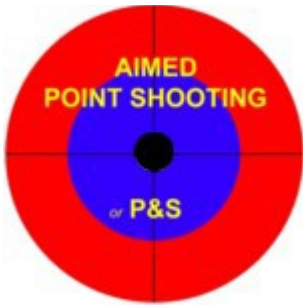

DOES YOUR AGENCY TRAINING LEAD DIRECTLY TO OFFICER DEATHS?

On Apr 11, 2016 the Force Science Institute published an "extra" news release that confronts the issue that "many agencies have training paradigms that are directly leading to deaths of officers in the line of duty."

In a provocative, in-depth interview, Insp. Chris Butler, one of North America's leading use-of-force experts, minces no words in assessing shortcomings of police training.

Butler,who is a 26-year veteran of the Calgary (Canada) Police Service, is an instructor in the Force Science Institute's two-day Force Science Basics seminar on FS principles and is one of the few peace officers to earn special certification as an Advanced Force Science Analyst.

His assertion that "many agencies have training paradigms that are directly leading to deaths of officers in the line of duty...is hard for trainers to swallow, but not all training is good training. And bad training will get officers killed just as fast as no training at all."

The hour-long interview was conducted by FS graduate Brian Willis, president of Winning Mind Training, and is posted in audio format on Willis' website for police trainers.

In it, Butler offers insights into applying FS research to firearms and UOF programs to better prepare officers to overcome life-threatening challenges of the street.

Here's a sampling of the topics touched on:

Having spoken to thousands of firearms and use-of-force trainers, Butler says that he can count on one hand the number who have said, 'We base training on the threats and circumstances that officers are likely to encounter on the street.'

"Almost always the standards are designed to meet some sort of administrative risk-management requirement. Very little is finding its way from real-life combat situations into firearms training."

Training in no-or low-light situations is commonly neglected, even though a significant percentage of OISs occur where visibility is impaired. And officers frequently are not taught the importance of moving immediately when faced with a threat--a proven means of disrupting offender hit rates--because trainers mistakenly accept that range design prohibits any movement that's effective.

Butler recounts valuable lessons learned from Force Science's groundbreaking Traffic Stop study, which involved a motorist suddenly producing a gun and firing on officers during discussion of a driving infraction.

The initial reaction of 91 out of 94 officers was to "stand flat-footed, draw, and try to return fire," says Butler, who helped conduct the study. That "strong but wrong" automatic response was "embedded in their brain" because that's how "we have conditioned officers to respond to lethal threats presented at close range." Yet in the 1.5-1.9 seconds that reaction requires, an officer could receive "a minimum of six rounds coming at them."

Force Science's well-known Hit Probability study, which revealed the natural instinct of many offenders to shoot at an officer's head from close range, also confirms the value of immediately moving as a threat response, Butler says.

"Officers see the threat coming and they tend to stand still while drawing their weapon to respond," he says. "Drawing your weapon should be your second priority. Moving to get your body off-line is the single most important piece of mitigating action you can take.

Butler challenges trainers who claim they can't teach movement on the range because of safety considerations or facility limitations. "We can't allow ourselves to fall into that fallacy of thinking," he declares. "Every time you let an officer stand still and draw, you reinforce a habit that can get the officer killed.

There are always solutions. Even taking a dramatic step to the right or left as you draw and fire can help. It may not be the optimal solution, but we can certainly start to implement small advances and do it now without waiting for the 'big' solution."

Too few agencies "move beyond the classroom to teach [tactics] in a context of reality-based training," Confining teaching only to the classroom typically "floods an officer's forebrain with knowledge that never gets into the midbrain," Butler says. "The only way to teach skills so an officer is competent to perform them is in the environment in which they are going to be needed."

Trainers who don't appreciate the "huge difference" have no understanding of "how the brain works under stress.

We can't think we are training officers to respond predictably and reliably in the crucible of life-threatening events until we have first seen them [use their skills] reliably and predictably in the context of a realistic training environment."

"There's a huge responsibility on trainers to understand how to tie together cognition, perception, motor behavior, and tactical decision-making," he says. "We have the most work to do in moving firearms training into a state that is supported by research."

Trainers always say they need more time, Butler observes. "But the question is: How effectively and productively are you using the time you've got?"

Are you, for example, "spending far too much time taking officers to a high level of technical skill [with their firearm], rather than taking them to an acceptable, safe level of competence and as fast as possible moving them out of a static environment and start building complexity [into their training], so their basic skills are further enhanced within the context in which those skills are needed."

During the interview, a variety of other topics were brought up and explored.

Click here for a copy of the text of the Force Science News "extra" release. When a link to the news extra on the Force Science site is available, I'll add it here.

This is a link to an article about the 2010 ILEETA conference (International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers), panel of experts discussion on Point Shooting vs. Aimed Fire. The panel supported the use of Sight Shooting in CQB situations even though it has never been proven via photos or videos of ever being used effectively in CQB situations wherein there is the greatest chance of Officers being shot and/or killed. It is way past time to implement research supported shooting dogma, as continued adherence to that which is not, or can not be used in CQB situations, leads to deaths of Officers.

End.