



HRCJTA TB 2021-2

DATE: January 22, 2021
TO: Hampton Roads Criminal Justice Training Academy Member Agencies
FROM: Scott Barlow, Executive Director
SUBJECT: HRCJTA Training Bulletin 2021-2 Universal Cover Mode- (Finger off Trigger)

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The Universal Cover Mode

There are continuing concerns of having accidental discharges with firearms. An unintentional discharge occurs when the officer/deputy has his/her finger on the trigger of their weapon when the officer/deputy has an involuntary contraction.

- ✓ Startle Effect: When a sudden unexpected occurrence frightens the officer/deputy (i.e. loud noise)
- ✓ Postural Disturbance: When a sudden loss of balance causes the body to tighten/tense up (ex, losing one's footing)
- ✓ Interlimb Interaction: The muscles of one hand contract because the officer/deputy or subject suddenly moves, causing the other hand to contract

The Universal Cover Mode is recommended for the officer/deputy to use to prevent unintentional discharges. The Universal Cover Mode is used along with verbalization skills "Police Don't Move, or get on the ground or I will shoot". The subject must be directed by the officer/deputy to react in such a manner that protects the officer/deputy and allows for control of the situation.

The Cardinal Rule of the Universal Cover Mode: Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until you are on target and have *decided* to fire because of a deadly threat.

You should not attempt to place hands on a person with a weapon in one hand. Maintain a cover position until your backup arrives (whenever possible). If you are assaulted, retreat, creating distance whenever possible. Distance is your friend when you have a firearm. Distance creates time to assess the threat and decide if deadly force is warranted. Distance does not provide the attacker an opportunity to grab you and attempt to take your firearm. If the offender continues to close in on you, this sends a clear message to the officer/deputy that the offender is a significant threat since they now are aware you are armed. A nonviolent person is unlikely to close the distance between an armed officer/deputy and himself.

In a review of confrontations with a firearm under stress, it has been proven that finger on the trigger is conducive to accidental discharges with catastrophic results. The “**Universal Cover Mode**” has been used by L.E. for many years and has been proven to be sound practice and a national standard for training.