Ambush Attack on Code Enforcement Officer

November 2022

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A Code Enforcement Officer in Louisville, KY was recently assaulted and robbed in an ambush attack by two reported juveniles as a third juvenile was present but did not engage in the attack. In September of this year the *International Code Council* (ICC) conducted their annual conference in Louisville in which I presented a class on **Safety and Violence Mitigation Strategies**. The presentation was very well received and there was a lot of discussion about the need to provide safety training to all code professionals. The violent attack of a Code Enforcement Officer in Louisville further validates the necessity of safety training for all code professionals from qualified safety trainers with experience, credentials, and subject matter expertise in officer survival.

The Code Enforcement Officer in Louisville was taking photographs of the property when she was violently attacked. Two perpetrators ambushed the Code Enforcement Officer from behind, knocked her to the ground, reportedly placed a gun in her mouth, and stole her personal firearm which was identified as a 9mm handgun. She was fortunate to survive. This violent attack took only mere seconds to complete. I often state in training that *violence happens fast* and this incident is an example demonstrating just how fast a violent attack can occur. To view the video of the ambush attack go to the article [Kids wanted for robbing metro code inspector](). I am thankful that the Code Enforcement Officer was not seriously injured. This violent encounter could have had a very different outcome resulting in a homicide. Considering it was reported that one of the juvenile attackers placed his gun in the Code Enforcement Officers mouth, only a few pounds of pressure on a trigger separates life from death. It is important not to minimize the serious nature of this act of violence.
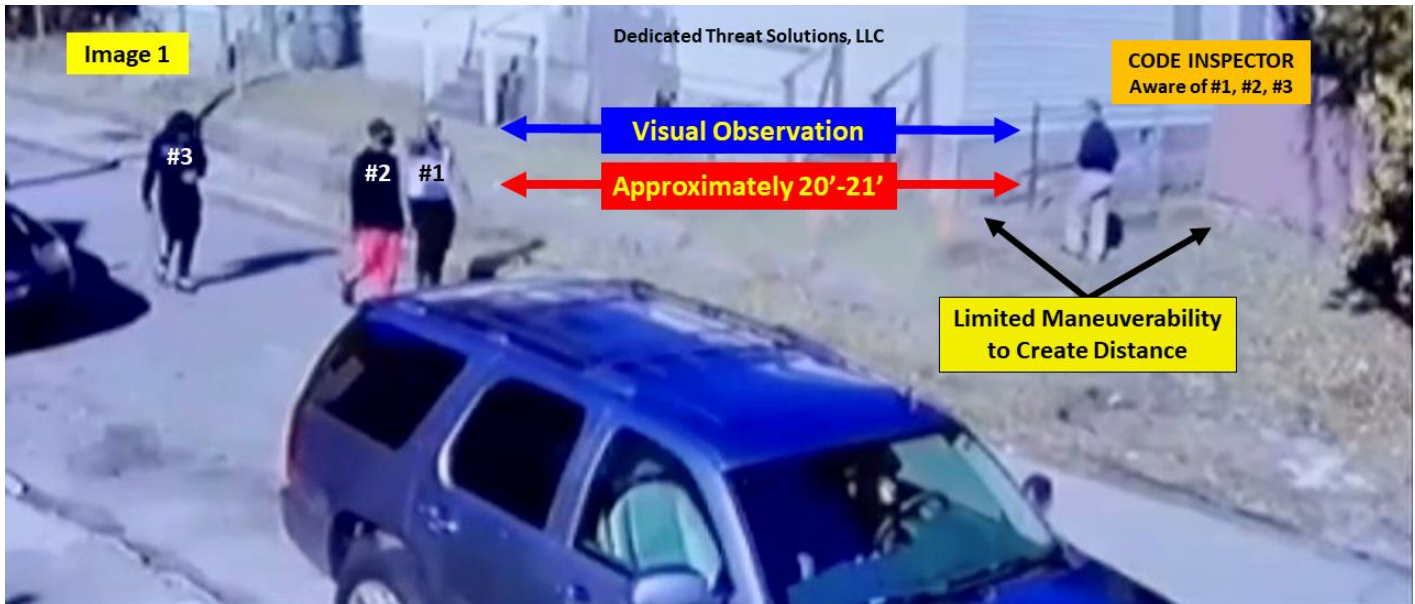
This article is not to judge the actions of the victimized Code Enforcement Officer but to review officer safety factors as a learning tool. Currently, minimal information is publicly available regarding this incident. As the attack was caught on video it provides an opportunity to examine what occurred and learn from the incident. Having evaluated and analyzed thousands of real-world violent encounters it is important to state that while video evidence is extremely valuable, it does not tell the whole story regarding an incident. Angles, distances, lighting, audio, and other factors can be very different from what appears in the video. Additionally, a video cannot relay what the officer was experiencing at the time of the attack.

As taught in the **Code Official Safety Specialist** (COSS) training through the **Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation** (CEOSF), all violent encounters are impacted by the factors of time, distance, and environment (TDE). This ambush attack highlights many of these factors.

Time	Everyone has the same amount of time. Code enforcement officers should strive to use time more effectively than the threat that wants to harm you.
Distance	Increasing distance generally, but not always, provides an increase in safety and buys you time to assess the situation, analyze what is occurring, and decide your next move.
Environment	Includes numerous variables that can impact your safety such as cover and concealment, barriers, escape routes, weapons of opportunity, lighting conditions, etc.

In Image 1 consider the factors of TDE and how they can influence an attack. It appears that all parties are aware of each other through visual observation. If #1 and #2 started their attack at this point, the Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) does not have much distance from the threats. The estimated distance from the CEO to threat #1 is approximately 20'-21'. A healthy young juvenile can easily cover this distance in under 1.5 seconds. That is not a lot of time for the CEO to respond even if armed with a firearm. The environment is another important factor as the CEO is limited in her options because the house and fence impede movement to create more distance away from the threats. Additionally, there does not appear to be any cover or concealment available that the CEO would be able to utilize before the attackers reach her location.

In this incident the attack does not begin at this point. Yet, the factors of TDE must be considered at this time because it is when the CEO first observed the three individuals. If the CEO assessed they were a threat to her safety, we can determine based on the close proximity to the threats there is limited time to respond and maneuverability is impacted by the house and fence. Lack of distance, time, and maneuverability do not work to the benefit of the CEO. These are factors that all code professionals must consider when working in a field environment. It is also important to know that the field is the most dangerous environment for code professionals as the majority who have been killed in the line of duty by violence were killed while working in the field.

Other considerations based on Image 1:

⇨ This violent encounter involved multiple attackers which adds to the complexity of the incident and significantly increases the level of danger to the CEO. A one-on-one confrontation can be challenging enough. An encounter with multiple attackers is difficult under the best of circumstances especially when "*walking away*" is not an option such as an ambush attack. There are situations when avoidance and de-escalation are not options based on the threats action.

⇨ The CEO, threat #2, and threat #3 are wearing long sleeve shirts indicating that the temperature is cool. Threat #1 is wearing a tank top which can be considered an anomaly. In and of itself this observation may not have significant meaning. Reasons that #1 may not be wearing a warmer top can include he likes cooler weather, he doesn't own warmer clothes, he owns warmer clothes but they are dirty, he has a medical condition where his body temperature runs warmer than normal, or he may be under the influence of a drug which raises body temperature. There can be a host of reasons why #1 is not dressed more in alignment with #2 and #3. If #1 is under the influence of a substance it may be a contributory influence that leads to the attack as he may not be thinking clearly, is more prone to taking risk due to lowered inhibitions, etc. If #1 is the group leader then his actions can influence the actions of #2 and #3. Again, the factor of wearing a tank top by itself may not be valuable but when aggregated with other relevant factors the meaning may hold more significance.

Why is this important?

Because observation is a significant part of situational awareness. The ability to gather information, assign meaning, and then use critical thinking skills that lead to effective safety decisions in a time compressed environment while under pressure is a critical skill that can determine the outcome of your safety.

⇨ Note that #2 and #3 both appear to be wearing face masks. Additionally #3 is wearing his hoodie over his head. Are the face masks for protection against Covid or a method to intentionally conceal their identity? Also note that #1 does not appear to be wearing a face mask. This might be considered the second anomaly in addition to the tank top but still isn't enough information to necessarily assign meaning or impact action.

⇨ If the CEO visually observed the three individuals and determined they were a threat to her safety then this is the most appropriate time to initiate proactive safety measures. Again, time is a critical factor in all encounters and the ability to use time to your advantage can increase your chances for a successful outcome. Even extremely small increments of time under 1 second can be significantly advantageous. The concept of time is strongly linked to the OODA Loop. The first "O" of the OODA Loop is 'Observe' which is impacted by your level of situational awareness. If you lack awareness you have no chance to observe a threat that wants to harm you which means you cannot be proactive with safety. This can lead to victimization including serious injury or death.

⇨ The assault and robbery of the CEO appears to be a crime of opportunity. It is highly unlikely that the three juveniles knew the CEO was going to be at the location to conduct an inspection. Instead, they may have been walking down the street, observed that the CEO possessed a handgun that they wanted, quickly created a basic plan of attack, and then implemented their attack on the CEO with the objective of stealing her firearm.

Image 2 indicates that the CEO did not assess that the individuals were a threat to her safety. The CEO begins to focus her attention on her camera in order to take photographs of the property.

⇨ Note how #1 and #2 maintain visual observation of the CEO as she is focusing on her camera.

⇨ Also note how #1 and #2 maintain close proximity to each other while #3 lags behind.

Image 3 shows the CEO taking photographs of the property.

⇨ Notice how #1 and #2 are in even closer proximity to each other compared to image 2. They may be communicating pre-attack information on how and when they will initiate their attack.

Image 4 shows the start of the ambush attack being implemented. The CEO remains focused on taking photos of the property and has no awareness of the impending attack.

⇨ #1 lowers his body like a predator stalking his prey as he beings to attack.

⇨ #2 simultaneously begins his attack.

⇨ #3 continues to move in his original direction of travel but keeps close observation.

Image 5 is a continuation of the ambush attack.

⇨ #1 has taken the lead in order to gain physical control over the CEO.

⇨ While difficult to observe from this image, #2 is retrieving a firearm that he possesses.

⇨ #3 continues to observe as he remains on his path.

Image 6 is where the CEO is in serious danger as attacker #1 is now in physical contact of her while attacker #2 appears to be pointing a firearm at the CEO. Notice the aggressive and dynamic position of #2 as he is moving in closer to the CEO. #3 continues to observe but does not actively engage. Even if the CEO turned around prior to the ambush attack her maneuverability is severely limited by the house and fence. Both threats would be in extremely close proximity and she would have an extremely small amount of time to respond.

Image 7 shows attacker #2 shoving his firearm in the CEO's face as #1 physically controls her. #3 is continues to observe. The CEO is likely experiencing psychological and physiological responses to stress. This would include the "chemical dump" of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. Her heart rate, respirations, and blood pressure will increase. Her fine motor skills will not be functioning. She may be experiencing tunnel vision, auditory exclusion, slow motion time, or other perceptual distortions. The level of danger to the CEO is extremely high at this point.

Image 8 shows that the CEO has been physically taken to the ground by #1. It appears this is the point in which #2 reportedly places his gun in the mouth of the CEO. #1 then unholsters the CEO's firearm effectively disarming her. It appears that the CEO's firearm was in a holster located on her right hip.

This incident may not have been a pre-planned attack yet it was effectively executed. It was reported that the attackers were juveniles and one must consider if they have previously engaged in this type of violence. Their use of a firearm, commitment to the attack, and lack of hesitancy in committing a serious crime is very concerning.

Image 9 shows #1 and #2 making a hasty exit from the scene after victimizing the Code Enforcement Officer and stealing her firearm. It appears that #1 has possession of the CEO's firearm. #3 is not visible but is in close proximity.

Image 10 shows the disarmed CEO sitting on the ground looking in the direction the attackers ran. Keep in mind that this violent attack occurred in mere seconds. Reviewing the previous images can give the impression that the attack occurred over a longer period of time but the truth is that his encounter happened very fast. Never assume that the danger is over as the attackers can turn around, return to the CEO, and shoot her potentially to avoid being identified. Be proactive until you know you are safe.

According to the article it was reported that the Code Enforcement Officer returned to work two days after the attack which indicates that no serious physical injuries occurred during the attack. There is the possibility of short and/or long term psychological injury. Critical incidents have the potential to overwhelm normal stress coping abilities. A few points regarding the aftermath of a violent attack:

❖ Being victimized does NOT mean that the victim will automatically develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

❖ Following a critical incident possible responses include sleep difficulties, intrusive thoughts, isolation, emotional numbing, anger, frustration, heightened sense of danger anxiety, depression, changes in appetite, etc.

  – It is also important to note that none of the above may be experienced. It is not abnormal to feel okay following a critical incident.

❖ If help is needed, seeking professional assistance is NOT a sign of weakness.

After such an attack I encourage anyone who needs assistance for physical, mental, or emotional health issues to seek help from a qualified mental health professional or medical professional. Many departments have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that can provide resources which are often free and confidential. Contact your Human Resources department for specific information.

Safety Considerations for Code Professionals

This article is not meant to be an in-depth analysis of this attack but rather to highlight points that have safety implications. Every incident provides a learning opportunity which can add to the safety of all code professionals regardless of location, job title, or department name. Following are safety considerations that are not necessarily related to the incident in Louisville, nor is it all inclusive.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Situational Awareness (SA) is a critical skill that must be learned, developed and practiced. Conceptually SA is not difficult to understand but it can be challenging to implement these skills for a variety of reasons.

You may be in a situation where your initial assessment indicates that there is no threat to your safety. Even if you initially do not assess a threat it is important to understand that the situation can rapidly change. Therefore, maintain situational awareness and continue to assess the environment as you are performing your job. Do not become so "*task focused*" at the expense of your safety such as when taking photographs, completing an inspection, writing paperwork, talking with people, etc.

Situational Awareness is a skill that affords you to ability to assess your environment to determine if there are safety implications. SA can buy you time to use avoidance tactics or implement protective tactics. SA does not guarantee that you will identify all threats and it does not guarantee your safety. Even when you have SA and identify a threat it does not mean you will be able to avoid, de-escalate, or mitigate all acts of violence. Therefore, SA should be thought of as a skill, not a complete safety system.

MULTIPLE THREATS

Acts of violence committed by multiple threats always increases the level of danger to your safety. If necessary, slow down and observe for a longer period of time to assess.

Multiple threats increases the level of difficulty and complexity of your response. There are more factors and variables to consider in a time compressed environment, that can be very stressful with high consequences for failure.

Multiple attackers creates a "*Disparity of Force*" which can impact and justify when and how much force a code professional uses for protection. You must be able to clearly and specifically articulate the disparity.

How and when you choose to protect yourself in a multiple attacker situation can be impacted by factors and variables such as proximity, weapons, verbal threats, body language, prior knowledge of the threats, location, if you are alone, your level of training, type of safety equipment you are issued, etc.

AMBUSH ATTACK

According to the Ambush Fact Sheet[1] by The International Association of Chiefs of Police, four factors have come define an ambush assault:
- ⇨ Element of surprise
- ⇨ Concealment of the assailant, their intentions, or weapon
- ⇨ Suddenness of the attack
- ⇨ A lack of provocation

All violent encounters are dangerous but the ambush attack is the most dangerous as the attacker(s) determines the time, location, weapon, and method of attack. It is critical to remember that the threat has a say in a violent encounter.

Ambush attacks tend to be fast, dynamic, and very violent. This is why ambush attacks are often referred to as the worst-case scenario of a violent attack.

In an ambush attack there is no ability for avoidance or use of verbal de-escalation skills. By definition, there is no opportunity to "*just walk away*" from an ambush attack.

OFFICER SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Officer safety equipment (OC spray, expandable baton, electronic control device, firearm, etc.) and personal protective equipment (PPE - gloves, face masks, respirators, Tyvek suits, hard hats, etc.) are two very different and separate topics that should not be confused as the same or intermingled when discussing officer safety.

Departments must provide training for any officer safety equipment that is issued to staff. Periodic refresher training must also be provided.

The Code Enforcement Officer in Louisville had her personal firearm taken from her during the attack. It is unknown specifically what type of firearm or holster she possessed. Gear selection is very important especially pertaining to holsters. As violent encounters can be very dynamic it is important to have a quality holster that provides retention so the firearm cannot easily be taken from the officer.

There must be written policies and procedures pertaining to:

- ⇨ Department issued safety equipment
- ⇨ Training standards and requirements

Policies must be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary. Policy updates relating to safety equipment and training standards must be clearly communicated to staff.

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[1] https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IACP_Ambush_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Code Enforcement Professionals Killed in the Line of Duty

22 Homicides
18 Male (82%)
4 Female (18%)

Statistically a code professional killed in the line of duty by violence will be shot with a firearm while working in the field by a male offender.

91%
Killed by Firearm

20 Homicides By Firearm

86%
Killed in the Field

The "**Field**" is your most dangerous work environment!

23%
Killed in California

5 Homicides In California

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OFFICER SAFETY TRAINING

Code enforcement professionals have been seriously injured and killed in the line of duty by violence. This includes code professionals from the United States, Canada, and Belgium who have been shot and stabbed to death. The vast majority of incidents, unless high-profile, never make the news. The need for formalized officer safety training is long overdue and some states are now developing and implementing legislation to address this vitally important topic.

When it comes to violent encounters the reality is:

⇨ Violence does not care about job titles
⇨ Violence does not care about department names
⇨ Violence does not care about jurisdictional boundaries

TRAINING MATTERS.
CODE OFFICIAL SAFETY SPECIALIST (COSS)

CEOSF
CODE OFFICIAL SAFETY SPECIALIST

Too often decisions are made regarding officer safety training and the issuance of officer safety equipment based on faulty assumptions that do not match the reality of violent encounters.

Officer safety training needs to be formalized, comprehensive, and ongoing because violence is dangerous, dynamic, stressful, unpredictable, and potentially lethal.

Providing individual officer safety training classes that are not integrated into a formalized training plan can lead to staff who are overconfident but less safe. This occurs because staff are unable to contextualize and apply the information to an encounter that falls outside the scope of the course. Inability to adapt to a novel situation will increase stress which leads to hesitation in an encounter where time is a critical factor. Hesitation when action is required is a recipe for a negative outcome.

Many code departments and agencies provide training that focuses exclusively on situational awareness, verbal de-escalation skills, or both. Situational awareness does not guarantee an encounter will be avoided. Verbal de-escalation skills do not guarantee an encounter will be de-escalated. Those who complete training on situational awareness and/or verbal de-escalation who are confronted with unavoidable violence such as a physical attack may not have the ability to respond in a timely and effective manner because they have not been trained for this possibility.

Many officer safety skills are perishable meaning that the skill will deteriorate if not practiced. This places responsibility on staff to regularly practice the skills they are taught. Departments have an obligation to provide refresher and ongoing training. Safety training is not a one and done event.

Every Day; Every Inspection is a great mental reminder for all code professionals to use to be proactive with safety. If the word "inspection" does not apply then use "task" so that it reads – *Every Day; Every Task*. This mantra serves as a reminder that every day you work and with every inspection or task you complete, there is the possibility of danger. It is not intended to cause fear, paranoia, or hypervigilance but to acknowledge the potential of danger in a rational manner that fosters safety. Being proactive is one method to fight complacency.

I encourage all code professionals to write this mantra on a 3x5 index card and place it in their work vehicle. Every time the vehicle is entered the code professional will see the card which serves as a reminder to be proactive, situationally aware, and make decisions that foster safety. Working in the field is the most dangerous environment for code professionals as the field is where most are killed in the line of duty as well as verbally threatened and physically assaulted. But a mantra on a 3x5 card is not enough. Training is essential and the Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation has a comprehensive international Code Official Safety Specialist training program available.

Code Official Safety Specialist (COSS)

The *Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation* in partnership with *Dedicated Threat Solutions* is proud to offer a comprehensive international officer safety program for code enforcement professionals to include Code Enforcement Officers, Building Inspectors, Fire Inspectors, Health Inspectors, Housing Inspectors, Park Rangers, and other code related professions.

The **Code Official Safety Specialist** program is a comprehensive 5-course series on officer survival principles, concepts, and practices. Each course is approximately 3 hours and includes a comprehensive participant workbook with activities to further develop course content. This program sets the standard on officer safety training for code professionals.

The Code Official Safety Specialist is an international safety training program for all code professionals.

The **Code Official Safety Specialist** training program consists of the following 5 courses:

1. Tactical Mindset
2. Fear Management
3. Verbal De-escalation
4. 3 Phases of a Contact
5. Surviving a Violent Encounter

Attendees who complete the training receive a certificate of completion from the Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation recognizing the code professional as a **Code Official Safety Specialist**.

To register for the on-demand **Code Official Safety Specialist (COSS)** training click here: **COSS**.

To learn more about the Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation and sign up for their FREE newsletter click here: **CEOSF**.
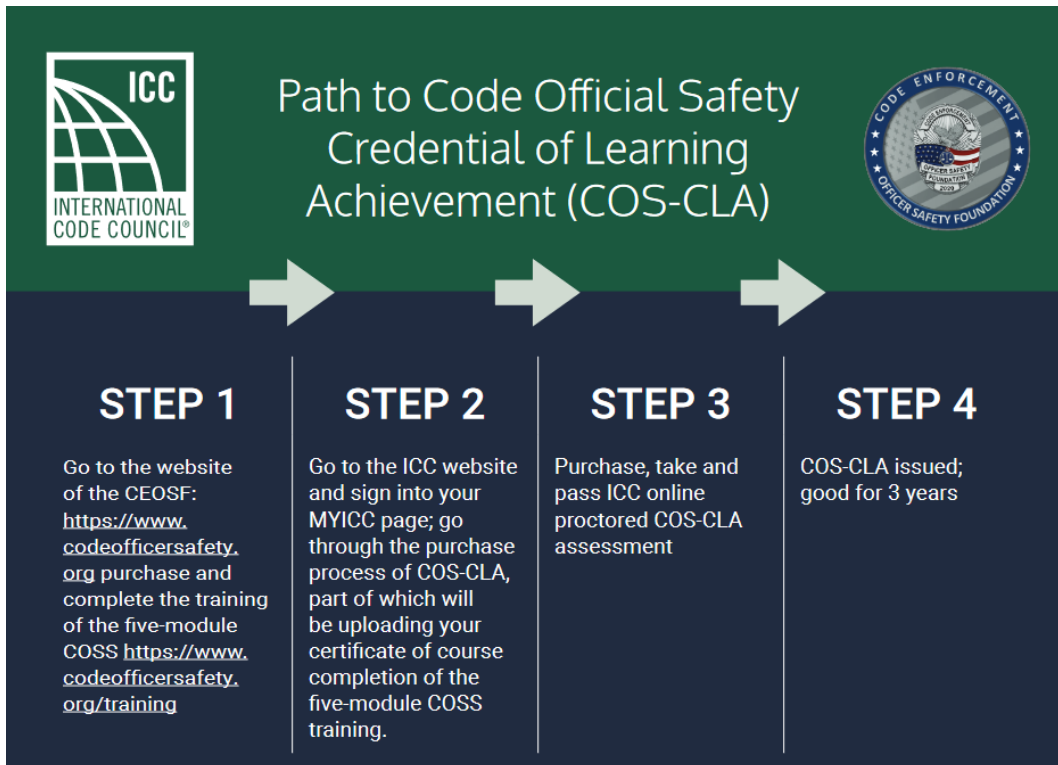
ICC Code Official Safety - Credential of Learning Achievement (COS-CLA)

The **International Code Council** offers a valuable professional development credential called the **Code Official Safety – Credential of Learning Achievement** (COS-CLA). Code professionals who complete the Code Official Safety Specialist training through the Code Enforcement Officer Safety Foundation are highly encouraged to obtain their COS-CLA and digital badge.

A Credential of Learning Achievement (CLA) goes beyond traditional training in its measurement of comprehension on the subject matter. It validates the participants willingness to go the extra mile in training and career advancement. The CLA differs from International Code Council (ICC) certifications and education because there is the required components of training/education and assessment on a specific subject matter, it is a different method of obtaining a valuable ICC Credential based on training and testing.

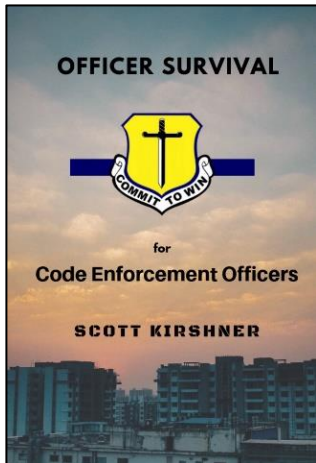To register for the **Credential of Learning Achievement** click here: **COS-CLA**.

Path to Code Official Safety Credential of Learning Achievement (COS-CLA)

STEP 1
Go to the website of the CEOSF: https://www.codeofficersafety.org purchase and complete the training of the five-module COSS https://www.codeofficersafety.org/training

STEP 2
Go to the ICC website and sign into your MYICC page; go through the purchase process of COS-CLA, part of which will be uploading your certificate of course completion of the five-module COSS training.

STEP 3
Purchase, take and pass ICC online proctored COS-CLA assessment

STEP 4
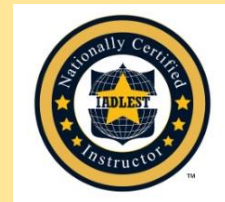COS-CLA issued; good for 3 years

Benefits of Code Official Safety Specialist (COSS) Training:

- ☑ 5 Comprehensive Courses
- ☑ 15 Hours of Training
- ☑ Comprehensive Participant Workbook for Each Course
- ☑ Highly Experienced Officer Survival Instructor
  - ❖ CEOSF Certified Officer Safety Instructor (COSCI)
  - ❖ IADLEST National Certified Instructor (INCI)
- ☑ Authorization to use the "COSS" acronym
- ☑ Certificate of Completion
- ☑ ICC CEU's
- ☑ Option to obtain ICC Credential of Learning Achievement
- ☑ State Association CEU's depending on state
- ☑ Professional Growth and Development
- ☑ Commitment to Officer Safety
- ☑ Increased Confidence
- ☑ Understanding why "*just walk away*" is a flawed strategy

The trainer for the **Code Official Safety Specialist** (COSS) program is the author of **Officer Survival for Code Enforcement Officers** which is used by departments, associations, and code professionals nationally and internationally.

Mr. Kirshner is a **CEOSF Officer Safety Certified Instructor** (COSCI) and an **IADLEST Nationally Certified Instructor** (INCI) meaning his credentials have been thoroughly vetted and verified to ensure the highest quality training standards.

Scott Kirshner, M.Ed., COSCI, INCI, SAS-AP® has been a Parole Administrator, Supervisory Probation Officer, and a Corrections Officer. He has extensive experience as an officer survival trainer and has been a lead defensive tactics instructor, firearms instructor, and use of force instructor. He is the author of Officer Survival for Code Enforcement Officers. Mr. Kirshner is the owner and Lead Instructor of Dedicated Threat Solutions, LLC. The author can be reached at: info@dedicatedthreatsolutions.com.