

Learning to use force **By Christina Chapman**

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The police may be the law, but that doesn't mean they can abuse their authority.

April 8 was the fourth class of the Morris Citizen's Police Academy, but unfortunately due to another assignment I was given, I was absent from this class.

But since being absent isn't exactly a crime, Detective Sgt. Scott Henderson agreed to meet with me and talk about what I missed.

Henderson gave the class their first test before his lesson. It was on officer survival and use of force. He tested them first to get an idea of what the class believed officers did when put in a situation where force is required.

The first step officers take in arresting a subject and assessing how difficult of an arrest it may be is pretty simple: They talk to the subject.

"We start with dialogue. We tell them they are under arrest and they're coming with us," Henderson said. "Most of the time they come with us at that point and walk to the squad with their hands behind their back."

Maybe out of shock or stubbornness, the subject may need a little help getting to the squad and then an officer may take their arm and lead them, he said.

At this point if he or she is still not cooperating, an officer can get compliance by using pain. Officers have different ways of doing this, but a common one Henderson said he uses is a wrist lock, which applies pressure to a nerve in the wrist and tends to get the subject moving.

"We use a few small things to get them moving in the right direction," Henderson said.

After these measures, officers have the option of getting a little rougher and get "compliance by mechanical." An example would be knocking the wind out of the subject just to scare them enough to cooperate, Henderson said.

The last two options include impeding with a nightstick, pepper spray, Taser gun or other device.

"The last way is to use our weapon to stop someone because we can't do it any other way," Henderson said.

Unlike on TV, police do not shoot warning shots into the air. This was a true or false question I actually got correct.

But what is usually portrayed correctly on TV is what officers say when confronting an armed subject.

Although it had always been a nightmare for Henderson when he is partnered with a rookie officer, he said luckily he has never had a rookie drop their own weapon when Henderson shouted, "Police drop your weapon!"

Though police officers have the liberty to use any of these procedures, they do not have to go in any order. If a subject has a weapon pointed at an officer, the officer is not going to simply say, "You are under arrest, and coming with me." He is going to skip this and draw his weapon in return.

But police do consider the aspects of the situation and the differences between the officer and the subject.

"It's a totality of circumstances," Henderson said.

Factors include age, sex, size, skill level and the number of officers and subjects in the situation. If the subject is a 120-pounder woman and the officer is a 200-pound man, this is considered. It is the same if the arresting officer is 120-pound female and the subject is a 200-pound male, Henderson said.

As upset as I am that I missed the use of force class and could not volunteer to help demonstrate the use of the wrist-lock, I am very excited for the fifth class where we will learn how to do a building search.

I haven't gotten to play cops and robbers since I was a kid. Rumor has it we're going to get to use fake guns. Now I just have to decide if I want to play the cop or the robber.

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