



Message from NTOA Chairman of the Board on SWAT Standards and Dynamic Entry Tactics

By Lt. Phil Hansen

The release of our NTOA SWAT Standards document and the publication of recent articles concerning dynamic entry tactics in *The Tactical Edge* have created a good deal of discussion and some debate within the tactical community. Debate is a valuable tool for vetting opinions and weighing alternatives, but it should be based on factual assumptions and common language. The purpose of this article is to explain the origin, development and anticipated future of the NTOA SWAT Standards document, and to clarify the NTOA position with respect to the definition and employment of dynamic entry tactics. This information is provided to help our members make informed judgments concerning these issues.

NTOA SWAT Standards

To date, the NTOA SWAT Standards have been very well received and many teams are successfully utilizing the document to justify much needed improvements in their training programs. Nevertheless, it has come to my attention that many NTOA members were taken by surprise with the release of the SWAT Standards and some feel overlooked in the developmental process. Apparently, those of us involved in the SWAT Standards project became too preoccupied with completing this important document, and failed in our responsibility to keep the membership informed along the way. I accept complete responsibility for this oversight, offer my sincere apology, and promise that such an error will not be repeated. That being said, I would like to offer some insight into the background and

development of the Standards.

I would like to first point out that the NTOA SWAT Standards are living documents, subject to revision. Just as tactics and technology continue to evolve, there will be a need to revise and develop the SWAT Standards over time. With this in mind, revisions have already been made to facilitate the needs of smaller agencies, and there is currently a project underway to develop a standardized review and revision process. This effort is being led by Eastern Region Director Captain Ed Allen of the Seminole County (FL) Sheriff's Department. As an NTOA member, you will have an opportunity to provide input during the next SWAT Standards revision process.

For many years, members of the tactical community asked that the NTOA create standards for SWAT. Until two years ago, we declined to engage in this process. What changed our position was a firm belief that if we did not publish standards soon, some lesser qualified body would. We became convinced that in the near future, federal agencies would seek a national standard to measure teams on the basis of policy and training, in the same way that teams are now typed according to equipment resources. We also believed that SWAT standards were needed to improve the performance and professional status of the tactical community at large. Our decision to act was based on our belief that SWAT standards were best formulated by experienced, working tactical officers, rather than administrators from a federal agency or a private training vendor, or as a government-sponsored project for graduate students.

The current NTOA SWAT Standards document was constructed using the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (California POST) SWAT Guidelines as a basic template, with modifications taken from existing NTOA Best Practice documents, and from the personal experience of individual members of the NTOA SWAT Standards Committee. The California POST SWAT Guidelines were the first of their kind, and were developed over a two-year period with input from sub-committees of tactical personnel from agencies of all sizes. Final revision and writing was accomplished by a SWAT Executive Committee with extensive SWAT experience that included senior representation from the NTOA and the California Association of Tactical Officers (CATO).

The bottom line is that the NTOA SWAT Standards are well-crafted and created to enhance the safety, performance and professionalism of SWAT teams. They are based on research, sound tactical doctrine and on literally thousands of years of collective SWAT experience. They also contain a healthy dose of compromise. The goal of this document is to raise the bar for SWAT and make us better at what we do. These standards may be difficult to realize but they are achievable and worthwhile. If you have questions or concerns about the NTOA SWAT Standards, I would ask that you first obtain and read a current copy. If you still have concerns or wish to propose a revision, contact any member of your Board of Directors, and we will ensure that your issues are addressed during the next review and revision process.

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Winter 2010 NTOA Training Calendar



Course Description	Registration Deadline	Course Start	Course End	Member Discount Cost
10th Annual Crisis Negotiations Conference Phoenix, AZ	3/31/10	5/18/10	5/21/10	\$300
10th Annual International Breachers Symposium Tucson, AZ	4/23/10	5/24/10	5/27/10	\$250
27th Annual Tactical Operations Conference Pittsburgh, PA	7/31/10	9/19/10	9/24/10	\$500
Less-Lethal/FSDD/Chemical Agent Instructor Certification Edmonton, AB Canada	2/26/10	4/26/10	4/30/10	\$939
SWAT Supervision & Command Decision Making Las Vegas, NV	2/15/10	3/15/10	3/19/10	\$670
Minneapolis, MN	2/15/10	3/15/10	3/19/10	\$685
Las Vegas, NV	5/28/10	6/28/10	7/2/10	\$670
Las Vegas, NV	7/16/10	8/16/10	8/20/10	\$670
SWAT Team Leader Development Fort Collins, CO	7/9/10	8/9/10	8/13/10	\$566
Tactical Precision Long Rifle 1 State College, PA	3/12/10	4/12/10	4/16/10	\$595

Non-members must add \$55 to cost of class listed above. If you are not an NTOA member you may join for \$40 per year and take advantage of the Member Discount Price. To register for a class, visit www.ntoa.org/training or call 800.279.9127, ext. 2.

Dynamic entry tactics

The recent publication of articles in *The Tactical Edge* concerning the use of dynamic entry tactics has created a good deal of debate, some of which is based on reasonable disagreement, some on misunderstanding and some on outright distortion of the articles. There have been assertions by some that the NTOA is now refusing to acknowledge the validity of dynamic entry as a viable tactical option, and there have even been inferences that the NTOA stands ready to testify against teams or officers who utilize dynamic entry tactics. Nothing could be further from the truth. NTOA instructors have always taught dynamic entry tactics in hostage rescue courses, and as one of several different options for the service of high-risk warrants. Moreover, no NTOA board member or instructor has ever testified against a fellow law enforcement officer on the basis of tactics, nor will they ever be sanctioned to do so by the NTOA.

Before discussing the NTOA position on dynamic entry tactics, it seems appropriate to begin with a definition to avoid any confusion over terms. For our purposes, dynamic entry tactics refer to rapid entry into and rapid movement through a target location. Speed of execution is critical when using this tactic, which is meant to surprise and overwhelm the suspect(s), and thereby prevent them from taking some unwanted action, such as harming hostages or in some cases, destroying evidence. To enhance the odds of success, this speed of execution must be supported by surprise and, whenever possible, by diversion. Although speed is a primary factor, team members should never move faster than they can assess threats and shoot accurately.

The NTOA has always presented dynamic entry tactics as one tactical option, but above all else, intelligent mission planning and operational flexibility are the key components taught by NTOA instructors. Dynamic entry tactics are a viable and time-proven option when speed of

execution is essential, but they are only safe, effective and ultimately defensible under certain conditions. Speed of execution by a team may limit a suspect's ability to react, but it also limits an officer's ability to assess threats and to react as well. Flash/sound diversionary devices may create a diversion but they are no substitute for a true element of surprise. NTOA instructors ask that mission planners take these types of relevant factors into account when selecting a course of action.

The NTOA philosophy concerning the selection of a tactical option is relatively simple to summarize:

First, evaluate all aspects of your mission, including goals, intelligence and legal constraints. Next, consider all the tactical options at your disposal, and then select the safest alternative to successfully complete your mission. Finally, once a course of action is selected, have the flexibility to adjust to circumstances as they evolve.

It is important to note that these concepts are not a recent departure in training or practice for the NTOA. They have been taught continuously by NTOA instructors for nearly 20 years.

The overreliance on dynamic entry tactics is a topic of discussion that I personally have a great deal of passion about. Year after year, I have seen good police officers killed and wounded in the line of duty while utilizing dynamic entry as a "one size fits all" solution, without the element of surprise, and without a mission that supports its use. There have been several such deaths this year alone. As a leader, I feel compelled to call the issue to your attention and I am joined by the remaining NTOA directors and instructional staff.

Recent articles criticizing the overuse of dynamic entry tactics reflect this same concern on the part of different authors, and are primarily aimed at this "one size fits all" approach to the selection of tactical options. Some authors may be more critical or less flexible than others. Every article that appears in *The Tactical Edge* is subject to the nuance and passions of the indi-

vidual author. I seldom read an article that I agree with completely, and over the years there have been several that I completely disagree with. Nevertheless, I try to learn from each piece that I read and judge the content on its individual merits. I would ask that you please try to do the same and not read too much between the lines. We have no conspiracy at work here. What we do have are fellow officers who care and who are sharing a lifetime of hard-fought lessons learned through this publication.

Twenty-six years ago, the NTOA was founded to provide a source of training and a means of information exchange among tactical officers. As our Association has grown in size and influence, our obligation to provide leadership has grown as well. True leadership is never easy. More often than not, it involves some degree of risk and controversy. The release of the NTOA SWAT Standards and our position on the overuse of dynamic entry tactics reflect part of our collective efforts to provide leadership in the tactical arena, protect our fellow law enforcement personnel and improve our performance as guardians of our communities. The NTOA has one overriding objective: to enhance performance and safety for you, the tactical officer. Thanks to each of you for your continued participation and support, and I welcome your comments. «

2010 NTOA Grants

Watch for new 2010 grants
at www.ntoa.org

Application period:
February – June 2010

You must be a current NTOA
team member to apply.