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PLANNING FOR MASS DEMONSTRATIONS

One of the biggest balancing acts for police departments during mass demonstrations is to maintain order, yet allow individuals to express their freedom of speech. Many events from the past have helped shape policies and procedures for mass demonstrations today. These events have turned into case studies for police departments across the country, and provided accurate data as they plan for mass demonstrations. Those events have helped shape the standards for preparation that departments across the country have implemented. What are some of the things that officers need to do before, during, and after a mass demonstration? This blog entry shares some of the best practices that are being used today.

Mass demonstrations can present unique challenges for police, public safety, and security departments. Navigating the line between maintaining order and allowing freedom of expression can be tricky—and going too far in either direction can have disastrous consequences. How can schools, cities, and other organizations proceed wisely and ensure positive, peaceful demonstrations? Many organizations look to the past, and use experience from past events to help shape policies and procedures for demonstrations today. Past events can serve as case studies to guide preparation and offer insight into what to do before, during, and after a mass demonstration.

In order to be prepared for mass demonstrations, police, public safety, and security need to have a plan in place. Some mass demonstrations are known of well in advance, while others are more spontaneous in nature. However, each and every department should have a basic plan that can be adaptable to fit the situation. Many

agencies that have dealt with mass demonstrations assert that careful planning helped the events go off without any major hitches. After dealing with mass demonstrations that went poorly or resulted in violence, many agencies state that they should've had a better, more effective plan of action.

One of the most important elements of a plan is communication with other local, regional, and/or national agencies that will be sharing resources and knowledge during the event. Enhanced communication will increase the efficiency in the case that a coordinated response is needed. In addition to law enforcement, the department should work with local stakeholders, including local elected officials, area business owners, public transportation officials, medical facilities, venue managers, and more, as these individuals and groups are most likely to be affected by the demonstration.

Another important aspect of the planning process is your department's relationship with the media. More likely, media outlets will cover the demonstration from start to finish, so it is imperative that they are informed about their roles and responsibilities. Many organizations proactively plan for success by hosting media forums prior to demonstrations. This type of event allows journalists, government officials, and law enforcement to establish expectations for the demonstration. Additionally, some departments may want to give media officials identifiers other than media credentials, such as an armband or vest, so they can stand out in the crowd while the event takes place.

Lastly, when planning for mass demonstrations, officials need to expect the unexpected. An effective plan prepares for things that might not go as intended. During the planning process, all "what-ifs" and worst-case scenarios need to be considered. Planning for every possible situation allows for the department to be prepared for anything and everything that could occur during a mass demonstration.

Law enforcement agencies are always training for situations that may occur in their jurisdiction. However, training for large-scale events in coordination with other agencies is a relatively new practice, and these combined training situations are critical to the success of planning for a large mass demonstration.

Training should be specific for each category of officers within a force. For example, a commander and an officer will not receive the same training because their roles are very different. However, specific training doesn't mean that there aren't distinct areas of overlap. Each position plays a crucial role in ensuring the proper implementation of the safety plan before, during, and after a mass demonstration. Training for each position in law enforcement should feature the same mission, strategy, and terminology, because this consistency is key to the success of the plan.

Training can (and should) take place in varied settings, including lectures, simulations, or field exercises. These training sessions should feature a review of any applicable laws, civil liberties regarding mass demonstration events, use-of-force and restraint policies, de-escalation techniques, and statements about officer conduct.

Classroom training is good for reviewing policies and procedures, but field training is best for trying out the plan itself.

When training with partner agencies, it is extremely important for the host agency to inform the other agencies of the terminology/lexicon that will be used. Differences between terminology at particular law enforcement agencies may cause confusion, so agencies collaborating for mass demonstrations should plan and train beforehand to set parameters, establish a memorandum of understanding, and ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Creating a well thought-out plan to prepare for mass demonstrations is important, but so is the ability to implement the plan when it's needed. When a plan is implemented, a minimal chain of command is essential. One of the most effective structures for a chain of command contains three levels – strategic, operational, and tactical. On the strategic level, the incident commander is responsible for the event. For mass demonstration events, the incident commander is often the police chief. In this role, the individual must be able to develop, plan, and implement an operation involving many agencies – they are effectively the owner of the event and everything falls underneath them.

On the operational level, an operational commander is the person responsible for managing the actual deployment and response to the event. This individual helps guide how the response is managed during the event. While the event takes place, the operational commander assesses the situation, considers new intelligence, assesses available resources, and balances competing demands that may arise.

On the tactical level, a field commander manages the application of resources according to the operational commander's plan. The issues that they deal with relate to front-line decision making and tactic application. If plans need to change, they are usually verbalized and not written down, which can be challenging when conducting a post-event review of the response.

Another important facet of effective implementation of the plan for a mass demonstration is to have proper radio communication channels for all those involved. When multiple organizations are involved, communication can become complicated, making proper access to technology crucial for law enforcement. Radio communication channels should be established for the strategic, operational, and tactical commanders, along with the field officers, a channel for logistical issues, and a channel for "normal," non-mass demonstration related activity.

With respect to technology, officers can boost efficiency by using law enforcement and mobile apps, such as Omnigo mobile patrol, to help them document incidents as they occur at the event. The app also allows officers to access any important documents, such as the communication plan for the mass demonstration, from the palm of their hand.

Lastly, before the event takes place, barriers should be put in place to assist in crowd management and control. The type of barrier should reflect the intended use. For example, police bicycles are often used as a barrier that maintains a friendly, positive community image. They can be used to screen the crowd and control access to and from certain areas. Other barriers that could be used for planned events include metal fencing or cement dividers.

After the mass demonstration, all law enforcement agencies should review the event's happenings from start to finish. In this debriefing session, officials should do a step-by-step evaluation of every aspect of the event, discussing both positive and negative outcomes. After the debriefing session takes place, the conversations should be written down and summarized so they can be referenced in the future.

Conducting public surveys with local stakeholders and area citizens is also beneficial. The purpose of these surveys is to gather their opinions about how the agencies involved handled the event and how the public perceived the demonstration overall. These surveys can help shape the planning and preparation for future events that the department may have to manage.

After reviewing the outcomes of the demonstration, the lead agency should create a document that recaps the event from start to finish. In order for this document to be as complete and thorough as possible, everyone that participated in the event to also participated in executing the event response plan should also participate in the compiling of this report. The document may also include lessons learned and tips on planning for the next event.

Managing a mass demonstration is complicated, but proper planning and preparation, can help ensure better, safer outcomes. By implementing these best practices, police departments and other agencies can be more prepared for mass demonstrations and more effectively walk the line between maintaining safety, **security**, and order while allowing freedom of expression.

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THE POLICE TRAINING SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES