



COLUMBIA POLICE DEPARTMENT
600 East Walnut Street □ Columbia, MO 65201
(573) 874-7652

Media Release

*****UPDATE*****

TYPE OF INCIDENT: Suicidal Subject – Providence and I-70
DATE & TIME OCCURRED: 07-25-08 @ 1037 hours
SUBJECT: Phillip Lee McDuffy
45-year old from Columbia

DETAILS OF INCIDENT:

Below is a general explanation of the conduct of the Columbia Police Department within the tactical framework of their duties in this critical incident.

Preliminary findings and tactical philosophy of events surrounding the suicidal subject indicate several things:

Before meaningful conclusions can be drawn about whether police conduct in this event was proper or not, it is our duty to inform the public of the rules and guidelines that govern police actions in critical incidents.

Generally speaking, in critical incident management, police prioritize the safety of all persons involved, according to a simple matrix.

This matrix, called Safety Prioritization is as follows:

1. Hostages
2. Innocent involved citizens
3. Police officers
4. Suspects/Subjects*

(* A subject is a person who is the focus of a police operation who has not committed a crime.)

The object of this list is to keep the safety of those involved ranked in this order.

For example, since no hostages were involved in this incident, our first duty is to the protection of the public, who by their proximity are involved. This is the traffic on I-70, below Mr. McDuffy, and secondarily, to the cars and pedestrians on Providence Road.

This is why traffic was completely shut down below him. For if while we are present, Mr. McDuffy and jumped and landed on a car passing below at 60 miles per hour, he could at over 250 pounds cause significant injury or death to the innocents below.

Next on the matrix come police officers, who as part of this training, and in order to keep this order intact, do not place themselves in unnecessary jeopardy that might in and of itself create the justification for perhaps even deadly force on Mr. McDuffy. Police officers nationwide are taught that we don't truly ever control a suspect/subject's actions. We can only control our own.

Much that the public does not know at this point about Mr. McDuffy, his violent criminal past and resistive behavior toward the police will eventually come to light, once the investigation is completed. However, certain preliminary conclusions are necessary for a public and media who are justifiably demanding answers.

Very suicidal statements that he made at the scene indicated his extreme desire and unequivocal determination to follow through on his threats to jump. We had information from callers about his potential suicidal behavior that he was in possession of firearms as little as a few days ago, that he was possibly armed today.

In order to keep the safety priority matrix intact, closing within body contact distance would have been an unacceptable compromise of those priorities, and against department policy. The Taser preliminarily appears to have been a wise choice for its incapacitation potential.

Based on his statements to officers at the scene, and his safe location (not a danger of serious injury or death) at the moment the first Taser was deployed, the officers involved actually acted on his behalf, in the hope that the Taser would incapacitate him, and bring the situation to a successful conclusion without injury to Mr. McDuffy.

However, as you can see when you watch the news reports, the first deployment was ineffective. Unfortunately, Mr. McDuffy made the choice to move out toward higher ground very rapidly, and it was approximately five seconds before a second taser was able to be deployed. By that short time, he was by preliminary investigation, more than 15 feet above the ground.

Last on the matrix is the subject. He is relatively free to make choices bad or good, within the constraints that police presence provides. But ultimately, his choices are his own, and while we regret deeply that Mr. McDuffy is seriously injured, the rapidly unfolding events prevented effective force prior to his placing himself in greater jeopardy. In that span of only five seconds or so, a lifesaving act became one that admittedly contributed to his injuries today, secondarily to his choice to move to higher ground.

As has probably already been asked, there are no inflatable devices or other rescue devices that were available today, and his rapid mobility would have prevented their effective use anyway, were they available.

A secondary consideration that is not meant to imply uncaring on our part, the police must constantly evaluate the needs of an individual and the needs of the community at large, and the large demands that one individual can make which can deny effective police service to the rest of the community, as well as the near complete shutdown of a major interstate highway.



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It is important to point out that our policy on Taser deployment in Section III, Subsection D. 3 states:

Unless there are compelling reasons that can be clearly articulated, officers shall not use the Taser against a person who the officer believes:

(3) Is in a position where a fall would likely cause serious injury or death.

While it might be argued that this deployment was clearly outside of policy, the initial deployment was made when Mr. McDuffy was not in danger of a high fall. As soon as that deployment failed, Mr. McDuffy's rapid movement toward higher ground over a distance of more than 20 feet in five seconds prevented a second shot in the same area in time.

While we realize that the timing of this incident as far as Tasers are concerned is most relevant as far as the public debate is concerned, and it will and should continue in light of it, we continue to have complete confidence in it's ability to not only reduce violent confrontations in arrest situations, but also for its lifesaving incapacitation qualities that made it particularly appropriate here. Other tools in our arsenal are only pain compliance based, and someone in pain but remaining highly mobile can still fling himself off of the bridge.

Again, we regret that Mr. McDuffy is injured, and that he is in a place mentally that caused him to choose this course of action in the first place.

We want to again stress that this is a very preliminary statement of tactical doctrine, and while it is used with respect to today's events, the complete internal affairs investigation will take some time to complete, and may draw different conclusions.

However, we wish to be responsive to the public, and not appear to be withholding information that is available. We mandate Professional Standards Unit investigation of any use of force that involves injury. A complete report on the outcome and findings of that investigation will be made available as soon as it is finished.

Captain Zim Schwartz
Community Operations Division Commander
Office #573-874-7525

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For follow up questions or interviews pertaining to this media release you are directed to the following web link. ([Click here](#)) We request that you not reply to this email address, as the author may not be available to receive it.

Operations Division Fax (573) 874-3142
Investigative Division Fax (573) 442-9660
Administrative Division Fax (573) 874-1571

