



Are You Code 4 Yet?

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr

Let me set the scenario. You are in the park on a routine foot patrol when you hear voices coming from the creek. The creek is closed to fishing so you venture down to investigate and find three males fishing. You advise dispatch that you are "10-95 on three" and announce your presence. As you are checking the subjects ID's, dispatch comes back to ask your status. Are you "code 4" yet?

Code 4 is defined as "no more assistance needed." This would be when you have gone down the mental list in your mind to evaluate all the possible circumstances and determine that the contact is safe.

Early in our careers we are so aware of officer safety that every time we have a discussion with our spouses we automatically go into our bladed stance. Every visitor contact is preceded with a call to dispatch to advise that we are "10-95." We wait to go "code 4" until we know for sure that the contact is safe and no further assistance is needed. However, as we become more experienced and comfortable in our job, we tend to get a little relaxed. After we are well into a contact, we notify dispatch that we are "10-95" and in the same breath we announce that we are "code 4." Is this poor officer safety? Well, depending on who you are talking to the answer could be yes or it could be no.

Being the curious sort, I asked numerous rangers and even some police officers how they determined if a contact is "code 4." The names and agencies of the rangers have been changed to protect the innocent. (I'm not really going to use any names; I just always wanted to say that.)

An officer with a local police department said that he considers that a contact is "code 4" once he determines the suspect is no longer a threat and that he can manage the scene safely.

One ranger stated that he goes "code 4" basically as soon as he goes "10-95" if the suspect's appearance, attitude and demeanor are cooperative.

Another ranger told me that at times he feels pressure from dispatch to go "code 4." He said that he has gone "10-95" and when he requests a drivers license check (10-27) dispatch is quick to ask if he is "code 4". If he says "no" then dispatch starts sending multiple units to his location. So he says yes and then waits to see how the contact is going before requesting additional units to respond. Is this really safe? Why not advise dispatch that you are not "code 4," and additional units are not required at this time.

We all need to get back into the routine of thinking about officer safety first. With each contact we need to look at our subjects, surroundings, time of day and ETA of incoming units. So before you go "code 4" make sure you have gone through all the possible circumstances. Don't be caught by a wolf in sheep's clothing. You can always cancel incoming units.

Public Information & Media Relations

by Lori Gerbac, Region 5 Director

In our profession, we are bound to be contacted by the media at some point for information on our parks, an incident, or special event. It is also very likely that we may contact them for a variety of the same reasons. The intention of this article is to help you have successful media relations, no matter what form of media you are working with or for what reason.

It's possible your department has a *Public Information Officer* or designated staff, who handles some of the more intense media relations or emergency management issues, but there is typically a time when the media wants to interview park staff and it is best to be prepared.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the media are our most direct channel to our mass audience. They can help you reduce public panic, prepare the public

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From the President's Desk

Ah, spring is upon us. I hope you all have survived the winter. I know that some of our Southern California members got hit pretty hard this winter. The winter has been fairly mild for us up in the north this time around. With spring comes an increase in visitation and potentially more wet weather. I always look at it as a transition season for most parks. It gives us a chance to clean up after whatever the winter brought us and to prepare for the summer onslaught of visitors.

Thank you to all of the members that were prompt in returning their membership renewals and ballots. For those that renewed by January 31, a special gift will be on its way to you very soon to show our appreciation for your support.

In other news, applications are now being accepted for the 2005 PRAC Scholarships. Any student or regular PRAC member that is taking 6.1 or more semester units, and majoring in a course of study related to the park profession is eligible to apply. Each year, a minimum of two \$500.00 scholarships are available for eligible people to apply for. Each year, there are relatively few applications. If you meet the criteria for the scholarships, I urge you to apply for it. It is a member benefit that few members take advantage of. If you know of eligible students, urge them to apply. Nobody will receive the scholarships if nobody applies. Scholarship applications can be obtained from the "members only" section of the PRAC web page.

In July of last year, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) contracted with PRAC to conduct a study of their agency's unmet public safety and maintenance needs. The study included a 1-month long survey completed by their operations staff, reviewing of incident reports and other statistical information, and ride-alongs and site visits conducted by Lori Charett Gerbac and I. The MRCA assigned Amy Lethbridge to act as a liaison between the MRCA and PRAC. After the close of the study period on December 31, 2004, PRAC provided the MRCA with a written report and I gave a brief oral summary to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy on the findings of the study. The MRCA management will now be able to take PRAC's recommendations and work on implementing them to address the issues the study found. During the study period and my time working with the MRCA I found their rangers and management to be very dedicated, extremely professional, and very easy to work with. It was a pleasure working with the MRCA and I hope that you found value in the service PRAC provided you.

That is all for now folks. I hope you have a great spring and I look forward to seeing you around the parks!

Stay safe,

Mike Chiesa

February 8, 2005

Dear Mr. Chiesa and PRAC Board

I would like to thank you, as well as the PRAC Board for awarding me the 2004 Scholarship.

It was less than two years ago when I decided, after much anxiety, to leave a successful and stable career in the restaurant industry in order to pursue a second career as a park ranger. I enrolled in the Park Management program at West Valley College full-time in order to quickly facilitate this lifelong dream. With graduation approaching in May of this year, I am completely grateful for your consideration in awarding me with this incredible gift of \$500. Had it not been for the financial aid of this scholarship as well as others, I would not have been able to reach this goal so quickly. I am incredibly fortunate to be able to fully concentrate on my studies without the challenge of maintaining employment.

Thank you again for your gracious assistance. I look forward to meeting everyone next month at the PRAC Conference in Sonoma.

Sincerely,

Joseph Garbarino

Rangers capture murder suspect!

by John Havicon

Sacramento County Park Ranger Bill Wetzel and Park Ranger Assistant Anthony, (AJ), Bennett was on patrol along the American River Parkway. It seemed a very quiet morning with overcast skies and not very many visitors using the park. Bill was listens to the ranger's main radio but he was also monitors the sheriff's channels, listening for any incidents occurring in the Parkway. As they were driving along the Parkway, they overheard a BOLO, (Be On The Lookout), on the sheriff's channel, for a black Saturn SUV and the suspect was armed and dangerous.

The suspect earlier had entered the victim's home and was burglarizing it. The suspect had found the victim's 2 handguns from under his bed, a .44 caliber and a .41 caliber. The victim returned home from home for an early lunch with plans to meet his wife there. He surprised the burglar who shot and killed him with both guns. The suspect loaded the victim's car, the Black Saturn, with stolen property and drove away. Shortly after the wife returned home to find the body of her husband.

Bill and A.J. started playing scenarios in their head and talked about what they would do if they found the vehicle. They quickly discounted that they would ever see the vehicle but checked the nearby parking lot anyway. The

lot checked clear and they drove out onto the residential streets to check the next park. As they drove, they noticed a black SUV, two cars ahead of them. Bill accelerated to get close enough to read the license for a match. As he did the driver accelerated also. Bill followed the vehicle and reported his location to the sheriff's dispatch.

Before Bill had a chance to read the license and confirm a match, the vehicle took off trying to lose him. Bill, now in pursuit of the vehicle, chased it about a mile to housing tract that overlooks the river. The suspect stopped his vehicle, quickly jumped out and ran into a nearby resident. The suspect broke into the unoccupied home and changed clothes. Bill and A.J. stayed with the vehicle and directed the sheriff's and CHP in for a perimeter. The suspect exited the back of the house and ran down to the river. As he started to cross, he saw several armed rangers waiting for him across the river. He turned around to retreat and found the bank lined with CHP and sheriff's. The suspect dropped both guns into the river, raised his hands and gave up.

This criminal would still be at large and the crime, likely unsolved had it not been for Bill and A.J.'s sharp observations and their actions.

Public Information & Media Relations

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for action, alert/warn the public about what may follow after an incident or event and a variety of things.

You may contact the media to educate and inform, change human behavior or attitudes, call people to act (volunteer projects) and/or to create positive impressions of the agency within the community. The purpose of interacting with the media and providing public information is to save lives, protect property and minimize negative impacts on the environment.

A proactive attitude is far better than a reactive attitude. If you have a proactive attitude, you reach out to the media and establish good relationships, anticipate hazards the community may face in your parks, provide public information in a timely and accurate manner and anticipate a community's expectations. If you are unprepared and insensitive to the public's needs, interests, or concerns, and are hiding something negative from public disclosure, are not able to ensure public trust, you have a reactive attitude. The latter is sure to get you in trouble.

What does the media expect from you?

The media wants and expects you to provide the "5 W's + 1" each time you release information. They are: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Each medium also has more specific expectations, such as television needs the "actual visual" of the story and will want immediate, direct access to the scene. Radio needs immediate audio or an interview with someone describing the event for the listening audience and the newspaper reporters need detail and background in greater quantity than broadcast reports.

Depending on the circumstances, or if you have a critical incident in your park, the media will want access to persons in charge of the scene or centrally involved in the story and an explanation of the big picture; they will want to know how close they can get to the scene; a status report of what is happening right now, a location to park and set up their microwave or live satellite trucks and information on the nearest accommodations (food, fuel, lodging).

Tips for a successful media relationship:

- Be honest, state facts without dressing them up or painting a picture worse than reality. If you are not the best source for the information, refer the reporter to the proper authority. Saying "I don't know" is not an admission of stupidity, if at all possible, follow it up with "But I'll find out and get back to you." Make sure to follow up and never speculate.

- If you do not want to see it in print or hear it on the news, do not say it. There is no such thing as "off the record."

- When you have said enough to answer the question or to explain the situation, be quiet. Do not fall for the reporter's tactic of looking at you expectantly with the microphone in your face. Look expectantly back at the reporter with your lips firmly closed, and await another question.

- Never say "no comment." It sounds like you have something to hide. So does brushing past the reporter(s) without saying anything as questions are shouted after you. If you have been instructed not to talk, if you are waiting for new information, or there is someone else who should be the source of information, say so. As a last resort, something along the lines of "I can't really address that here" followed by some bit of information can work.

- Do not make cute or smart remarks. The tone of voice you use does not come across in print at all.

- When you are interviewed as an agency representative, any opinion you give will be considered the agency's opinion, even if you preface it with "this is just my opinion."

- If you can see a reporter, assume that you can be taped. Microphones can pick up the sound of your voice from 50-feet or more away. Just because you are no longer in front of the camera does not mean that the camera is not on you—perhaps from as far away as a block. Print reporters frequently tape interviews as well. Assume that all phone conversations are being taped.

- Be concise and do not use jargon. At best you'll sound bureaucratic or pompous; at worse you will confuse people.

- Remember that television is more of an emotional medium than an intellectual one. Viewers will remember how you looked and behaved more than the content of what you said.

- Do not plaster a smile on your face when the topic is serious. Keep your hands at your side or at your desk. Do not jingle keys or change in your pocket. Avoid wearing sunglasses, photograph lenses will turn dark after only a few minutes under camera lights.

- Always make reporters feel that you are trying to help. The media is your outlet to the public. Keep any hostility on your part to yourself. Remember, never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel.

This information is a summary from FEMA's *Basic Public Information Course Manual*. I took this course several years ago and I highly recommend it. It is through the Emergency Management Institute, for more information, go to: www.fema.com and click on Education and Training.

On another note...

I want to thank our members for your vote of confidence. I am proud to represent our profession, PRAC and Region 5 and I take the responsibility seriously. As Region 5 Director, I will work toward organizing training for Region 5 and increase our membership. I am always open to your suggestions for training and welcome your assistance, hint... I really want to hear from you! I will miss seeing you at the conference this year, as I have embarked upon a new challenge of graduate school, although I will be there in spirit. It will be a terrific conference and I apologize in advance for my absence. Please contact me with your ideas.

My Thoughts

by Matt Cerkel

I'm Matt Cerkel and I'm your new Region 1 Director and I'd like to share my thoughts on what my coworkers and I have dealt with over the past 2 years. This March will be my tenth year as a full time ranger here in Marin County. My entire career was been with the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD). For me it has been a dream come true to be able to help "preserve and protect" the Mt Tamalpais area. Even though the MMWD has recently reclassified it's park rangers to "watershed wardens" after a misinterpretation of a court ruling and Public Resources Code Section 4022, I still consider myself a ranger, regardless of what I'm called and so does the public I serve. After 10 years I still feel lucky to be a ranger and can look back with pride and forward with hope.

As Mike Chiesa reported in the last *Signpost*, The MMWD Board in a 3 to 2 vote decided recently not to restore peace officer status and firearms to its rangers. This was supposed to be only a "temporary" suspension of peace officer status pending resolution of a legal question. The Board decided to maintain the rangers as only public officers and to contract with the Marin County Sheriff for 2 deputies to patrol MMWD's watershed lands. I'm deeply concerned by this decision because it marks a serious reduction in the actual protection of the Watershed and its visitors.

It concerns me that this decision was made despite of the fact the recommendation supporting this decision had many discrepancies and lacked a complete discussion of the issue. I feel a decision should have been delayed until the discrepancies were properly addressed. The outside park and law enforcement professionals attempted to address the problems when speaking to the MMWD Board and the entire MMWD ranger field staff was opposed to the change. Since 2003 two of the seven field rangers employed at the time by the MMWD have left because they felt the job was too unsafe without peace officer status. I was personally very disappointed by the Board's decision and felt it was a mistake to make a decision based on flawed information. I believe the MMWD has taken two giant steps backwards when it comes to protecting the watershed and it's visitors.

With my 10 years of experience, mostly as a peace officer, I feel public officer status is ineffective and potentially unsafe in the setting the MMWD rangers patrol, 22,000 acres ranging from urban-wildland interface to wilderness-like backcountry. Public officer status may work in the urban park setting were peace officer backup is only a couple minutes away, but this is not the case with MMWD watershed lands even when the contract deputies come onboard. It is virtually impossible for public officers to

enforce the law in a fair, equal and consistent manner without an immediate peace officer presence. The MMWD ranger program, at least in regards to law enforcement is now a mere shell of what it once was. One member of the MMWD Board, who was opposed to the change, clearly understood this and stated "You might as well post signs telling violators to turn themselves in to the Sheriff's Office." In the long term the MMWD, the watershed, its users and the rangers all lose with these changes. The only ones to gain are those who wish to violate the law or harm the watershed or its users

With the changes currently being enacted by the MMWD, I believe the public will end up paying a lot more for a lot less. MMWD is attempting to replace 9 peace officer positions with 6 or 7 public officers backed by 2 contract peace officers. This simply will not offer the level of service and protection that once existed. From what I've seen and heard, contracting deputies to patrol park or open space areas is of limited or questionable effectiveness. Traditional law enforcement officers, like deputies, generally have little understanding of park or natural resource law enforcement and do not have the multifaceted abilities or educational backgrounds to replace peace officer rangers. Trying to replace peace officer rangers with deputies is like trying to place a square peg in a round hole; it's just not a good fit. Finally, unless the ranger just happens to have the deputy with them or very close by, the officer safety issues the rangers will face go largely unanswered.

The change in our legal status did not affect my strong sense of duty and I will continue to serve as effectively as possible under the circumstance. I am assisting the MMWD where I can to make the ranger program as effective as public officer authority allows.

I believe the truth will come out. My hope is the MMWD Board will reconsider its decision now that it has access to a complete and accurate picture of this issue and restore peace officer status to the rangers. Even as unarmed peace officers the MMWD rangers would be far more effective, the watershed better protected and the public better served then it is now.

I wish to thank Mike Chiesa, Walt Young, John Havicon, Jeff Gaffney, Neill Fogarty and Patrick Torres for speaking to the MMWD Board in support of the rangers. Your help is greatly appreciated. I'd also like to thank the supporters from the community. Finally, I'd like to thank Bob Donohue from the City of Chico and John Alexiou from the City of Santa Cruz for providing valuable information on setting up effective public officer ranger program.

**Park Rangers Association of California
Board Officers 2005**

President

Mike Chiesa
(707) 847-3245
FAX: (707) 847-3325.
E-Mail: president@CalRanger.org

Region 1 Director

Matt Cerkel
(415) 609-3863
FAX: (415) 945-1171
E-Mail: region1@CalRanger.org

Region 2 Director

Lee Hickinbotham Jr.
(408) 356-2729
E-Mail: region2@CalRanger.org

Region 3 Director

VACANT... VACANT... VACANT... VACANT

E-Mail: region3@CalRanger.org

Region 4 Director

Dave Updike
(310) 858-7272 EXT. 1232
FAX: (310) 858-7212
E-Mail: region4@CalRanger.org

Region 5 Director

Lori Charett
(858) 538-8082
FAX: (858) 536-8334
E-Mail: region5@CalRanger.org

Region 6 Director

John Lufrano
(775) 586-7271
FAX: (775) 583-7275
E-Mail: region6@CalRanger.org

Past President

John Havicon
(916) 875-6672
FAX: (916) 875-6632
E-Mail: pastpres@CalRanger.org

The Signpost Editor

David Brooks
(831) 336-2948
FAX: (831) 335-1178
E-Mail: newsletter@CalRanger.org

Scholarship

Bill Hendricks
(805) 756-1246
FAX: (805) 756-1402

Executive Manager

Heidi Horvitz
Office: (707) 847-3077
FAX: (707) 847-3077
E-Mail: office@CalRanger.org

WebMaster

Jeff Price
(805) 278-9201
E-Mail: webmaster@CalRanger.org

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email:
prangerd@ix.netcom.com

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Park Rangers Association of California
P.O. Box 153, STEWARTS POINT, CA 95480
(707) 847-3077 FAX (707) 847-3077

Park Rangers Association of California
P. O. Box 153
Stewarts Point, CA 95480-0153

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