

**Management Alert – The
United States Coast Guard
Discontinued the Use of
Functional Firearms in
DVD Simulation Training**



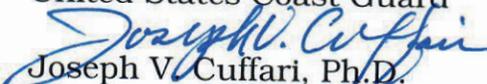


OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

September 23, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR: Rear Admiral Mark J. Fedor
Assistant Commandant for Resources and
Chief Financial Officer
United States Coast Guard

FROM: 
Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *Management Alert – The United States Coast Guard
Discontinued the Use of Functional Firearms in DVD
Simulation Training*

For your information is our final management alert, *Management Alert – The United States Coast Guard Discontinued the Use of Functional Firearms in DVD Simulation Training*, notifying you of an urgent issue that the Coast Guard addressed following receipt of our draft management alert on August 27, 2021.

Specifically, on August 27, 2021, we notified you that we determined the Coast Guard must take immediate steps to address the safety risks associated with the use of functional firearms during video-based simulation training. After receiving our draft management alert, Coast Guard took immediate corrective actions to discontinue the use of functional firearms during DVD-based simulation training. We conducted this work pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended*, and in connection with an ongoing audit being performed according to generally accepted government auditing standards.

We have appended your office's management response to the final alert. Your office concurred with the recommendation we made to implement alternative solutions to replace the use of functional firearms during its Judgmental Use of Force Evaluation training. Based on information provided in your response to the draft management alert, we consider the recommendation resolved and closed.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended*, we will provide copies of our alert to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over DHS. We will also post the final alert on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Bruce Miller, Deputy Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 981-6000.

Attachment
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Summary of Issues

We issued this management alert to advise the Department of Homeland Security and United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) of a risk to the health and safety of personnel posed by using functional firearms (emptied of ammunition) during Digital Versatile Disc (DVD)-based simulation training. After receiving our draft management alert, the Coast Guard took immediate corrective actions to discontinue the use of functional firearms during DVD-based simulation training.

During our ongoing audit of DHS law enforcement virtual training, we learned that the Coast Guard was using functional firearms to conduct DVD-based simulation training. We identified this issue in Coast Guard's *Commandant Instruction 3574.5C, 18 September 2014, Coast Guard Judgmental Use of Force Evaluation (JUFE)* (policy) and observed a demonstration of this training at one Coast Guard location. According to testimony or policy from four other DHS components that employ or train law enforcement personnel, the use of functional firearms during video-based simulation training is prohibited within their respective components. By using functional firearms capable of firing ammunition, even if emptied of ammunition, in DVD-based simulation training, Coast Guard increased the risk of unintentional injury or death.

Background

Coast Guard unit commanders evaluate use of deadly force decision making by personnel who carry weapons in performance of their duties. Since 1985, the Judgmental Pistol Course, reclassified to JUFE, has been used to evaluate personnel's ability to make appropriate deadly force decisions. The current JUFE DVD provides realistic use of force scenarios that can be delivered using a standard DVD player or standard Coast Guard workstation, as shown in Figure 1. JUFE is administered by law enforcement instructors who score examinees on decision making and articulation. Examinees respond to five scenarios with multiple situations.

According to the policy, the following materials are used to conduct JUFE training:

- JUFE DVD, DVD player, or standard Coast Guard workstation with a DVD drive
- TV/monitor
- JUFE answer key and score form
- The primary weapon (emptied of ammunition) the examinee is designated to carry



Figure 1. JUFE Setup

Source: DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) photo



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- Standard Coast Guard boarding uniform (body armor and weapons belt, fully equipped with inert OC pepper spray)
- Recommended minimum room size of 12 x 20

According to the policy, the examinee is issued an empty weapon of the primary weapon the examinee is designated to carry, which is holstered and strapped in. The policy also indicates that JUFE is a “dry-fire” course, and the weapons belt, magazine pouches, and weapon are not to contain any magazines or ammunition.

The Coast Guard Discontinued Use of Functional Firearms in DVD Simulation Training

The Coast Guard exposed personnel to unnecessary risk by using functional firearms during DVD-based simulation training. According to the *Safety and Health Manual, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, June 2010*, “The Department’s fundamental occupational safety and health principle, applicable at every level in the organization and for every mission or activity, is to eliminate or effectively manage safety and health risks and exercise the tenets of operational risk management.” In addition, according to the manual, “Risk control is the process of developing and implementing measures to control each risk ... [and] the overall goal of the occupational safety and health risk assessment process.”

During site visits with other DHS components that employ law enforcement personnel, we observed firearm safety measures that varied from Coast Guard JUFE procedures. For example, at one U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) location, multiple firearm safety markings were visible prior to entering a video-based training simulator room, as shown in Figure 2. At the CBP locations we visited, vendor-provided training firearms were used that are incapable of firing projectiles.

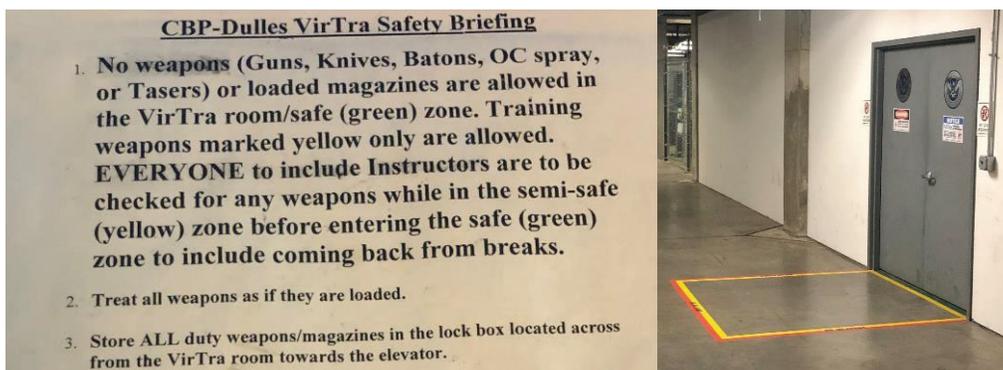


Figure 2. CBP Video-Based Simulator Safety Briefing and Warning Signs

Source: DHS OIG Photo



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At a Federal Protective Service (FPS) training facility, we observed the use of training firearms, as well as decommissioned less-lethal weapons used to conduct virtual reality-based training.¹ The United States Secret Service prohibits the presence of live firearms² in training venues conducting simulated weapons training. One Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) firearms instructor expressed concerns about the use of functional firearms during video-based training due to the possibility of projectiles, the risk outweighing the benefits, and the availability of safe alternatives, which accurately simulate the weight and feel of a functional firearm. Additionally, the *Federal Law Enforcement Training Center Cheltenham, Maryland Training Policy Summary, June 2013*, states, “Live weapons are permitted only in the Firearms Range Complex. ... Live-fire weapons are prohibited in all other training areas. ... Weapons are prohibited in the firearm simulator areas. Weapons will be secured in the weapon lockers.” Figure 3 shows an example of a firearm used by Coast Guard during JUFE training (A), compared to alternative training firearms (B, C,³ and D).



Figure 3. (A) Coast Guard firearm used in DVD-based simulation training; (B) CBP training firearm; (C) Commercially available training firearm; (D) FPS training firearm

Source: (A, B, D) DHS OIG photos; (C) photo DHS OIG obtained from GSA Advantage website

¹ Training firearms may include decommissioned firearms, replicas, and vendor-modified devices. Decommissioning refers to deactivating and, according to a Federal Law Enforcement Training Center firearms instructor, would involve permanently disabling the weapon so it is unable to fire a projectile.

² The United States Secret Service refers to “live firearms” in its *Management of Simulated Weapons Training Systems, April 6, 2017* directive. We interpret “live firearms” to mean firearms that are functional and capable of shooting lethal ammunition that could cause injury or death.

³ The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) offers private sector professional services, equipment, and supplies to Government organizations and the U.S. military. GSA Advantage is the online shopping and ordering system that provides access to thousands of contractors and millions of supplies and services.



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Coast Guard officials cited cost, storage, and potential muscle memory issues as the reasons for using functional firearms instead of training firearms. However, there is widespread use of training firearms to conduct similar training across DHS components that employ law enforcement personnel. Additionally, according to a Coast Guard Investigative Services⁴ official, their Special Agents do not use the JUFÉ program and conduct similar training using training firearms that are incapable of firing projectiles. Moreover, Coast Guard officials stated that the use of airsoft guns⁵ is already implemented in other Coast Guard training exercises that JUFÉ examinees complete. Although Coast Guard policy states that the firearm used during JUFÉ should be cleared and emptied, the use of a functional firearm in a video-based training environment increased the risk of unintentional injury or death.

Recommendation

We recommend the Commander, Force Readiness Command, United States Coast Guard implement alternative solutions to replace the use of functional firearms during its Judgmental Use of Force Evaluation training.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

Coast Guard concurred with the recommendation. We included a copy of Coast Guard's management comments in Appendix B.

We consider the recommendation resolved and closed. A summary of Coast Guard's management response and our analysis follow.

Coast Guard Comments to Recommendation: Coast Guard concurred with our recommendation. On September 3, 2021, Coast Guard discontinued the use of functional firearms for the JUFÉ. Coast Guard enacted a policy change to substitute airsoft pistols and non-guns in place of functional firearms for JUFÉ. Coast Guard provided evidence of this policy change with its management comments. Coast Guard will continue to evaluate the appropriate training policies and equipment needed to ensure the safety and readiness of law enforcement personnel.

OIG Analysis of Coast Guard's Response: Coast Guard's actions are responsive to the recommendation. We consider the recommendation resolved and closed.

⁴ Coast Guard Investigative Services is a Federal law enforcement agency within Coast Guard that conducts investigations of actual, alleged, or suspected criminal activity; carries firearms, executes and serves warrants; and make arrests.

⁵ Airsoft weapons may propel a 6mm plastic or biodegradable BB or may be converted to blank fire.



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Appendix A

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002*, Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135, which amended the *Inspector General Act of 1978*. We issued this management alert during an ongoing audit of DHS law enforcement virtual training.

The objective of our ongoing audit is to determine the extent to which DHS law enforcement components collaborate and leverage resources for virtual training. Between June and August 2021, we interviewed Coast Guard officials from the Office of Maritime Law Enforcement and Coast Guard Investigative Services and observed a demonstration of JUFE training at one Coast Guard location. We also obtained and reviewed documentary evidence, including *Coast Guard's Commandant Instruction 3574.5C, 18 September 2014, Coast Guard Judgmental Use of Force Evaluation* and simulator-based training policies and procedures for United States Secret Service, CBP, FPS, and FLETC. We interviewed officials from multiple DHS components, including a FLETC firearms instructor, Chief Supervisory CBP officer, and FPS Assistant Director of Training and Professional Development. We also observed demonstrations and safety procedures of simulator-based training systems for CBP and FPS.

On August 12, 2021, prior to our draft management alert issued on August 27, 2021, we notified Coast Guard officials that they were exposing law enforcement officers to unnecessary risk by using functional firearms during training video simulations and recommended they implement alternative solutions to replace the use of functional firearms during JUFE training.

We conducted this work pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended*, and in connection with an ongoing audit being performed according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require we plan and perform the audit work to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives. Additional information or recommendations regarding the issue addressed in this alert may also be included in the final report resulting from our related ongoing audit of DHS law enforcement virtual training.



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Appendix B
Coast Guard Comments to the Draft Management Alert



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United States Coast Guard

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7500

MEMORANDUM

From: *MJP* Mark J. Pedor, RDML
COMDT (CG-8)

Reply to: Audit Liaison
Attn of: LTJG S. M. Vignola
(202) 372-3533

To: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.
Inspector General

Subj: DHS OIG DRAFT REPORT: "MANAGEMENT ALERT - THE UNITED STATES
COAST GUARD SHOULD DISCONTINUE THE USE OF FUNCTIONAL
FIREARMS IN DVD SIMULATION TRAINING"

Ref: (a) Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General Project No. 21-029

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Coast Guard appreciates the work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.
2. The draft report contained one recommendation. The Coast Guard concurs with this recommendation and our response is included in enclosure (1).
3. Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please contact me or my designated point of contact if you have any questions.
4. My designated point of contact is LTJG Sydney Vignola who can be reached at 202-372-3533 or sydney.m.vignola@uscg.mil.

#

Enclosure: (1) USCG Response to OIG Draft Report Recommendations on DHS Law Enforcement Virtual Training



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MANAGEMENT ALERT – THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD SHOULD DISCONTINUE THE USE OF FUNCTIONAL FIREARMS IN DVD SIMULATION TRAINING

OIG Project No. 21-029

OIG recommended that the Commander, Force Readiness Command, United States Coast Guard:

Recommendation 1: Implement alternative solutions to replace the use of functional firearms during its Judgmental Use of Force Evaluation training.

Response: Concur. Effective 3 September 2021, the Coast Guard discontinued the use of functional firearms for the Judgmental Use of Force Evaluations (JUFE). ALCOAST COMDT NOTICE (ACN 087/21) enacted a policy change to substitute airsoft pistols and non-guns in place of functional firearms for JUFE. The Coast Guard will continue to evaluate the appropriate training policies and equipment needed to ensure the safety and readiness of law enforcement personnel.



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Appendix C
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