Methods of Patrol for Security Officers

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Introduction

Patrolling represents one of the most important responsibilities of a security officer and an effective patrol will often help deter criminal activity, identify hazards, protect people and property, and ensure that security procedures are being followed.

It is important to never view patrolling simply as walking around a site, but rather a systematic process of observing, assessing, recording, and reporting anything that may affect the safety or security of the premises.

1. The Purpose and Intent of Patrol

The main purposes and intent behind the security patrols is to provide a presence within a specific area for reasons which include:

1. Deterring theft, vandalism, trespassing, and other unauthorized activity.
2. Detecting security breaches at an early stage.
3. Identifying safety hazards, fire risks, and environmental problems.
4. Checking doors, gates, windows, restricted areas, equipment, and other vulnerable points.
5. Protecting employees, visitors, customers, and property.
6. Ensuring that security procedures and site rules are being followed.
7. Providing a visible security presence.
8. Responding appropriately to incidents and emergencies.
9. Gathering accurate information for reports and investigations.

2. Types of Patrol

There are actually several types and methods of patrol, including:

1. Foot or Walking Patrols, which represent one of the most common methods.
2. Vehicle or Bicycle Patrols, which generally allow for a larger area to be covered more quickly.
3. Random / Staggered Patrols, which involve alternating routes of travel at alternating times.
4. Scheduled Patrols, which are typically used for fire watch or monitoring of specific situations.

It needs to be remembered and understood, that as a security officers you may use several different methods of patrol depending on the size, layout, and risk level of the site.

3. Patrol Techniques and Methods

Regardless of the type of patrol, the security officers effective use of observation skills and techniques cannot be overstated.

Utilizing the acronym O.L.C.C.R can often help increase the effectiveness of the security officers effectiveness.

Observe

While patrolling a location, the environment should be carefully examined rather than simply passing through.

Listen

Whenever patrolling an area, listening for sounds which are outside of the normal sounds commonly heard within the area can often indicate a potential problem.

Check

Where authorized, officers should physically check designated security points.

This may include doors, gates, locks, alarms, lighting, equipment, or other site-specific controls.

Officers should never bypass safety procedures or enter areas where they are not authorized to go.

Compare

A security officer should seek to develop an understanding of what "normal" actually looks like within a specific environment and remain vigilant for any changes which may be observed and may be significant. For example, an unfamiliar vehicle, an open door that is normally locked, or a light that is normally switched off may require further investigation.

Report

Information which may impact the safety or security of others should be reported immediately through the appropriate chain of command.

4. Varying Patrol Routes

The effectiveness of patrol as a deterrence is based strongly within the principle of unpredictability and the simplest way to engage in this principle is to vary not only the times at which a patrol of an area is made, but also the specific route used to patrol the area.

It is however equally important to ensure that any alteration to times or routes do not cause sensitive or required areas to be missed.

5. Personal Safety During Patrol Activities

During a patrol, the personal safety of the security officer must be considered. To help achieve this objective, the security officer should follow these principles and techniques:

1. Always maintain awareness of your surroundings and any changes within the environment.
2. Whenever possible and applicable, follow lone worker procedures regardless of other personnel located on the same post or site, unless they are patrolling with you.
3. Always carry some form of communications equipment (Two-Way Radio, cellular phone, etc).

4. Always be aware of emergency contact procedures and have this information readily available.
5. Never engage within unnecessary confrontation, if it can be avoided.
6. Always maintain a safe distance from potentially aggressive individuals until backup arrives.
7. Never be ashamed to request assistance if needed.

It is important to always remember, that the objective of patrol is to protect people and property, not to take unnecessary risks.

6. Documentation

Documentation is an critical aspect of an effective security operations. The use of a “Patrol Log” or simply notes left for the next shift can and will go far to help prevent situations from either developing or expanding into more complicated issues.

Additionally, one should NEVER falsify a patrol record or claim to have completed a check that was not performed, as this can lead to not only the escalation of a problem, but also personal liability on the part of the security officer.

7. Common Patrol Mistakes

Although mistakes are a part of any activity, a security officers should always seek to avoid the following, to ensure professionalism:

1. Following exactly the same routine when site procedures allow variation.
2. Becoming distracted by personal phones or unrelated activities.
3. Failing to investigate obvious abnormalities.
4. Ignoring small security or safety issues.
5. Assuming that another officer has already checked an area.
6. Failing to document incidents.
7. Entering unsafe situations unnecessarily.
8. Becoming complacent because a site has historically been quiet.
9. Making assumptions about people without objective evidence.
10. Leaving assigned patrol areas without authorization.

In Conclusion

Effective patrol is based on visibility, observation, prevention, communication, and accurate reporting.

There is no single patrol method suitable for every security environment. Foot, vehicle, bicycle, static, scheduled, and varied patrols may all have an appropriate role depending on the site's risk assessment and security plan.

The most effective security officer is not simply the officer who covers the greatest distance. It is the officer who remains alert, professional, observant, safety-conscious, and prepared to recognize and report abnormal conditions.

A successful patrol should leave the officer with a clear understanding of the condition of the area and leave the site with a stronger level of security.

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About the Author

Brian S. Williams is a professional firearms instructor, tactical trainer, and executive security consultant with greater than 35 years of experience in firearms instruction, use-of-force training, and protective operations. As the founder of several firearms training and security organizations, he has developed and delivered firearms, tactical, and instructor certification programs for civilians, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and licensed security professionals throughout the United States.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Williams has trained and certified more than 10,500 Connecticut pistol permit applicants, instructed more than 2,000 civilians and hundreds of law enforcement and security professionals in advanced firearms and tactical applications, and provided remedial firearms training to military and correctional personnel. He served as a Marine Police Officer and Watch Commander with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and was appointed to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council, where he contributed to firearms training and policy discussions.

Mr. Williams holds numerous professional certifications, including NRA Training Counselor, NRA Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor, General Dynamics Simunitions FX™ Instructor, The Heckler & Koch International Training Division and Sig Sauer Academy Instructor certifications, and USCCA Concealed Carry and Home Defense Instructor. He is the author of *Welcome to the Real World: A Dangerous Place to Be Caught Unprepared* and has been recognized as an expert in firearms by the Connecticut Superior Courts. His work continues to emphasize responsible firearms ownership, sound judgment, lawful use of force, and practical, reality-based training.