

	Houston Independent School District Police Department Directives	DIRECTIVE: 450-025
		EFFECTIVE DATE: January 14, 2023
SUBJECT: Civil Disturbances, Walk Outs and Demonstrations		REVISED DATE:

PURPOSE

This directive aims to specify guidelines for police response and intervention in civil disturbances, walk-outs, and demonstrations. This directive applies to all Houston Independent School District Police personnel.

BACKGROUND

Civil disturbances, walk-outs, or demonstrations can involve law enforcement agencies in unpredictable situations. Tactics employed by persons engaged in disruptive activities frequently include efforts to draw police, and other public officials, into responses likely to produce violence and injury to participants and, thus, garner support for their cause. Department personnel must deal with disruptive situations to minimize the potential for violent confrontations.

Demonstrations are often highly emotional incidents. The demonstrators and others in the area are committed to their various causes and possibly conflicting rights. Department personnel will strive to remain objective to maintain effectiveness in such situations. Once the appearance of objectivity is lost, the department's presence at a demonstration may increase tensions and make the police task even more difficult.

Department personnel assigned to the demonstration scene will strive to maintain an outward appearance of calmness, whether the task involved is simply standing by, protecting participants from hostile persons, or making necessary arrests of violent participants.

POLICY

It is neither the intention nor the desire of the HISD Police Department to suppress or restrain lawful activity. The department will use whatever resources are necessary to protect the rights of any person, or group, to conduct a peaceful and lawful demonstration at any permissible location. Unlawful activity, however, requires prompt and effective action that will discourage the conduct whenever it occurs.

INITIAL RESPONSE

The first officer at the scene of a civil disturbance, walk-out, or demonstration shall observe the situation from a distance and evaluate it before taking action. The officer shall notify dispatch of the situation and request a supervisor respond to the scene.

COORDINATION OF OFFICERS' ACTIONS

A supervisor will coordinate officers' actions.

- a) Only requested units shall respond to the scene.
- b) Officers will report to the supervisor after parking their vehicles in one group, away from the crowd.

- c) One officer will be assigned to guard the vehicles against damage.
- d) Individual officers shall avoid, when possible, driving their cars into the enter of the crowd and acting individually.

COORDINATION OF DEPARTMENTAL ACTIONS

Information about a scheduled demonstration or disturbance affecting the departmental response received before the event shall be forwarded to the Chief of Police, Asst. Chief of Police and Commanders.

Supervisors will:

- a) Ensure that appropriate planning is coordinated with other units;
- b) Verify that required personnel resources will be made available;
- c) Determine the strategies and contingencies to be used; and
- d) Determine what equipment will be needed.

The Chief of Police, Assistant Chief of Police, and Commanders shall be briefed on all plans to determine the level of involvement required.

Supervisors and officers will strive to ensure that a disciplined and coordinated department response is maintained at the scene of a demonstration.

Officers shall not act alone unless a loss of life or great bodily harm could result to persons from the conduct of participants.

When property damage is imminent, officers will coordinate their response through assigned supervisors and perform tasks as directed.

Supervisors will remain at the scene and continually seek information concerning the location and number of demonstrators, the emotional condition of the crowd, and the resources available to maintain order effectively.

RESPONSE TO VIOLENT/ ILLEGAL CONDUCT

Officers should use the appropriate amount of force necessary to protect themselves, others, or property whenever a participant uses physical violence upon an officer, another person, or property.

Whenever possible, supervisors or staff members present shall determine whether to arrest based on the availability of resources and the volatility of the demonstration or disturbance.

Whenever possible and appropriate, demonstrators engaging in illegal behavior shall be warned that their continued behavior could result in arrest.

NEWS MEDIA

Department personnel assigned to the demonstration scene will cooperate with the press, photographers, and radio and television personnel. News media representatives have a constitutional right to cover demonstrations but must not violate the law.

Those with a right to cover or photograph demonstrations are not limited to papers, radio, or television station representatives. Persons representing some of this city's small newspapers or magazines, free-lancers, and other citizens are also entitled to take notes or photographs.

ORDER TO DISPERSE

A dispersal order must be given before a person can be guilty of remaining at a place of riot or unlawful assembly. Once the dispersal order is given, a reasonable time must be allowed for compliance. An order for arrest may then be given at that time.

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

Assistance from other agencies may be requested if the riot grows very large. If such assistance becomes necessary, the Chief of Police or designee shall notify the highest-ranking officer available at the appropriate municipal agency or the Harris County Sheriff's Office.

The Chief of Police, or designee, will also notify the Superintendent of Schools, designee, and the HISD Communications Office that a request for assistance has been made.

Approved By


Pedro Lopez Jr., Chief of Police