LAW OFFICER ROLL CALL

Barricaded Subjects in Confined Spaces: Approach and Contact

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TOPIC Approach and contact with armed subjects barricaded in crawlspaces, basements, and storage rooms

INCIDENT

Carbondale, about 10:05 a.m. Central time: officers went to the 200 block of Emerald Lane for a follow up to a domestic disturbance. Police said an armed suspect barricaded himself in the crawlspace under the house and fired a weapon at officers, striking one officer in the leg. Officers returned fire but did not strike the suspect. The officer was taken to an area hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. At about 1:15 p.m., Carbondale police, Illinois State Police, and Jackson County deputies took the suspect into custody. Illinois State Police is investigating at Chief Anthony Copeland's request.

Denver, about 12:30 p.m. Mountain time: 911 callers reported a man with a gun near 19th Street and Chestnut Place. Chief Ron Thomas said the man himself called, said he was armed and a "danger to himself and others," and had locked himself in a basement storage area. Thomas said officers knocked and identified themselves. When the door opened, the man was holding a handgun. Officers told him to drop the gun and show his hands. "Instead, he raised the pistol, fired at least one round, we believe, striking one of our officers," Thomas said. Officers returned fire and struck him a number of times. Police said the officer's injury was not serious. A department post said it may have come from a round hitting the duty belt, which has not been confirmed. Thomas said the suspect, a man in his 40s, was in critical condition at Denver Health. Names and the Carbondale weapon have not been released. This is not an after-action. We do not have the full tactics or the video.

KEY LESSONS

1. Slowing down. When a subject is inside a tight space and is not actively hurting someone, time can work for you. A negotiator's most important ally is time, and field commanders should not rush anything unless the loss of life appears imminent. Added time may let an agency plan, establish rapport, and calm the person inside. That is not a rule to stand still while someone is being shot, or while an armed person is about to meet a resident. None of this is meant to prevent or delay acting in defense of life. Chief Thomas said officers wanted to encounter the man in Denver before someone else did.

2. Cover and distance. Crawlspaces, basements, and storage rooms cut your options. The person inside may have cover, a hidden angle, and a single opening you have to use. We do not know where the Carbondale officers were standing, or how much room the Denver officers had at that door. Before you knock, call out, or step to an opening, look at what will stop a round and what will not. A crawlspace opening can send a shot from below. Give yourself distance if the layout allows it, and do not stand in the only path the muzzle already owns.

3. Time and resources. The Carbondale incident ran from about 10:05 a.m. to custody at about 1:15 p.m., with three agencies on scene by the end. A contained barricade can take time and help from outside your own department. Think early about a supervisor, perimeters, a command post, medical resources, and a specialty team or negotiator. If you cannot hold a long barricade, know in advance how to get help.

4. Containment or entry. Field officers who respond should contain first, and weigh forcing a person out against the risk. In some cases the best course may be to stand down. That is your agency's legal and policy call, not a blanket order from this briefing. Containment means holding the exits you can hold and keeping uninvolved people out. Entry or close contact may still be necessary if someone is being hurt, if the subject can reach other people, or if a shot has already been fired and you have to stop it. Have a plan for both, including when immediate action is authorized.

5. Communication. In Denver, the man called 911 himself and said he was armed and a danger to himself and others. That information should get to the officers before they reach the door. The incident should be contained before negotiations start, and trained negotiators should take the talking once a call is more than a quick resolution. At the door, keep commands loud, simple, and consistent. Officers in Denver told the man to drop the gun and show his hands. He raised the pistol and fired instead. When that happens, the problem is no longer a talking problem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If an armed subject is in a crawlspace, basement, or locked storage room, what tells you to hold a perimeter, and what would make immediate contact necessary?
2. In a tight space with little cover, where do you and your partner stand before you knock or call out?
3. What resources do you want started early, and who asks for them?
4. If the subject has called 911 and said he is armed and a danger to himself and others, how does that change your approach?
5. If the door opens and a gun is in the subject's hand, what do you expect in the next few seconds?

BOTTOM LINE

In a crawlspace, a basement, or a locked storage room, take the time and cover you can, hold what you can hold, and be ready if the door opens and the gun comes up.

SOURCES

Full article and sources: https://www.lawofficer.com/barricaded-suspect-carbondale-denver/

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