



SOVEREIGN CITIZENS

May 2019

Training Objective - Law enforcement and judicial officials must understand the sovereign-citizen movement, be able to identify indicators and know how to protect themselves from the group's threatening tactics.

WHO ARE THEY?

The sovereign citizen movement is a loosely organized collection of groups and individuals who believe that virtually all levels of government in the United States are illegitimate; thus, they follow their own set of laws. They may refer to themselves as "constitutionalists" or "freemen," which is not necessarily a connection to a specific group, but, rather, an indication that they are free from government control.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) considers sovereign-citizen extremists as comprising a domestic terrorist movement scattered across the United States that has existed for decades.

BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGIES

One prevalent sovereign-citizen theory is the Redemption Theory, which claims the U.S. government went bankrupt when it abandoned the gold standard basis for currency in 1933 and began using citizens as collateral in trade agreements with foreign governments. These beliefs can provide a gateway to illegal activity because such individuals believe the U.S. government does not act in the best interests of the American people.

They consider government-issued social security cards, driver's licenses, vehicle registrations, marriage licenses, and even hunting licenses, to be a contract which will result in the loss of liberty and freedom.

Sovereign citizens claim that they have absolute mastery over all of their property (including freedom from taxes, regulations, ordinances or zoning restrictions); that they are not citizens of the United States but are "nonresident aliens"; that the only court that has jurisdictions to try them for any matter is a "common law court"; and that they can never be arrested or tried for a crime or a matter in which there is a complaining victim.

They hold strong beliefs in the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms, and often possess multiple firearms.

VIOLENT ACTIONS / THREATS

First responders have had violent and deadly encounters with sovereign citizens. While most are nonviolent, some of these individuals may resort to violence as a way to express their anti-government beliefs and ideologies.

Since 2000, lone-offender sovereign-citizen extremists have killed six law enforcement officers. In 2010, two Arkansas police officers stopped sovereign-citizen extremists Jerry Kane and his 16-year-old son Joseph during a routine traffic stop on Interstate 40. Joseph Kane jumped out of the vehicle and opened fire with an AK-47 rifle, killing both officers.

CURRENT TACTICS / ILLEGAL ACTIVITY

"Paper-terrorism," is a practice of using fictitious legal documents and filings in order to intimidate, coerce, and harass law enforcement officers, public officials, and public citizens. Some have gone as far as creating their own fictitious law enforcement agencies, complete with fraudulent identification cards, badges, and clothing. Others will manufacture their own "passports" and vehicle registration cards and plates, embossing or printing the state name on plates. Other fraudulent documents used by sovereigns include surety bonds, promissory notes and property deeds.

As sovereign citizens' numbers grow, so do the chances of contact with law enforcement and, thus, the risks that incidents will end in violence. Law enforcement and judicial officials must understand the sovereign-citizen movement, be able to identify indicators, and know how to protect themselves from the group's threatening tactics.

Tactics Employed by Sovereigns During Traffic Stops:

- Attempting to distract the officer with paperwork;
- Attempting to prevent the officer from performing his duty;
- Displaying a badge that identifies the suspect as a member of law enforcement;

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- Identifying self as an official of the state;
- Displaying unauthorized tags that represent the sovereign citizen republic;
- Being uncooperative;
- Concealing loaded weapons; and/or
- Asserting that the law does not require them to have necessary documentation of license, vehicle ownership and a registered plate.

Law Enforcement Measures:

- Maintain focus
- Maintain professional bearing
- Use tact, patience and be persistent
- Beware of fraudulent documents
- Gather information
- Record encounter
- Contact supervisor
- Interview and debrief
- Apply enforcement as appropriate
- Make every effort to identify the subject(s)

CONCLUSION

The sovereign-citizen threat likely will grow as the nationwide movement is fueled by the internet, economic uncertainties, and seminars held across the country that spread their ideology and show people how they can tap into funds and eliminate debt through fraudulent methods.

Although the sovereign-citizen movement does not always rise to violence, its members' illegal activities and past violent—including fatal—incidents against law enforcement make it a group that should be approached with knowledge and caution. It is important that law enforcement be aware of sovereign citizens' tactics so agencies can warn the public of potential scams, spot illegal activity, understand its potential severity, and be prepared for and protect against violent behavior or backlash through intimidation and harassment.



Questions? KLCIS is here to help!

With questions or feedback, contact Mark Filburn at 859-327-9750 (mfilburn@klc.org) or Brian Nunn at 502-664-8110 (bnunn@klc.org) with KLCIS Loss Control Law Enforcement or visit klc.org for more information.



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