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Shoot or don't shoot? Jennings police demonstrate drill at Neighborhood Watch meeting

By [Scott Bandle](#)

Several Jennings residents recently learned what goes through the mind of a police officer faced with the split-second decision to shoot a suspect.

It was part of a Neighborhood Watch demonstration that put residents in police officers' shoes when officers are under threatening conditions.

"This is what we call situational shooting, or shoot-don't shoot," said Sgt. Shawn Lane. "Police go through the training. In certain situations, you have a split second to make a decision. We want to show (the residents) what we have to go through."

The simulator used a projector to beam films of potential shooting scenarios onto a movie screen. The participants could use a laser gun to shoot at the screen. A \$30,000 camera system and computer program recorded the shots and played them back. The Missouri Police Chiefs Association loaned the device to the Jennings police for the demonstration.

The program has a variety of scenarios, ranging from traffic stops to warehouse burglaries to sudden attacks in a police booking room.

"We have to decide whether he has a gun or not," Lane said. "The one rule is that we have to be threatened. We just can't pull the trigger. We have to be in actual physical danger."

Some of the situations have multiple endings. In one scenario, a man in a pickup truck is upset that he was pulled over for a traffic stop. He gets out of the truck, yelling at the officer.

One ending has the man walking back to his truck, retrieving a pistol and pointing it at the police officer. In the second ending, the man retrieves a cell phone, points it and threatens to call the officer's superior.

The decisions can vary according to the circumstances. A small, female officer physically attacked by a large man may have more justification for shooting than a male police officer who is the same size as the attacker.



Leon Algee Jr. photo - Jennings Police Sgt. Gene Tisius shows Ward 1 Councilwoman Yolonda Fountain-Henderson a target during Thursday's shooting demonstration at the Jennings Neighborhood Watch meeting.

One new facet to the police training came from the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado.

"The police were ridiculed at Columbine for not going in and helping the students," Lane said. "In Jennings, as soon as there are five police officers, we will go in without waiting. We won't stand outside."

Thursday's demonstration included several high school shooting scenarios. One situation had screaming children running in the school hallways trying to escape the shooter, while another had multiple shooters firing out of classroom doors.

"You've got to figure out which kid it is and the danger to the other kids," Lane said. "A lot of (officers) don't want to shoot kids. It's about what you have to do."

There were some light moments during the demonstration. One scenario, in which a man grabbed a purse and ran away, clearly was a no-shoot situation, Jennings Police Sgt. Gene Tisius said.

"I'd shoot him!" a woman called out.

Several volunteers got a chance to fire the laser guns at the screen, most coming nowhere near their targets.

Claude Slater, 64, learned that a man running away could suddenly turn and fire his pistol at an officer.

"It happened so fast," he said. "You almost don't have time to think. I think the training is neat to go through."

Rose Jraczyk, a 45-year Jennings resident, also was surprised at how fast the action was.

"I didn't hit anything, but it was fun," she said. "I thought it was interesting."