**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FROM GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE**

ISSUED\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ EFFECTIVE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

S.O.P. 11-6 USE OF FORCE WHEN DEALING WITH ANIMALS

**I. PURPOSE**

Provide members of the department guidelines for encounters with potentially dangerous animals such as dogs, cats, birds or other domestic animals or reptiles.

**II. POLICY**

It is the policy of this department to use the least amount of force necessary when encountering an animal. As with other use of force options, deadly force will only be used to defend the officer, other person or animal from being bitten by a vicious animal. The department recognizes that not all domestic animals, especially dogs, are inherently vicious. However, some are vicious by nature or may be protecting their area and officers should be aware of signs, warnings and visual/audio cues as to the intent of the animal.

**ATTENTION CEO: This policy is designed to protect domestic pets from being intentionally shot by officers for no apparent reason other than the, in this case, a dog appeared to be aggressive towards the officer(s). Courts have ruled that the unnecessary shooting of an animal may constitute a seizure under the 4th Amendment to the Constitution thus making the department and officer liable. The department should consider training officers on the behavioral traits of dogs. Each officer, however, will have his/her interpretation on what constitutes a vicious animal.**

**ATTENTION CEO: The agency should consider equipping patrol vehicles at a minimum at the supervisor level specialized equipment to enable the officers to take control of a vicious animal. Tranquilizer Guns are a very specialized piece of equipment that are usually only carried by a trained animal control officer. Careful consideration should be used if the agency considers this. Specialized training shall be required if issued.**

**ATTENTION CEO: If the agency has access to an Animal Control Unit, then a statement should be inserted stating that the animal control shall be called prior to the officer attempting to do so him/herself.**

**III. DEFINITIONS**

A. DEADLY FORCE: Any force that is likely to cause serious bodily harm or death.

B. NON-DEADLY FORCE: All uses of force other than those likely to cause serious bodily harm or death.

C. IMMINENT: Impending or about to occur.

D. SPECIALIZED WEAPONS/TOOLS: OC Spray, Taser, Control Pole, Food Treats, Tranquilizer Gun.

**IV. PROCEDURE**

**A. Calls for Service, Routine/Non-Emergency**. When an officer is dispatched to a call for service that is non-emergency in nature and is encountered by a vicious animal the following shall be followed;

1. If the caller is at the home and the officer can speak directly to the person, the officer will ask the owner to restrain the animal and keep it on a leash, in a pen or other secure space that allows security for the officer while working the call for service.

2. If direct contact cannot be made by the officer, the officer will ask the dispatcher to contact the caller by phone and have him/her come out to take control of the animal prior to the officer leaving a place of safety. (car, hardened structure) Should contact by phone fail, the officer should leave the scene and stand by a short distance away in the event contact is made allowing the officer to handle the call. If no contact is made the officer will resume normal patrol and periodically have the dispatcher call in an attempt to make contact with the complainant.

**B. Calls for Service, Welfare Checks and Emergencies**. When an officer receives a call of an emergency nature or welfare check the following applies;

1. On a welfare check, if the vicious animal is out of the residence, and the officer does have control equipment, he/she shall request another officer to assist in taking control of the animal in the quickest manner possible. Once the animal is secured, the welfare check will continue.

**NOTE**: Officers should always be aware of a second animal in the area and be vigilant at all times.

2. If the animal is inside the house, the same procedures outlined above will be followed. If no one can be seen inside from the outside by the officer then the officer will not enter a residence without a second officer present who can take control of the animal.

3. If a person can be seen and the officer has knowledge of a medical emergency either from dispatch or personal knowledge (previous calls) then the officer is authorized to use the necessary force to save the human life.

**NOTE**: Human life will always take priority over that of an animal.

**NOTE**: Deadly force is authorized only if the potential for receiving an injury from the animal is imminent.

4. In the event of an emergency call where it is necessary for the officer to save a human life or prevent further injury, the officer is authorized to use the necessary force to save a human life over that of an animal. See note above.

**C. Search Warrants**;

**ATTENTION CEO: The sensitive nature of search warrants, the execution of same and officer safety should always be considered. Accordingly, good intelligence should be gathered and disseminated to officers prior to the execution of a search warrant regarding the presence of animals and what actions may be taken.**

1. When an officer/s attempt to conduct a search warrant that is a regular search warrant, officer safety will always take precedent. Similarly, the preservation of evidence is important as well. Any vicious animals encountered pose a serious concern to both of the above. Not all animals are necessarily vicious just because it is barking, snarling or growling. Officers should be aware of this and try to control the animal as stated in paragraph A above.

2. Prior to the execution of a search warrant, as much intelligence shall be gathered regarding the existence of potentially vicious animals. The officer in charge of the investigation will brief all officers accompanying him/her as to the presence of animals on the property.

3. The only time an officer is allowed to use deadly force in the execution of a search warrant is when the potential for receiving injury from the animal is imminent.

4. When an officer/unit is attempting to execute a “no knock” search warrant, the OIC will gather and disseminate intelligence regarding the presence of potentially vicious animals at the site.

**NOTE**: Many criminals have dogs present to provide prior warning to the presence of others on their property. Some also use these animals to protect any illegal substances being stored there as well.

5. The commander of the unit executing the no knock warrant shall have a plan for dealing with vicious animals encountered when attempting the execution of the warrant. The plan shall have specific details on what types of specialized weapons shall be used against a vicious animal. Deadly force is authorized only in the event of an imminent injury by a vicious animal.