



SOVEREIGN CITIZENS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to establish a baseline of knowledge on Sovereign Citizens that will enable officers to handle contacts appropriately and safely.

BACKGROUND

The “Sovereign Citizen” (SC) movement is a loosely organized collection of groups and individuals who have adopted a right-wing anarchist ideology, originating in the theories of a group called the Posse Comitatus in the 1970’s. Its followers believe all existing government in the United States is illegitimate and they seek to “restore” an idealized, minimalist government.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation considers sovereign-citizen extremists as comprising a domestic terrorist movement. Sovereign Citizens do not represent an anarchist group, nor are they a militia, although they are associated with groups such as Aryan Nations, sharing a theory of “leaderless resistance.” Rather, they operate as individuals who come together in affiliated groups to train, help each other with paperwork, and talk about their ideology.

Sovereign Citizens declare war against the government and other forms of authority using the following:

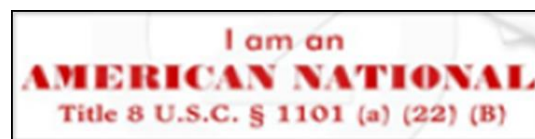
- **Paper Terrorism Harassment-** a tactic involving the use of bogus legal documents such as Diplomat Identification Cards, International Driving Permits, IRS Form 1099s and others to confuse the officer during the encounter.
- **Intimidation Tactics-** extremists will engage in a wide variety of intimidation tactics when contacted by law enforcement. Individuals will pose as “Civil Rights Investigators,” “Federal Agents” or identify themselves as “World Citizens” and “Nationals.”
- **Violence-** Sovereign Citizen’s criminal activity typically involves non-violent behavior such as squatting, tax evasion and fraud. Unfortunately, however, officers are highly visible symbols of government and as a result become a target of extremist anger and on occasion, extremists have retaliated violently against law enforcement. Since the year 2000, at least six officers have been killed by known SC (Jackson, 2013).

SOVEREIGN CITIZEN IDENTIFIERS

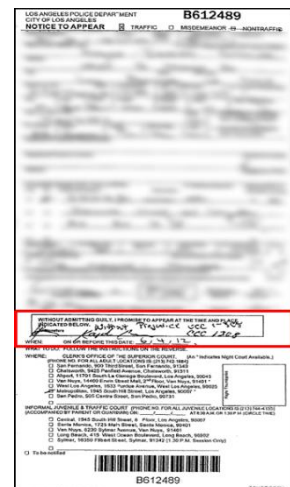
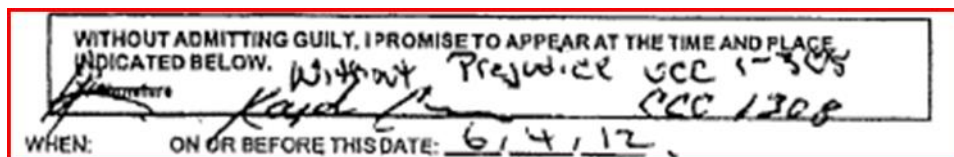
The following indicators can assist law enforcement officers to identify these SCs:

Visual Identifiers: Sovereign Citizens will produce fictitious documents including International Driving Permits, Diplomatic Travel Passes, Diplomatic IDs and license plates.

Sovereign Citizens will also indicate their political beliefs by displaying bumper stickers with “I am an American National,” “White Power,” “Posse Comitatus” and display government plates and/or CA Exempt License Plates to avoid paying registration fees.



Written Identifiers: When searching for written identifiers, these are some examples to look for. Extremists will deliberately use non-standard grammar, they will write their name in all Capital Letters, and use Red Ink Only. When signing documents, they will write the words “TDC” (Threat, Duress, or Coercion), “Without Prejudice” – UCC 1-308, and “UD” (Under Duress) on the form.



Verbal Identifiers: When contacting a SC, they are most likely to offer several identifying verbal clues such as references to the Constitution of the United States and the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC). Sovereign Citizens will self-identify as “Common Law Citizen,” “Freeman” and “Constitutionalists” among others.

Sovereign Citizens will commonly state “No Contract, No Contact,” when an officer has made contact with them. They will refuse to engage in conversation and even become resistive. Additionally, they will demand to see a Law Enforcement Officer’s Oath of Office when questioning an officer’s authority and will also contest an officer’s jurisdiction and demand proof of jurisdiction and/or a search warrant.

Behavioral Identifiers: Sovereign Citizens do not recognize any form of government authority. Therefore, when making contact with such individuals, it is important for officers to understand their behavior.

Sovereign Citizens can be identified by their forward actions. They will refuse to cooperate with officer requests and object to providing a driver license and registration. They will also attempt to assert control of the situation and attempt to intimidate with further recourse action. Because of their beliefs, SCs will react out of fear, mistrust, or simply anger which has the potential to transform a minor situation into a major one.

DEFUSING AND SAFETY TECHNIQUES

It is vital for officers to quickly recognize they may be dealing with a SC and to take the necessary safety precautions in order to be prepared to handle the encounter appropriately. The following are a few strategies that may lessen the risks to officers and ensure a peaceful outcome.

Defusing Techniques: The two key defusing techniques are ventilation and active listening. Ventilation essentially involves letting the individual speak, giving them an opportunity to “ventilate” and “blow off steam,” thereby decreasing their anger because they have been given a chance to express it.

Once the individual has calmed down, using active listening techniques will further disarm the person. These techniques include: *Validation*, whereby the listener lets the speaker know that he or she understands the speaker is upset, and *Reflective Questioning*, whereby the listener asks the speaker questions about what he or she has just said, in order to draw the speaker out and get the speaker to slow down and consider what he or she is talking about.

Safety Techniques: If an officer realizes a potential dangerous situation involving a SC, it is crucial to request back up before the encounter. Do not get confrontational and do not argue with their beliefs. Sovereign Citizens will make outrageous statements and it is natural to want to argue against those views. However, it is important to realize there is a little chance the individual will change his or her mind and an argument may worsen the situation.

There will be times, when an officer may have an opportunity to distract a SC or derail their train of thought. An officer can ask where the SC learned his or her beliefs or theories. This will not only allow the individual to explain rather than argue. Thus lowering the confrontation level, but will also give the officer an opportunity to learn more about their ideology.

POLICY

The Los Angeles Port Police Department has not implemented a department policy in the aforementioned area since sovereign citizenship in and of itself, is not illegal. Port Police Officers will not infringe on the First Amendment rights of people who have unpopular political or social views.

PROCEDURES

The Los Angeles Port Police Department will continue to enforce all laws violated by any person regardless of governmental beliefs. When making contact with SCs, Port Police Officers first should stay alert for some of the identifiers mentioned above. It is recommended to use caution at all times and to exercise sound officer safety techniques. Port Police Officers should request a Field Supervisor to respond to the scene with any SC encounter. Port Police Officer should follow the **Use of Force Policy 300**, should it become necessary.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Port Police Officers should complete a Miscellaneous Incident Report (MIR) documenting the encounter with the SC. A copy of the completed Field Interview (FI) Card, a copy of any other pertinent documents should be attached to the report. An FI check and follow-up will be conducted by Port Police, Criminal Investigations Section.

Port Police Officers should complete a Suspicious Activity Report (SAR), if they have reason to believe the SC is involved in criminal activity, attempted criminal act or have a nexus to foreign and/or domestic terrorism. Port Police Officers should also submit a SAR/TIP/LEAD with the Joint Regional Intelligence Center. Port Police Officers should follow the **Suspicious Activity Reporting Policy 469**.

TRAINING VIDEOS / AIDS

Southern Poverty Law Center - Sovereign Citizen Movement

https://youtu.be/d_y-gLm9Hrw

California POST Learning Portal – Homeland Security Sovereign Citizens: Extremists

https://lp.post.ca.gov/post/user_activity_info.aspx?id=726

REFERENCES

Anti-Defamation League, “Officer Safety and Extremists: An Overview for Law Enforcement Officers”, Law Enforcement Agency Resource Network (2001).

California POST Learning Portal, Sovereign Citizens: Extremists, (May 2013).

Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit II, “Sovereign Citizens: An Introduction for Law Enforcement”, Federal Bureau of Investigations (November 2010).

Major Crimes Division- Analysis Section, “How to Identify and Report Suspicious Activity”, Sovereign Citizens – Extremists, *Los Angeles Police Department* (September 2011).

Southern Poverty Law Center, Sovereign Citizens and Law Enforcement, (November 2010).

Thom Jackson, “Sovereign Citizens on Traffic Stops”, Officer Safety Corner, *The Police Chief* 80 (February 2013): 14-15.