



CITY OF MADISON POLICE DEPARTMENT  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE



**Threats of Targeted or Mass Casualty Violence**

Eff. Date 01/16/2023

**Purpose**

To provide a consistent and comprehensive response to threats of targeted or mass casualty violence, including in our schools, businesses, and public places. Typically, these threats or warning behaviors require immediate action and investigative steps by first responding officers and investigators.

This procedure establishes the expectations for the initial response to a threat or report of concerning behavior in order to facilitate behavior-based threat assessment in an effort to best prevent incidences of targeted or mass casualty violence. This procedure governs communications received in person, telephonically, and electronically to include communications via any social media platform.

**Glossary**

**Imminence:** Officers should examine the threat itself and ask the complainant and other available sources about the following factors to structure a professional judgment as to the impending nature of the threat they are investigating.

**Inhibitors:** In threat assessment, this is anything that serves to decrease the likelihood that a subject's behavior will escalate to an act of targeted violence (e.g., familial bonds, strong friendships, or employment).

**Interception:** If a threat is imminent, all efforts should focus on locating, containing and arresting the suspect. Post-arrest investigative steps should be pursued in accordance with normal department practices.

**Risk Factors:** Existing realities about the person of concern that may increase the risk of violence they pose in a given situation.

**Risk Levels:** To determine a risk level, research has shown certain elements to be present in communications and persons of concern. Not all elements need to be present for the risk level to be achieved. There are four identified risk levels: low risk, moderate risk, elevated risk, and high risk or imminent. See risk level addendum for full descriptions.

**Pathway to Violence:** A series of sequential steps – from its beginning with a felt grievance, to violent ideation, research, and planning, specific preparations for violence, critical breaches of security or other boundaries, to a concluding attack – which indicate that an individual is progressing towards an act of targeted violence.

**Person of Concern:** An individual who may become the subject of the investigation due to suspicious or threatening activity to include indicators of potentially dangerous behavior.

**Threat:** A declaration of an intention or determination to inflict punishment, injury, etc., in retaliation for, or conditionally upon, some action or course.

**Threat Assessment:** A fact-based method of assessment/investigation that focuses on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, they are moving toward an attack on an identifiable target.

**Warning Behaviors:** Changes in patterns of behavior that may be evidence of increasing or accelerating risk.

## Procedure

Each incident reporting threats of targeted or mass casualty violence should be taken seriously and be investigated fully and promptly. Responding officers shall notify a supervisor at the beginning of the investigation and should consider consultation with appropriate Madison Police Department (MPD) resources (Mental Health Unit (MHU), Criminal Intelligence Section (CIS), etc.) as needed.

Although formal enforcement action is often indicated, investigating officers should consult with MHU if possible prior to taking enforcement action such as an arrest or citation. State charges should strongly be considered in most cases, to include physical arrests (jail, Juvenile Reception Center (JRC)), fingerprint/photo-release of juveniles to parent, or citations appropriate to the circumstances.

Once sufficient information has been obtained, investigating personnel will evaluate the imminence of the threat. In high imminence cases, responding officers should then transition their efforts from investigation to locating and apprehending the suspect (interception). In circumstances where information supports a lower imminence evaluation, officers should conduct an initial investigation into the suspect and behavior.

## Investigative Responsibilities

### Patrol Officer

1. Responding officers should notify a supervisor at the beginning of the investigation (or as soon as practical) and should consider consultation with appropriate MPD resources (Mental Health Unit, Criminal Intelligence Section, etc.) as needed. Notification of a Mental Health Officer and Journey Mental Health should be done while in contact with the suspect or prior to contacting the suspect (if possible).
2. Responding officers should identify the threat or concern with specificity and detail. Officers should consider the following in the assessment:
  - a. The communication suggests all inhibitors to violence are gone; the person's life is rapidly changing in a manner that compels violence.
  - b. The communication presents a time or violent action imperative.
  - c. The communication suggests the author perceives that outside factors are closing the window of opportunity for an attack.
  - d. A communication indicates that a breach or attack has already begun; claims credit for or rationalizes an attack; or establishes the author's legacy.
  - e. A communication is written in such a way to imply the author is already dead.
3. Officers should ask about evidence of the following behaviors regarding the person of concern:
  - a. Acquisition of equipment or weapons, rehearsal, or training.
  - b. Circumventing security measures at a target location, probing security, approaching or stalking the target.
  - c. Exhibiting an increased pace or rate of activities related to a potential target.
  - d. Exhibiting increased distress, diminishing alternatives to violence, or a decompensation in self-care or hygiene.
  - e. Taking concrete steps to prepare for the end of their life.
  - f. Recent withdrawal from normal life patterns and/or physical withdrawal to somewhere with increased privacy.
  - g. Suddenly ceasing the use of regular medication or substance use.
4. Officers should preserve all evidence, both physical and digital. This includes noting social media or other digital account names and passwords if available.
5. Responding officers should make all reasonable efforts to positively identify the source of the threat.
6. Officers should also identify the victims or targeted persons. This may be the complainant, another individual or group (such as a school class or work team), or a population affiliated with

an institution or organization. All persons mentioned explicitly or reasonably believed to be the subject of a direct threat should be positively identified and contacted by law enforcement.

7. Officers should assist potential victims or targeted persons in the creation of a safety plan where feasible/appropriate.
8. A priority report shall be completed prior to the end of the officer's shift.

Generally, the more of these imminence factors present, the more imminent the threat. An imminent threat may present with just one of these factors.

### **Patrol Sergeant**

1. Monitor or respond in the beginning of the investigation and should consult with appropriate MPD resources (Mental Health Unit, Criminal Intelligence Section, etc.) as needed.
2. A field supervisor should respond to every reported threat of targeted or mass casualty violence.
3. The supervisor should assist the investigating officer in evaluating the threat.
4. If an imminent threat is present, the supervisor shall direct resources to intercept the threat and to take the suspect into custody.
5. Supervisors should direct the investigation with the goal of referring charges for any criminal violations present.
6. The supervisor shall ensure that the Officer In Charge (OIC) is notified in a timely manner.

### **Officer-In-Charge (OIC)**

1. During imminent threats, the OIC shall notify district command staff per Notification of Commanding Officer Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).
2. Additionally, in imminent threats, the Captain of Community Outreach and/or the Lieutenant of Community Outreach & Emergency Management shall be contacted.

### **Follow-up Investigations**

Threats of targeted or mass casualty violence shall be assigned to a district detective for initial follow up by the appropriate district detective lieutenant. The district detective lieutenant should also notify the Mental Health Unit about the assigned threat investigation. Follow up investigators should consider consent or compulsory searches of the suspect's vehicle and room, searching for weapons, plans, or statements and evidence speaking to the suspect's state of mind or veracity of the threat. Investigators should also generally interview the person of concern directly and in person.

The MHU Sergeant should consult with the CIS Sergeant, embedded crisis workers, and detectives with additional threat assessment training. Through consultation, the MHU Sergeant should assign additional resources as needed.

### **Case Management**

After a threat assessment has been completed and a risk level has been identified, a management strategy should be implemented. To the extent possible, efforts should be made to connect individuals with resources in order to positively engage persons of concern and to interrupt the pathway to violence. All outreach efforts shall be documented in a report.

### **Risk Level Addendum**

**(Source: *Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks*, FBI 2015)**

## Risk Levels

To determine a risk level, research has shown these elements to be present in communications and persons of concern. All elements do not need to be present for the risk level to be achieved.

### ***Imminent:***

#### Concerning Communication

- The communication suggests all inhibitors to violence are gone; the person's life is rapidly changing in a manner that compels violence.
- The communication presents a time or violent action imperative.
- The communication suggests the author perceives that outside factors are closing the window of opportunity for an attack.
- A communication indicates that a breach or attack has already begun; claims credit for or rationalizes an attack; or establishes the author's legacy.
- A communication is written in such a way to imply the author is already dead.

#### Persons of Concern

- Acquisition of equipment or weapons, rehearsal or training.
- Circumventing security measures at a target location, probing security, approaching or stalking the target.
- Exhibiting an increased pace or rate of activities related to a potential target.
- A person exhibiting demonstrating increased distress, diminishing alternatives to violence, or a decompensation in self-care or hygiene.
- A person has taken concrete steps to prepare for the end of their life.
- A person who has recently withdrawn from normal life patterns and/or physically withdrawn to somewhere with increased privacy.
- A person who has suddenly ceased the use of regular medication or substance use.

### ***High Risk***

#### Concerning Communication

- Language is more action oriented
- Message is phrased as though the relationship with the person will be coming to an end
- Statements conveying action will be taken to resolve the grievance
- Message contains the means and ability for the person to carry of the threat
- Expressions of accepting responsibility for the violence and that violence is the only option to achieve a sense of justice

#### Persons of Concern

- Virtually or actually rehearsing the attack to ensure their ability to commit violence
- Finalized planning and preparing for an attack
- Attempting to breach target's security
- A person may exhibit a combination of concerning warning behaviors and risk factors
- Has the means and ability to carry out a violent attack
- Appears willing to accept all consequences
- Violence appears to be the only option

### ***Elevated Risk***

#### Concerning Communication

- Reflects an increase in intensity and/or severity
- Multiple methods of delivery may be used (e.g. in-person, phone, mail, email, text, etc.)

- Indications that research has been conducted on the target and has acquired necessary inside, personal, or background information on potential victims
- References to 'special authority' for violent action, such as divine sanction
- Directed or fixated on a cause or person
- A dramatic increase in tone in a series of communication
- Statements referencing time sensitivity

#### Persons of Concern

- Stressors in a person's life may be escalating
- Suicidal/homicidal ideations may be present
- Person may desire recognition and believes violence can help them achieve this
- Recent acquisition of weapons and training with them that are contextually inappropriate and an escalation from the person's norm
- Spending lots of time on research and/or surveillance

### **Moderate Risk**

#### Concerning Communication

- Explains a grievance and may suggest violence is being considered
- Statements indicating the person has conducted some research and has acquired some knowledge beyond what is publicly known
- Reference to engaging in warning behaviors and presence of risk factors
- No sense of urgency and may still be pursuing peaceful alternative to resolving the grievance
- Communication may suggest ambivalence indicating their mind may not be made up that violence is the only answer

#### Person of Concern

- Absence of significant inhibitors
- May have a grievance and is more likely to be considering violence as an option
- May not have made a decision to act out violently
- Others are concerned person may become violent
- Exhibiting some warning behaviors
- May be engaged in the research and planning phase by gathering more information on a target
- Increased number of risk factors that may not be appropriately managed
- Present or forthcoming stressors that may negatively impact the person

### **Low Risk**

#### Concerning Communication

- Causes some concern about potential violence, but may be confusing, unrealistic, or make no allusions to violence at all
- No clear grievance
- Communication appears to be venting instead of warning of future predatory violence
- References to the possibility for peaceful resolutions
- Referencing of inaccurate information about a target
- Non-committal language
- Threatened action may be unrealistic or improbable (i.e. "I will plant a nuclear bomb at work")
- Phrased to try to convince the reader of its seriousness rather than conveying the seriousness (e.g. "This is not a joke.")
- Method of delivery does not suggest an in person approach

Person of Concern

- The person's actions and language still suggest they are seeking a peaceful resolution
- If the person has a grievance, it has not reached the level where violence appears justified
- Violence may not be an acceptable means to achieve justice to the person
- No pressing time imperative
- Threat may serve as venting
- Few or no warning behaviors and risk factors
- Circumstances make it nearly impossible for the person to carry out the threat (i.e., person is incarcerated and does not have someone willing to act on their behalf)
- Inhibitors outweigh enhancers

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