

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia police demonstrate new simulator

By [Andrew Denney](#)

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Columbia Police Sgt. Mike Hestir uses a replica of his side arm during a demonstration of the new police officer training system that uses real-life scenarios to evaluate use of force. | Photo courtesy of Evan Spaulding

COLUMBIA — Police demonstrated a new simulator to the public on Wednesday that puts officers in realistic situations where they have to decide whether they will use weapons.

The simulator, which was provided to the Columbia Police Department by the Columbia Police Foundation, a non-profit group, will be used in the department's new training facility and will be available for use by the Boone County Sheriff's Department, the MU Police Department and

law enforcement agencies throughout mid-Missouri.

Columbia Police Sgt. Mike Hestir said the simulator can help young officers learn how to use the appropriate amount of force depending on the incident.

“This simulator allows us to plan out these scenarios in the safety of our building,” Hestir said.

The Prism video-based simulator, developed by the Seattle-based Advanced Interactive Systems, uses a projection screen to show officers nine situations filmed with actors who pose as potentially dangerous subjects. Officers are provided with replicas of their standard-issue firearms, pepper spray devices and Tasers. Using the simulator, the officers are tested on their knowledge of department procedures, the prudence of their actions and their proficiency with department-issued weapons.

“It’s not just a toy, but it is a lot of fun,” Columbia Police Chief Ken Burton said.

Columbia Police Officer Lindsey Mueller was the first to give a demonstration of the simulator. In the first situation, a man was attempting to burglarize an East Campus home. With a replica pistol aimed at the simulated suspect, who had both arms wrapped around a stolen stereo, Mueller commanded him to drop the appliance. But the suspect didn’t comply and instead ran out of the house. Mueller did not fire a shot.

In the second demonstration, Mueller was once again dealing with a hypothetical burglary in East Campus. This time, the suspect dropped the stereo and pulled out a knife. After repeated commands to drop the weapon, Mueller shot the suspect.

A red dot appeared on the suspect’s body where the weapon was aimed and fired, and the time it took for her to draw her pistol and take the shot was displayed next to it.

Hestir said tracking the reaction time of the officers in these situations helps to determine their competency with department-issued weapons.

Hestir tried a more difficult situation where the officer must enter a bar and look for a suspect without indicating that he is an officer. In the simulation, the officer sits down at a table behind the suspect to wait and see how he reacts when uniformed officers arrive at the bar.

In the simulation, when the uniformed officers arrive, a woman sitting next to the suspect pulls a firearm from her boot, and Hestir was forced to draw his weapon quickly and fire. He hits the armed woman in the abdomen. His time: 0.9 seconds.

Hestir said he went for a low shot because there were bystanders on the other side of the bar that could have been hit if he had missed the woman while aiming at a higher part of her body.

“Kind of makes the ‘Why didn’t you shoot the gun out of her hand?’ kind of asinine, doesn’t it?” Burton said.

Hestir said the program can help to identify “trigger happy” officers as well as ones that could be hesitant to use force.

“It’s important to us, if we’re forced by a suspect to use force, that we can do it competently,” Hestir said.

Chris Egbert, a member of the Columbia Police Foundation, said the device could help officers make “life and death decisions” better than shooting live weapons at dummy targets does.

“It’s better to learn it in a training environment than on the street where you can choke up and get someone else or yourself killed,” he said.

Jim Bornhauser, a member of the foundation, said the simulator could do more than help law enforcement officers hone their skills — it could help to protect to Columbia residents.

“I think this is a tremendous asset for the rest of the community,” Bornhauser said.

Columbia Police Sgt. John Worden said [half of the department has received an introduction to the simulator](#). The total cost of the device was \$42,000, of which \$40,000 was raised through an auction arranged by the foundation, and \$2,000 was provided by the foundation itself.