



Rural Policing
with Patrick "Pat" Novesky

December 27, 2010

Rural Metro: Working with backup from other agencies

A game warden and a town cop may respond as backup to a each other's calls — it's imperative to train together and open the lines of communication

Patrolling remote areas in a one-officer squad can create some interesting issues. I'm talking about when your backup hopefully — but not always — comes from an officer in the same county. We know though that when help is requested by an officer or sent by your dispatcher it could well be the neighboring county from which the cavalry comes. I'm talking about calling an off-duty officer at home to suit up and respond, or the poor dispatchers out there who have to tell an officer, "I'll see if I can find someone."

I've been to calls where cops left their homes in plain clothes and personal vehicles to help an officer in need because that was all that was available. I've seen situations where the local citizens called themselves into action to protect an officer — including a Boy Scout leader wielding a rake and a pastor who picked up the officer's aluminum flashlight that got tossed during the scuffle. Now THAT is community policing!

Although a far cry from the cavalry of well-armed officers that would show up in a large city, these civilians showed resolve and helped to defuse an ugly situation.

Unanswered Status Check

There are times in the backcountry where a backup unit may end up going to an unknown situation — and location — to backup a fellow officer because they cannot be reached. Many times this is due to the radio issues that plague the rural officer, but we don't know until we get there. For the rangers and game wardens, it is not uncommon to begin or end your shift without any real communication with anyone until you need help. How about the State Police Officer or Sheriff's Deputy out there in remote areas on portable trying to get a simple request to dispatch? How many times do we hear broken radio traffic from one officer that results in other backup officers calling dispatch: "What was that location?" or "I can't copy, where were they at?" or "What's he got out there?"

What about that simple status check that goes unanswered?

We respond and have no idea what may be going on, could be the usual radio problems that plague the backcountry, or an officer fighting for their life. It is important that we

respond as though we are going to a crime in progress. Don't just assume you are dealing with bad communications.

It is our nature to get to the scene quickly to find a fellow officer. However, when you are talking about situations where hours can pass in some cases, there is a lot that can happen and we need to switch gears a bit and become a good investigator as well. Unfortunately, there is always the potential that we may be going to a crime scene. This investigation starts several miles from the last known area of the officer, documenting license plates of vehicles in the area, descriptions of people, recreational vehicles, and the like. This is helpful information should we need to locate potential witnesses or suspects.

Yes, it's a pain but better to have it and not need it.

Once on scene, if there is no one around, park some distance away so you don't destroy tire tracks, footprints or other potential evidence. In these unknown situations it is very possible to unravel a mystery by checking to see if there are multiple types of shoe prints or tire tracks, signs of a scuffle in the dirt etc. Check the squad, is it locked/unlocked? Emergency lights activated indicating a vehicle stop was made? Damage indicating a shooting or fight? Are the long guns in the rack or did the officer remove one prior to leaving the area?

Make sure to check the mobile data computer for any recent activity. These are all little things that may help us get a better understanding of what and who we are dealing with, and help us make a determination as to how to proceed and what resources we may call upon to assist.

Use the Shadows

Hopefully, the officer we are looking for may be just a few yards away making contact with someone and just has simple radio issues. If this is the case and we do not know the circumstances of the contact, do we want to go in right away and identify ourselves, or take our time and make certain that there are not others that could harm our lone officer? Remember, bad guys tend to hang around in numbers and the ones who grew up in or frequent rural areas depend on most cops working alone. By staying in the shadows we may be able to see more of what is going on beyond what might be in front of the primary officer. There may be a time to make our presence known and maybe not, don't automatically assume that you need to charge in and identify yourself right away. If the situation does not warrant an immediate response then take your time, make sure there are not more threats in the area that the primary officer is unaware of.

When working in remote areas we tend to work in what could be referred to as a modified metro police force — several agencies such as police, sheriff's, game wardens, federal rangers, and tribal police may be called upon to back up anyone at any given time. Because of this dynamic and possibly not even knowing the officer, agency, or location you may be called upon to assist, we all need to keep an open mind. We must realize that with the vast number of agencies out there that there are different

schools of thought.

Understanding (and Allowing) Different Methods

Many times, we train differently and handle situations differently. Because of this, don't assume people have been searched, weapons cleared, or that the officer you are assisting has things all under control. I don't say this to insult officers — we all know cops from first year recruits to 30-year vets that have off days and bad habits. Simply put, we can all learn from and need to protect each other. Never be insulted because a backup officer wants to pat someone down again, double check a firearm, or handcuff someone who isn't hooked up. We cops need to win every time and that means you might have to give up the ball every now and then. That's part of being a team. If the officer next to you feels that something just isn't right, let them do their job.

When you have this “rural metro” type police of police force it is important to develop whatever type of positive working relationship you can, work together, train together, and grab a cup of coffee together. If you are an administrator, support this effort! A game warden should be well-equipped and -trained to respond to a bank robbery and a city officer should be able to respond to a group of armed illegal hunters in a remote area. There are many things we can learn from each other, but we need to work and train together to open the lines of communication.

In these remote areas, you may not know where backup may be coming from. For that backup, it's sometimes tough to know what type of situation they may find themselves in. But rest assured they will be coming. Could be a city officer shredding polyester on branches to get to a ranger in the woods or a game warden showing up at a domestic on a snowmobile to back up a deputy. Each will be happy to respond and we will be happy to see them. A small amount of time shaking hands and training together beforehand can make things run far more smoothly should the time come where you get that call to head someplace you may have never been to check on an officer you never met.

About the author

Patrick Novesky has a total of 18 years in law enforcement and began his career at age 20 as a sheriff's patrol deputy in Northern Wisconsin, Pat has since worked as a police officer in Verona, Wisconsin and as an officer with the Dane County WI Narcotics & Gang Task Force. Pat has served as a police firearms and Verbal Judo instructor and has been involved with various training for all types of law enforcement. The past 10 years of Pat's career have been spent working as a conservation officer for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources stationed in Forest County patrolling the Nicolet National Forest & surrounding area. [Contact Patrick Novesky](#)