officers that their verbal direction works. For example, the instructor may choose to have a virtual subject comply with an officer’s order to drop a gun or knife if the instructor feels that the trainee has demonstrated significant command presence.

Research by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers found that an individual officer who demonstrates command presence is likely to have a 99 percent success rate handling incidents. Virtual reality video instruction is an excellent tool for teaching command presence, says Dr. Terry Wollert, who holds a certification from the Force Science Institute in the analysis of use-of-force incidents and works with Laser Shot to develop its interactive simulation scenarios.

“A lack of command presence will result in a 99 percent failure rate,” said Wollert. “Officers who speak with a strong, authoritative tone and have knowledge of the law exhibit command presence.”

Simulation training enables the evaluation of command presence with a consistent set of stimuli. Instructors should strive to be as objective as possible in this evaluation and look for a lack of authoritative tone, along with a degree of hesitation and poor non-verbal body cues as signs that officers are questioning themselves, he adds.

Simulation scenarios also provide a good opportunity to teach situational commands. For example, officers can be educated that the command “Take your hands out of your pockets” may give a suspect the opportunity to retrieve a weapon and cause an officer to shoot. But the command to “Turn around and face away from me,” followed by further instruction to “Slowly show me each of your empty hands, one at a time” keeps the officer in charge.

If a suspect quickly takes his hands out of his pockets (whether armed or unarmed) in this scenario, the suspect is still violating the officer’s command, and further action – potentially including force – is needed.

PROVIDING CONSISTENT TRAINING & EVALUATION

Simulation training also provides a more consistent experience, Wollert says, because any sense of competition between instructor and trainee is removed. Although there is still an element of judgment in choosing how the scenarios play out, having an established library of outcomes allows instructors to know exactly what can happen in each episode and repeat as needed. This helps instructors evaluate specific skills as objectively as possible for each trainee.

Instructors can help identify officers’ strengths and weaknesses via playback of the finished scenario, showing where officers’ bullets struck or missed. Asking officers after each scenario, “What did you do and why did you do it?” provides practice that aids officers in writing good reports in the field.

Another advantage of simulation training is the ability to replay a real-life situation after the fact. After-action analysis helps officers understand how and why they make decisions in the moment, and if necessary, change tactics for a better outcome.

LEARNING BY DOING

One of the best ways to learn is by doing. Having officers performing the actual task and providing instant after-action feedback is a key training strategy to help officers know when their response to resistance meets a proper level where force becomes necessary. When officers encounter calls that require quick decision-making regarding use of force, they should have a “been there, done that” confidence that they have the tools to handle the situation.

Classroom instruction only goes so far. Scenario-based virtual reality training provides an active learning process where officers can get instant feedback on how they handle the most volatile types of encounters they are likely to face. This “learning by doing” approach helps build confidence to help officers to make the right decision regarding the use of force in response to resistance.

**SCENARIO-BASED
TRAINING PROVIDES
AN ACTIVE LEARNING
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WHY I BELIEVE IN SIMULATION TRAINING: **ONE OFFICER'S STORY**

By Rachel Zoch

Capt. Michael Curry discovered simulation training almost by accident. As a training officer with a suburban department in the Houston area, he found that the agency had purchased the Laser Shot training platform but wasn't making full use of it.

Curry started exploring what Laser Shot had to offer, first by using the platform to boost marksmanship. He worked with the department's firearms instructors to create a laser-based course to help officers struggling with their shooting qualification by providing training in a dry-fire environment at the station.

This effort yielded positive results right away, from greater control and customization of the training program to cost savings from reduced range fees and officer overtime. "No. 1, the cost-benefit analysis for using laser-based training versus live was the biggest issue," said Curry. "I could get more bang for my buck using the laser-based program."

IMPROVING TRAINING WITHOUT INCREASING COSTS

Because the department didn't need to worry about scheduling, overtime, travel to the range or ammunition expenses, officers were able to get as much training as they needed to boost their skills.

"We had very good success with this technique because it allowed us to get numerous numbers of rips and rounds down range in a very short period, without having to do all the scheduling," he added. "We were able to actually train officers on shift so they didn't need to be paid overtime."

In addition to improving officer performance and reducing expenses, using in-house simulation training also enabled the department to keep officers at the station so they could respond quickly when needed. "We were able to actually practice in the building," Curry said, "so if something did happen, we would just put the toys down, pick up our real guns and then respond accordingly."

The small footprint and mobility of the Laser Shot system provided a great deal of flexibility for the department. "It allows you to create a training environment just about anywhere," Curry said. "You can pick it up, put it in a case with all of the tools, take it anywhere and set it up."



CREATING CUSTOM SCENARIOS TO TRAIN FOR LOCAL ISSUES

Once he saw the positive impacts of simulation training, Curry began to expand the program, including working with Laser Shot to develop custom scenarios to train for specific local issues.

“We used every bit of the training apparatus. We used the judgmental scenarios. We used the games and the core skills drills to work on handling and marksmanship,” he said. “Just about everything they had to offer, I found a way to use it.”

Laser Shot collaborated with Curry and his team to create custom local scenarios, based on the agency’s specific needs and goals, with the department’s officers acting as role players. Being able to customize the scenarios is a key benefit, Curry says, and he appreciates that the company was willing to work with him to develop the custom scenarios when he didn’t see what he wanted in their existing catalog.

“We had a good working relationship, and they were able to make those scenarios come to life for us,” Curry said. “They were always open to suggestions and feedback.”

CAPT. MICHAEL CURRY APPRECIATES THE **REALISM**, **FLEXIBILITY**, AND **COST SAVINGS** OFFERED BY LASER SHOT’S TRAINING SIMULATOR.

BRINGING SIMULATION TRAINING TO A NEW AGENCY

Based on those experiences, Curry says it only made sense to bring Laser Shot’s training technology to his current agency, which serves a rural college campus about 45 miles north of Houston. He joined in the agency in late 2017 and hopes to have the system in place by June 2019.

To get ready for the simulator’s rollout, Curry is developing a three-stage process for all the department’s officers that includes moving drills and advanced weapon handling drills in both the dry-fire laser environment and live-fire drills.

“The goal is to use the Laser Shot training to get all our officers to an 80 or 90 percent threshold for marksmanship qualification and to maintain that into perpetuity,” he said. “It’s to get everybody comfortable doing what they need to do so that they are as accurate as they possibly can be when handling their firearms.”

He also envisions using the judgmental branching video scenarios for decision-making training and evaluation.

“I’ve put a sergeant into the environment, had them respond to whatever shows up on the screen in front of them, and then begin to walk through the incident command portion of the event,” said Curry. “So after all of the shooting is done – if shooting was even necessary – now let’s begin to discuss and evaluate the thought process on what needs to happen next.”

A key benefit of the judgmental branching scenarios, he says, is the opportunity to understand what the officer is thinking about and help him or her navigate possible responses. The instructor is then able to evaluate the trainee’s thought process as well as his or her performance in the exercise.

Curry also appreciates the realism provided by the Laser Shot simulator because he says it helps officers experience life-or-death situations in a controlled training environment.

“As a police trainer, I should be able to recreate the adrenaline, the feeling, the rush, the fear, in a scenario-based environment that causes you to think so you have the tools to operate in the real-world environment,” he said. “I call it putting these tools into the mental Rolodex of the officer. You should have made whatever mistakes you’re going to make in training and talk them through so you have the tools in your mental Rolodex to respond appropriately.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE

Preparing officers for the critical situations they will face in the field is a critical component of any agency’s training program. While marksmanship is a crucial skill, it is only part of the equation.

This eBook explores why both live fire and simulation are necessary for a well-rounded training program. Simulation training offers the opportunity to test trainees’ judgment in a way that simply can’t be accomplished on the range.

We’ll also cover how simulation training can save your agency money and enhance your current training efforts by providing real-time feedback and a variety of scenarios to evaluate decision-making and train for appropriate use of force.

These articles, plus a list of essential resources for more information, will help your department ensure that your officers are prepared for success.

- Nancy Perry, PoliceOne Editor-in-Chief

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CAN SIMULATION REPLACE LIVE-FIRE TRAINING?



“YES &” NOT “EITHER OR”

WHY YOUR AGENCY’S TRAINING PROGRAM SHOULD USE BOTH LIVE-FIRE AND SIMULATION

By Rachel Zoch

Training is often the first victim of a budget shortfall, and it’s a rare law enforcement agency that doesn’t have funding problems. Firearms is one of the more costly elements of a training program, and there can be pressure to economize in this area. One way to do this is to substitute simulator sessions for live fire training, but there can also be over-reliance on live fire. A balanced training program will include elements of both.

Decisions on whether to emphasize simulator or live fire training may be driven by the resources available to the agency. If there has been a substantial investment in a simulator, or if scheduling live fire training poses some difficult logistical issues, using the simulator looks like the more attractive option. Some simulators carry a price tag well into six figures, and the executive who has committed to such a purchase will want to demonstrate that the agency is making the most of it.

A similar pressure arises when range time is hard to come by. An agency that doesn’t have its own live fire range might have to schedule time on one that is far away, requiring substantial driving time for officers. Regular days off, vacations and the need to keep officers available for calls for service require that any range sessions be spread over multiple days, increasing the cost and complexity of the training session. Critics without practical police experience will attack a firearms training and qualification schedule where officers have to drive an hour each way to complete a live fire course that takes only a few minutes.



LIVE-FIRE BENEFITS

Periodic live fire sessions are indispensable, no matter what the cost. Live fire includes elements that a simulator cannot duplicate.

- **Weapon failures:** Many simulators don't employ the officer's sidearm, substituting a modified gun of the same or similar design. If the officer has not properly maintained his sidearm or it has some mechanical failure, and there is no live range time, the problem won't be discovered until he is in the middle of a real deadly force scenario.
- **Recoil:** The guns used in some simulators mimic recoil via gas cartridges, but the recoil of a live round is usually more forceful. Officers unaccustomed to true recoil might be deadeyes in the simulator but less effective with live fire.
- **Muzzle flash:** Simulators seldom replicate muzzle flash, especially as it's seen in dark environments. Shootings are statistically more likely to take place at night, so it's essential to train in real-world conditions.
- **Noise:** This is problematic in both livefire and simulation scenarios, as officers wear ear protection on the range and won't be exposed to the full sound of their weapons firing. Still, officers need to be cognizant of the sound pressure of live fire and understand that their hearing may be impaired after firing their guns without hearing protection.

While traditional live fire training can address these elements better than a simulator, simulator training has virtues that are difficult to duplicate with live fire. Most live fire training is going to be held on a pistol range with designated lanes for each shooter, with targets at one end and shooters on the other. A creative trainer can incorporate some decision-making exercises into a range session, but safety concerns limit the complexity and variation of such evolutions.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Weather also plays a role in firearms training. Officers may not mind going to the range in the spring and summer, but they have to work in all sorts of conditions, including, rain, snow and ice. A simulator cannot reproduce severe cold weather conditions, high winds or a downpour. Granted, the firearms trainer who schedules range time during inclement weather may not be very popular with the troops, but he's doing them a favor by conducting training in the same conditions his cops are working in.

For example, an officer might prefer to wear leather gloves in cold weather. Has he ever fired his sidearm while wearing those gloves? If the gloves are going to impair his weapon handling skills (spoiler alert: they will), it's much better to find that out on the range than when he needs all his talent with firearms to overcome an adversary.

SIMULATOR BENEFITS

Simulators usually come with multiple real-world scenarios, all with outcomes that are either selected in advance by the simulator operator, or that branch to different outcomes depending on the actions of the shooter.

For example, a simple traffic stop scenario could start with the violator pulling over to the side of the road, then immediately jumping out to open fire on the officer. When the scenario is run a second time, the motorist jumps out again, using similar gestures, but this time shouts that his wife is having a baby and he is rushing her to the hospital. This sort of drama and variation is all but impossible to re-create on a pistol range.

Because simulators are usually enclosed in a building and access is controlled, there is less opportunity for shooters waiting their turn to get a preview of the scenario and know what to expect. Gun ranges are large, open spaces out of necessity, and it's much more difficult to keep officers who are not actively participating from watching those who are shooting.

Cops tend to be very competitive people, and many will use any advantage they can to appear to excel on the exercise, even if it defeats the part of the training objective.

COMPARING THE TWO

Live fire on a pistol range helps shooters experience the report of the gun, recoil, muzzle flash, environmental elements and the need for marksmanship and safe weapons handling.

Simulators are more effective for judgmental, shoot/don't shoot decision-making training, where a scenario can be replayed as many times as necessary to ensure the officer/shooter is using force at the appropriate level and in the appropriate circumstances. Just as importantly, the simulator also produces situations where force is not necessary or desired.

Both settings – range and simulator – are necessary to ensure a sound use-of-force training program.



WHY POLICE AGENCIES NEED SIMULATION TRAINING

By Tim Dees

**ALTHOUGH LIVE
FIRE TRAINING
WILL ALWAYS BE
NECESSARY, IT
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CRITICAL
DECISION-MAKING
SKILLS**

Police officers have always had situational, decision-making training in use-of-force situations, but the old-school approach was to use role players and scripted scenarios. The players were usually other cops, people who were often familiar to the trainees. It was difficult to eliminate the human element factor that could turn the training experience upside down.

And role players didn't always stick to the script. If the trainee was someone personally known to them, they might make the scenario easier or more difficult, depending on their personal bias. Some role players resented "losing" the scenario, e.g. being bested by the trainee, even when the trainee did everything right and should have prevailed.

The training coordinators who were devising the scenarios and giving the instructions often didn't have much of a choice about who would serve as role players. Further, the "sets" on which the scenarios were played out required a considerable amount of imagination, as most agencies didn't have access to facilities that resembled the real-world environments where the scenario was supposed to be taking place.



CREATING REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS TO TEST JUDGMENT

The advent of simulation training made this easier. Firearms simulators have evolved significantly since the 1980s, when the earliest models ran off of laser discs and there were seldom more than a handful of scenarios to choose from. Modern simulators record their scenarios on Hollywood-quality sets with players who both follow the prescribed story line and put on a convincing act. The scenarios are recorded with multiple setups and outcomes, branching according to the direction of the simulator operator and the actions of the shooter/trainee who is negotiating the situation.

“You can get to be pretty adept at making good decisions under duress by simulation training,” said Rich Nance, principal at Wartac CQC, a combatives training company. “It focuses on the decision-making component.”

Simulators excel at teaching decision-making skills, but they cannot completely supplant live fire range training or duplicate the practice of handling a live firearm and sensing the recoil, noise and other physical dynamics of shooting.

“You still need the live fire component because you have to be able to manage the recoil of your weapon, you have to understand what’s going to happen, you have to know what it feels like, you have to be able to hit what you’re aiming at,” said Nance. “These are all critical skills as well, but that’s more like the hard skills, whereas the soft skills are what we need the most work on, and that’s what’s the most neglected, that simulation aspect of it. The decision-making component is the most important and the least addressed aspect of training.”

Because simulators can provide something very close to a real world experience, including different outcomes based on different choices made by trainees in the moment, this technology helps police trainers bridge that gap and better address decision-making and use of force issues.

Simulators also make decision-making training more cost-effective. Modern simulators have a significant initial purchase cost but usually require only a single trainer to set up and run the system. Personnel costs are by far the biggest line item in a law enforcement agency’s budget. When the per-hour or per-trainee costs of simulator training are compared with the bill that comes with running multiple role-playing scenarios, each with its own set of “actors,” the simulator purchase price looks a lot more reasonable.



WHY YOUR AGENCY NEEDS BOTH

A sound use-of-force training program includes both live fire and simulator components. Both live fire and simulator training can reveal deficiencies that can be addressed as needed. When there are problems with basic marksmanship, e.g. the shooter isn’t hitting the target, they may be able to get in some inexpensive practice in the simulator before returning to the live fire range. Decision-making errors in the simulator can be addressed by a review of use-of-force policies and discussion with a qualified trainer before the shooter has to negotiate a similar situation on the street.

Even the best simulator can’t replace live fire training, and live fire training is more effective and less expensive when supplemented with simulated use-of-force scenarios. Neither can replace the other, but used together, simulation and live fire training work to make a well-rounded program.

3 WAYS

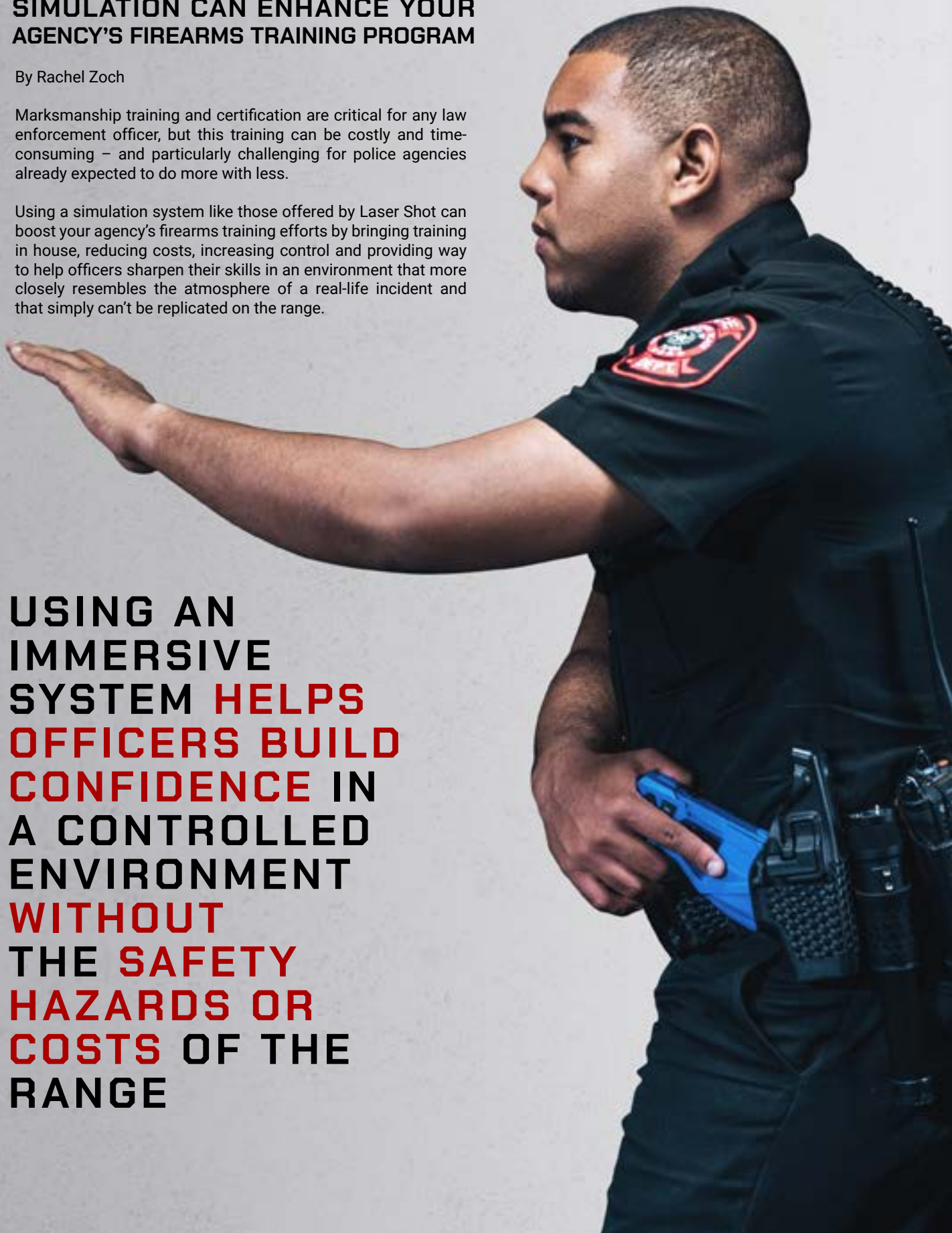
SIMULATION CAN ENHANCE YOUR AGENCY'S FIREARMS TRAINING PROGRAM

By Rachel Zoch

Marksmanship training and certification are critical for any law enforcement officer, but this training can be costly and time-consuming – and particularly challenging for police agencies already expected to do more with less.

Using a simulation system like those offered by Laser Shot can boost your agency's firearms training efforts by bringing training in house, reducing costs, increasing control and providing way to help officers sharpen their skills in an environment that more closely resembles the atmosphere of a real-life incident and that simply can't be replicated on the range.

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1 // CREATING REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS TO TEST JUDGMENT

From most qualifying distances, it's hard to see exactly where a bullet strikes the paper target. But the Laser Shot simulator provides precise shot markings, shows every shot in sequential order, and allows instructors and students to review their after-action reports within seconds. "There are various issues that can be diagnosed based on where their bullets are falling on that paper, but on a live range, it's very difficult to tell," said Scott Goodhart, senior account executive for Laser Shot. "They have to keep moving the paper back and forth or walking down the line, stopping everybody else from shooting, and then addressing the fundamentals and the mechanics."

On a live-fire range, an instructor can't safely stand too near a shooter. In a simulated environment, however, instructors can stand alongside or even in front of their students to correct stance, grip and other fundamental skills in the moment, even before the gun fires and recoils. This helps promote correct technique and avoids the potential for shooters to develop bad habits that have to be unlearned.

"The simulation environment is a great place to hone the basic skills that make a successful shooter," said Goodhart. "The simulator allows you to correct bad habits, and all of those things combined help you mitigate risks down the road."

2 // EVALUATE DECISION-MAKING IN A VARIETY OF SCENARIOS

Marksmanship is only part of the training officers need to succeed in the field – and it's no secret that the world is not a nice, neat, controlled environment.

This is where the simulator plays a key role. Testing officers' judgment in scenario-based training, where they are immersed into a specific environment with variables selected by the instructor, helps trainers assess and guide students' decision-making process.

"A training instructor can expose them to different things that they might encounter while on the job, whether it be day, night, bad weather, lots of other ambient noises going on," said

Goodhart. "They can set up different obstacles, barricades or role-playing environments, all within the comfort and safety of the classroom – because you'd rather make a mistake in the classroom than out on the street."

Goodhart says some agencies also incorporate the simulator into their physical conditioning programs to combat the effects of stress and physical exertion on performance and accuracy.

"For example, they will do maybe a series of 10 up-downs, 10 situps, 10 pushups, and then as soon as they finish, they immediately draw their firearm and put five rounds on a given target at whatever distance their instructor does," he said.

3 // SAVE MONEY BY BRINGING TRAINING IN HOUSE

Simulation training can literally mean more bang for your buck. The simulators are portable and can be set up in any darkened room, so departments can take them from station to station. After the initial investment, the department should see cost savings in reduced paid time on the range, as well as less spending on ammunition, range fees and other related costs. Shooting is a perishable skill, says Goodhart, and simulation training helps agencies provide more opportunities for officers to practice.

"If you have troubled shooters that are constantly having to go back to the range and requalify, then you can bring them in house, practice those fundamentals and see their progression over time," he said. "Whereas most departments are allotted maybe 50 to 100 rounds to practice with every quarter, you can easily shoot 500 to 1,000 rounds in 30 minutes as a single person practicing the different skill assessments that we offer."

PREPARE OFFICERS FOR THE FIELD

Helping officers hone their skills and build confidence using the simulator, says Goodhart, can translate not only to better performance but also faster qualifications and recertifications – and more importantly, better outcomes in the field.

"When they do get to the range and it's time to qualify, they're not missing shots," he said. "They're confident in what they're doing and they're, as we say, driving tacks and punching holes in the center of the paper."

Training with many different settings and scenarios instead of shooting at a piece of paper in a well-lit, well-controlled range environment helps law enforcement agencies better prepare officers for the unpredictability of the field.

"The system allows an instructor to throw their officers into a very realistic, stressful environment, as well as speed shooting drills to really test their proficiency," said Goodhart. "If you don't have those fundamental mechanics that you start with, they will show up as a problem down the road."



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