

October 11, 2017
For Immediate Release

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New Strangulation Law Models DA's Work in Domestic Violence Cases

San Diego Law Enforcement Partners Ahead of the Curve

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that a new domestic violence law that takes effect January 1, 2018, models the progressive work already being done in the area of strangulation prevention in San Diego. Gov. Gerry Brown signed [Senate Bill 40](#), which requires law enforcement agencies to develop an incident report form that includes specific domestic violence information, such as whether strangulation was involved in the incident. The new law also requires law enforcement to give written notice to victims at the scene of a domestic violence incident informing them that strangulation may cause internal injuries and encourage the victim to seek medical attention.

San Diego County implemented its own Strangulation Protocol in February, in conjunction with San Diego law enforcement and domestic violence stakeholders. The agreement outlines a coordinated community response on how to handle strangulation cases.

“We are so proud to have been on the cutting edge of domestic violence solutions in San Diego County,” District Attorney Summer Stephan said. “Now that the entire state will be required to complete the same steps, we are sending an even stronger message to domestic violence victims that we see their pain and suffering and will fight to protect them from the high risks associated with strangulation. At the same time, we are telling perpetrators that even though they think they are not leaving marks or bruises, we have ways to document this abuse.”

Studies have shown that episodes of non-fatal strangulation have a greater likelihood of leading to homicide. San Diego County law enforcement has already been focusing on this serious and personal form of intimate partner abuse.

“Since strangulation often does not leave obvious signs of injury, it is important for victims to receive appropriate medical care,” said Gael Strack, CEO of Alliance for HOPE International and the Training Institute of Strangulation Prevention. “Most strangulation injuries are internal and can lead to devastating immediate and long-term health consequences.”

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The San Diego Countywide Strangulation Protocol is a system of uniform detection, documentation and response so defendants and victims receive consistent treatment across the county. San Diego county law enforcement officers have been trained on the protocol and have been implementing it on domestic violence calls since February. The protocol includes a revised domestic violence supplemental form that every patrol officer in the field completes with an additional question about non-lethal domestic violence strangulation. In the past, strangulation was minimized because of the lack of injuries and training.

“Between what our law enforcement is already doing, and the notification requirements of this new law, San Diego County law enforcement agencies will go a long way in reducing this often undisclosed crime,” said Craig Carter, Escondido police chief and president of the Police Chief’s and Sheriff’s Association.

Family violence prevention professionals, prosecutors, law enforcement leaders, medical professionals, and advocates met for more than six months to formalize the protocol prior to its implementation. In addition, the San Diego Police Department and the City of San Diego, in partnership with the District Attorney, created a public service announcement and training video. The 30-second public service announcement targets potential victims as well as possible suspects with information about strangulation. View the public service announcement in English, [here](#), and in Spanish, [here](#).

“By talking about the deadly consequences of strangulation we shine the light on this dangerous crime and keep it out of the shadows,” said San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman. “If you or someone you know is being abused by an intimate partner, please report it. We want you to know help is available and you are not alone.”

The training video was disseminated to all law enforcement in San Diego County in April. It taught basic information about strangulation such as the little amount of pressure it takes to cause significant damage. For example, an adult can be rendered unconscious in 5 to 10 seconds with 11 pounds per square inch of consistent pressure.

“Strangulation is an intentional act that can have deadly consequences,” said San Diego Sheriff William Gore. “Reporting it can save your life or the life of someone you love and help us connect suspected victims to the supportive services they need.”

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