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Local officers gain real life firearms training without firing their weapons

Sara Denhart

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TRAINING DAY: Kentucky State Police Trooper Ryan Gosser fires a laser pistol at a man on a video screen who drew a weapon on Gosser during a mock domestic violence call. The situation was a simulation produced as part of IES Interactive Training's "Use of Force and Firearm Training" at the Carrollton City Hall. (Staff photo by Ken Ritchie)

Even though video games are becoming more and more realistic, the interactive training equipment the Carrollton Police Department and other area law enforcement agencies are using from the Kentucky Association of Counties has an element that video games do not have - a psychological aspect.

The use-of-force and firearms training the police officers will be using during the next two weeks is realistic, with actors portraying characters in intense and dangerous situations that cause trainees to become psychologically involved.

"It puts more of a real-world approach to firearms training," city Police Chief Michael Willhoite said.

The police officers do not shoot a single round of ammunition during the training. The trainee picks up a piece of equipment that looks like a handgun but uses a laser. A simulated electroshock weapon and a simulated can of pepper spray also are available.

With each squeeze of the trigger, officers can shoot the electronic hand-held device, fire electronic dart-like electrodes with their electroshock simulator or target where they would release the temporary blinding agents in pepper spray. The simulated weapons fit into an officer's belt so they can be pulled out to simulate real-life use.

With the weapon of choice in hand, the officer is thrown into a scenario without knowing what will happen next. Many of the situations put officers into a domestic violence setting, a mass shooting in an office or a traffic-related stop where a criminal at any moment could pull out a weapon and attack the officer.

In one scenario, the trainee is told he is working as an armed guard at an industrial site. A car approaches and the driver, without warning, pulls out a shotgun and fires at another armed guard, killing him instantly. The trainee only has seconds to shoot and kill the man with the shotgun before being shot himself.

Many of the local officers are not often thrown into situations that involve lethal force.

"This is a great training in case it does happen," Willhoite said. "It's just added training."

In addition to responding to scenarios, the officers interact with the prerecorded actors and use their voice command training to diffuse the situation. The actors' reaction and the scenario can be altered by the training administrator. If an officer does a good job with talking the suspicious person out of what they are doing, the administrator can make the actors drop their weapon.

At the end of the scenario, the trainer can replay the officer's actions and show it to the officer and the rest of the training class. From the playback, the officers can discuss what they did right, what they could have improved upon and where they hit the dangerous person. Officers can also do target practice, if needed.

"All the officers will go through this," Willhoite said. "It's good for us."

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