

The Profession: Refresher Training

by Michael Lindsay, Deputy Director - ILEA - 8/13/07

In discussions on professionalism, there seems to be several recurring points that surface when addressing law enforcement's continuing development.

The essential elements of a profession are often debated. One that seems well settled, however, is the need to keep members updated on the latest developments as well as keeping them well practiced in the basic skills.

To this end, all recognized professions require continuing education beyond a practitioner's basic educational and training requirements.

Law enforcement is no different. A continuing education requirement has been mandated since the early 1990's.

Since that time, other continuing education requirements have also been established by federal regulations, state law and grant provisions. Interestingly, our original 16 hour continuing education requirement has not been modified since its enactment.

Also of interest is the fact that even with the mandated training for SIDs, Hazmat, mental illness, domestic abuse and human trafficking-just to mention a few-we have never required continuing education in the high liability areas.

Most departments probably address firearms, emergency vehicle operations and physical (defensive) tactics just because these subjects are high liability areas. The Law Enforcement Training Board (LETB) is presently considering what requirements should be established, if any, for these areas. Your input as a member of the profession is important.

The relatively new "refresher" statute is yet another aspect of this same continuing education question.

For years, there was a question as to what in-service training an officer should receive if that officer left law enforcement for several years and then returned. Did the officer need to make up the 16 hours for each year missed? Was he beyond the jurisdiction of the training statute while out of law enforcement, and therefore needed no training before re-entering law enforcement? Should he re-take the basic course?

None of these questions were clearly addressed by the original basic and continuing education statutes.

Although some gray areas still exist, if an officer re-enters law enforcement after a period of inactivity, additional training is now required depending on how long the officer has been absent.

Whether one considers the new refresher law a remedy for unanswered questions in the continuing education statute or a new basic training law for those with prior experience, the specific requirements have now been solidified by the LETB. Those who are out of law enforcement for more than two (2) years but less than six (6) years can reactivate their certificates by completing a Board specified program.

Those out of law enforcement for more than six (6) years must retake the entire basic course.

All recognized professions have a well-developed continuing education requirement. The refresher law is just another step in establishing a system that projects a professional image to the public.

We must, as a profession, also evaluate if the time has arrived to modify or re-design our basic 16-hour continuing education requirement. Should training in the high liability areas be mandatory? Is this a matter that should be left exclusively to department discretion so that courses can be designed that are right for that particular department?

Please let us know your thoughts. This is your profession.

(Send your thoughts to mlindsay@ilea.in.gov)