

West Palm Beach, FL Police Department

General Officer Safety

WPB Police Department serves a population of 113,000 citizens over 58.1 square miles. The department employs 290 sworn officers and 98 civilian employees. With Florida having the second most line of duty deaths in 2021 (52) they believe it is their "obligation" to provide necessary training and resources to ensure officer safety.

WPBPD issues custom-fit soft body armor and requires officers to wear them. SWAT officers are issued threat level IV vests with front and rear trauma plates. Officers are also issued ballistic helmets and gas masks. Ballistic shields are available in several patrol cars on each shift as well as in the sergeant's vehicle.

In addition to providing each officer with a handgun, officers can choose to carry a patrol rifle and/or shotgun and required to be certified in their use. The department also authorizes officers to carry a back up/secondary weapon and requires officers to qualify with the weapon. **The state of Florida requires that all peace officers qualify with their duty handgun once every two years. WPBPD requires their officers to qualify with their handguns, rifle, shotguns and back up weapons annually, in addition to low-light and tactical courses. Officers are further encouraged to attend open range dates** at their facility. The department also operates a "shoot house" in the department basement, where simmunitions weapons are used in scenario-based training.

Each officer is issued a tourniquet to wear on their duty belt, and also issued a trauma bag which consists of tourniquets, quick clotting agent, sucking chest wound patches and bandages and every officer is trained in tactical first aid for self-aid, officer down and civilian medical emergencies. In 2020, one officer alone saved four victims of gunshot wounds, on three different calls, by utilizing this equipment and training. Each officer also personal protective equipment in their trauma bags to include; CPR masks, ambu bags and bloodbourne pathogen equipment including gear for full body protection.

The department also requires the use of seat belts while members are driving department vehicles. Officers violating this policy will face progressive discipline. Featured throughout the department are safety posters regarding vehicle operation and seat belt usage. WPBPD also provides annual hands-on vehicle operations and pursuit training at driving pad at a local college police academy. This training also includes no-evasive vehicle operations, felony stops, pursuit termination devices and force on force scenario training. The department also conducts training on their pursuit policy annually. Every pursuit is reviewed by the pursuit review board and it is determined at this review meeting whether the officer should be commended, disciplined or retrained regarding pursuits.

All officer safety instructors come from within the department and each is certified by the state of Florida. Examples include defensive tactics, firearms, ASP baton, emergency vehicle operations and CPR.

All officers receive 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Training to learn how to de-escalate situations. Additionally, the department owns a use of force simulator and trains their officers in shoot/don't shoot decision-making. Some scenarios are designed for the officer to choose to use their electronic control devices, pepper spray or no force at all.

For high-risk situations, WPBPD also has a SWAT team. Within the SWAT team is a Lenco Bearcat armored vehicle that can sustain rounds from a 50 caliber weapon. This vehicle is used in situations of armed, barricaded subjects, tactical situations, and rescues. The Bearcat has been used successfully in a number of situations including the deployment of teargas into a hotel room where a barricaded subject was. After the teargas deployment, the subject surrendered without further incident.

WPBPD also has an Emergency Field Force unit which is trained in civil unrest and riot situations, primarily through the use of non-lethal weapons. The department also has a K-9 unit and the dogs are trained in handler protection, tracking and narcotics detection.

The department also has a dive team for water rescues and a “Catchment team” which features ATVs and two airboats for responses to calls on their 23 square miles of wetlands preserves (called The Catchment), which provides drinking water for all of West Palm Beach. .

WPBPD also has an Unmanned Aircraft System team which consists of four drones and officers specially trained and certified by the FAA. The drones serve many purposes including conducting search and rescue operations, locating missing persons and attempting to locate fleeing suspects and escaped prisoners.

Per the Florida Administrative Code, all sworn officers must receive 40 hours of continuing education training every four years. Over the past four years, each WPBPD officer has received a minimum of 158 hours of documented training.

**** This summary is only a brief overview of many of the West Palm Beach, FL Police Department programs. In the actual submission you will see that WPBPD has other programs and incentives to benefit its members. Please review their entire submission and its associated documents to gain a complete understanding of their program.**