

Half of the nation's largest police departments have banned or limited neck restraints since June

62% now explicitly prohibit both carotid holds and chokeholds in their use-of-force policies, according to a Post survey



Art Acevedo, police chief in Houston and president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association greets people standing in line at George Floyd's funeral. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

By **Kimberly Kindy**, **Kevin Schaul** and **Ted Mellnik**

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At least 32 of the nation's 65 largest police departments have banned or strengthened restrictions on the use of neck restraints since the Memorial Day death of George Floyd after a Minneapolis police officer held his knee to Floyd's neck for more than seven minutes, a Washington Post analysis shows.

[See how each department's policies compare](#) ↓

The changes come against the backdrop of a national reckoning around race and policing, and are part of an effort to reassure stressed communities as protests continue across the nation.

“We have to show people we are listening,” said Art Acevedo, police chief in Houston, where the department’s use-of-force policy was updated to explicitly ban neck restraints in June. “We can’t afford another man dying at the hands of a police officer with no justification. We can’t have any more violations of the public trust.”

There are two neck restraints that police-reform activists say should be prohibited: the chokehold, which restricts breathing, and the carotid hold, which limits blood flow to the brain. The use of either can render a person unconscious and can be lethal.

A Post survey of the 65 largest U.S. police departments found that 46 prohibit chokeholds in their use-of-force policies, while 44 prohibit carotid holds in those policies. These formal rules list the tactics and techniques officers may or may not use on suspects in various scenarios and can be critical tools in holding officers accountable.

Floyd’s killing prompted changes at some departments ...

Of the nation’s largest 65 police departments



... but many force policies remain silent on neck holds



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The survey examined the policies of the largest U.S. police departments by population served. Together, these departments serve almost 64 million Americans — about 20 percent of the nation’s population.

Seventeen departments said they prohibit or restrict the use of chokeholds but did not explicitly state this in their use-of-force policies. Of those departments, six said the ban is implied because the use of the restraints is not taught.

Two departments that did not state a ban in their use-of-force policies didn’t return calls and emails from The Post.

Not having these policies clearly spelled out in use-of-force documents can make it difficult for the public to know what the rules are and for officials to discipline officers who use the restraints, said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, which provides research, training and reform plans for police departments.

“It should be part of use-of-force policy, and it should be part of training — both of them — because how can you hold people accountable if you don’t tell them what is expected of them?” Wexler said. “You have to make it clear in policy, but if you don’t have it in the training, it is an empty order.”



Eric Garner’s funeral at Bethel Baptist Church in Brooklyn in 2014. Garner died after being put in a neck restraint by New York police officer Daniel Pantaleo, igniting controversy over the use of such tactics. (Julia Xanthos/New York Daily News/AP) (Julia Xanthos/AP)



At the time of Garner’s death, the NYPD banned chokeholds in its use-of-force policy but allowed other types of holds, such as the carotid hold. New York passed a state law criminalizing carotid holds after Floyd’s killing. (John Minchillo/AP) (John Minchillo)

[NYPD body camera video allegedly shows use of banned chokehold]

In Houston, Acevedo said the police department previously had a prohibition on neck restraints but, until recently, the department’s use-of-force policy did not mention the restraints.

To make the policy permanent, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner last month signed an executive order to create a city ban so that “another police chief cannot come in the middle of the night and change it,” Acevedo said. Turner used a high-profile platform — Floyd’s funeral — to announce his plans. Ten days later, the department also updated its use-of-force policy to include an explicit ban on the restraints.

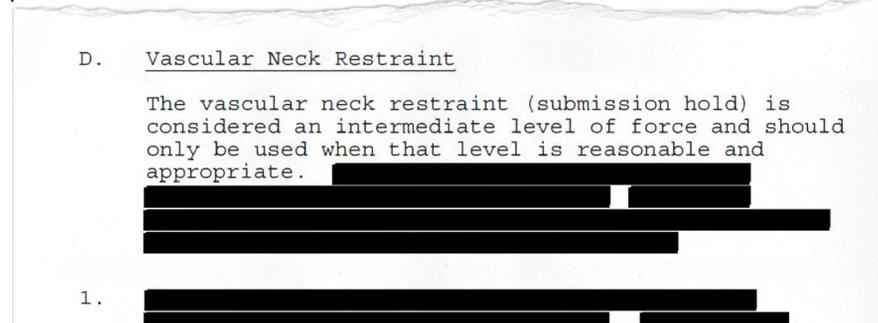
There are many ways departments prohibit neck restraints outside of the use-of-force policy, including official memos, internal orders and other directives. But some departments also consider a hold banned if it’s simply left out of training and policy documents.

The Sacramento Police Department listed the carotid hold as an approved tactic in its September 2019 use-of-force policy but recently removed all references to the hold and released a tipsheet saying the carotid control hold was “banned.” A spokesperson said via email that language previously approving the carotid hold “was removed therefore making it no longer authorized for use.”

Other departments are less transparent about neck-restraint guidance, although that is also starting to change. In four cases, use-of-force policies posted on department websites as late as June were heavily redacted. The Honolulu Police Department’s policy, which had most of the section on carotid holds blacked out, has since been replaced by one with no redactions. Houston police also eliminated the black marks.

Honolulu’s use-of-force policy is now public, but was heavily redacted until June

Three quarters of its policy regarding the carotid hold was not readable by the public



- [REDACTED]
2. Neck restraints or neck holds which restrict the subject's airway, such as bar arm chokes, are prohibited. Officers shall not use neck cranks or neck holds that place pain and pressure on the subject's neck or spine in order to overcome a subject's resistance. The only exception is for situations in which the officer is justified in using deadly force.

Proponents of the technique have long argued that if officers have the proper training, the use of neck restraints can be safe and helpful to suspects and officers alike. They say the holds allow officers to quickly subdue suspects and get them into handcuffs without using a gun, reducing the risk of a fatal shooting.

However, that argument is falling out of favor. More and more departments are training officers on techniques they can use to de-escalate encounters so that more suspects can be taken into custody without physical force.

Chokehold

Also called an arm bar hold



Applies **pressure** to the trachea, restricting airways and stopping breathing

Carotid hold

Vascular hold, sleeper hold or stranglehold



Applies **pressure** to the carotid arteries, restricting blood flow to the brain and causing loss of consciousness

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANTHONY CALVERT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Bill Smock, police surgeon with the Louisville Metro Police Department, said both neck restraints are perilous, even in police training. He knows of at least three officers who suffered strokes during training when the techniques were used on them.

“There is no such thing as making it safe with proper training,” Smock said. “Any pressure to the neck is dangerous and can cause serious physical injury, rips to the artery, damage to the internal organs, stroke and death. I don’t care what you call pressure to the neck, it is all strangulation, and it is all dangerous.”

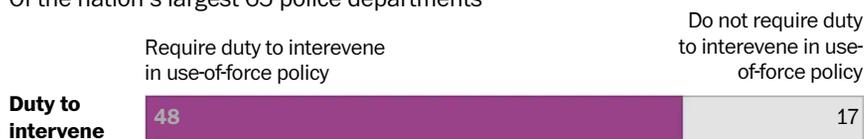
[Every fatal police shooting since 2015]

In addition to strengthened restrictions on neck restraints, police departments have begun to reconsider officers’ duty to intervene following Floyd’s killing. Since then, at least seven of the nation’s 65 largest departments have started requiring officers to intervene if a colleague is using excessive force.

In all, 48 of the 65 departments have a “duty to intervene” provision in their use-of-force policies.

Most require intervention when observing excessive force

Of the nation’s largest 65 police departments



Search for a police department’s policies ↓

“There are 18,000 police departments, and each of them is setting their own policies,” said Anthony Chapa, executive director of the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association. “There is no national police like there are in other countries where policies can be put in place and they are required everywhere.”

Chapa and the leaders of 11 other national police organizations came together in 2016 to create clear guidance for law enforcement agencies on use-of-force policies. One hope was that it could lead to greater uniformity.

[House passes broad police reform legislation in wake of George Floyd’s killing]

At the top of the group's 2017 report was the "the duty to intervene." After protests exploded across the nation this spring, the group gathered again and beefed up what it had previously said on the topic, adding that there should be "accountability for all officers on the scene." The revised report also said chokeholds, carotid holds and martial arts weapons — including brass knuckles and nunchucks, also known as chainsticks — should be banned to reduce the need for such interventions.

Getting officers to follow the duty-to-intervene rule is challenging because of the paramilitary structure of police departments, according to interviews with five use-of-force and police training experts.

In many cases, the incidents involve overly aggressive veteran officers who were trained in "warrior-style" policing tactics. Rookie officers are assigned to them for field training and are expected to defer to them. In Minneapolis, rookie officers did not stop 19-year veteran Derek Chauvin from kneeling on Floyd's neck.

"It's easy to say to officers that they must do it," said Timothy Bildsoe, a member of the board that sets training standards for Minnesota police departments. "But it's another thing to put your entire career on the line."



Cariol Horne, a former Buffalo police officer who says she was fired after trying to stop a colleague's use of excessive force, has been attending protests in the wake of George Floyd's death. (Justin Sondel)

Cariol Horne, a former Buffalo Police Department officer, has become the poster child to some for what can happen to an officer who intervenes. She was fired in 2008 after she pulled a fellow officer off a handcuffed suspect as he used a chokehold on the man.

Horne had served 19 of the 20 years needed to receive her pension. She said the man was not resisting; the other officer said he was. "It destroyed my life," she said in an interview.

[George Floyd died after officers didn't step in. These police say they did — and paid a price.]

Nearly 14 years later, the Buffalo Common Council — the city government's legislative branch — last month unanimously passed a resolution asking the New York Attorney General's Office to take a second look at restoring Horne's pension.

Now Horne attends protest rallies, calling for support of officers who intervene, walking by strangers who hold signs that say, "Get Cariol Her Pension!" Among the speakers at a recent rally was the man in the chokehold that day, Neal Mack Sr., who said: "She saved me. ... There should be more police officers like her."

At the rally, a pro bono legal team was announced for Horne, including W. Neil Eggleston, former White House counsel for President Barack Obama.

How the policies of the largest 65 police departments compare

Departments that have revised their neck restraints policies since George Floyd's killing are highlighted .

Click on the  document icon to open that department's use-of-force policy.

In use-of-force policy In other directive/guidance (specified)

DEPARTMENT	USE-OF-FORCE POLICY IS PUBLIC	POPULATION SERVED	CHOKEHOLD PROHIBITION	CAROTID HOLD PROHIBITION	DUTY TO INTERVENE
New York		8,523,000		STATE LAW	
Los Angeles		4,030,000	SPOKESPERSON	MEMO (TEMPORARY)	
Chicago		2,719,000			
Houston		2,345,000			
Phoenix		1,653,000		MEMO	
Las Vegas		1,644,000			
Philadelphia		1,587,000			
San Antonio		1,539,000			
San Diego		1,436,000	DEPT. ORDER	DEPT. ORDER	
Dallas		1,362,000			

DEPARTMENT	USE-OF-FORCE POLICY IS PUBLIC	POPULATION SERVED	CHOKEHOLD PROHIBITION	CAROTID HOLD PROHIBITION	DUTY TO INTERVENE
Suffolk County, N.Y.		1,302,000			
Miami-Dade County, Fla.		1,220,000	SPOKESPERSON	SPOKESPERSON	
Fairfx County, Va.		1,113,000			
Nassau County, N.Y.		1,048,000	STATE LAW	STATE LAW	
San Jose, Calif.		1,047,000			
Montgomery County, Md.		1,042,000			
Honolulu		982,000		DEPT. ORDER	
Austin		973,000	CITY LAW	CITY LAW	
Charlotte		931,000			
Jacksonville, Fla.		903,000	SPOKESPERSON		
Fort Worth		894,000			
Columbus, Ohio		893,000			
San Francisco		889,000			
Indianapolis		878,000			
Baltimore County, Md.		830,000	SPOKESPERSON	SPOKESPERSON	
Gwinnett County, Ga.		798,000			
Seattle		743,000			
Denver		721,000			
Washington, D.C.		702,000			
Prince George's County, Md.		696,000			
Boston		695,000			
El Paso		688,000			
Nashville		686,000	POLICY BRIEFING	POLICY BRIEFING	
Louisville		683,000			
Detroit		671,000			
Portland, Ore.		657,000	MAYOR DIRECTIVE		
Oklahoma City		653,000	TIPSHEET	TIPSHEET	
Memphis		652,000			
Baltimore		605,000			
Milwaukee		596,000	SPOKESPERSON	SPOKESPERSON	
Cobb County, Ga.		565,000			
Albuquerque		560,000			
Tucson		537,000			
Anne Arundel County, Md.		534,000			
Fresno, Calif.		532,000			
Sacramento		507,000	TIPSHEET	TIPSHEET	
Mesa, Ariz.		505,000	SPOKESPERSON		
Atlanta		496,000			
Kansas City, Mo.		493,000			

DEPARTMENT	USE-OF-FORCE POLICY IS PUBLIC	POPULATION SERVED	CHOKEHOLD PROHIBITION	CAROTID HOLD PROHIBITION	DUTY TO INTERVENE
Raleigh, N.C.		474,000			
Miami		473,000			
Colorado Springs		471,000			
Long Beach, Calif.		470,000	SPECIAL ORDER	SPECIAL ORDER (TEMPORARY)	
Omaha		469,000			
Prince William County, Va.		462,000	TIPSHEET	TIPSHEET	
Virginia Beach, Va.		451,000			
Oakland, Calif.		430,000	LETTER TO COMMUNITY		
Minneapolis		428,000			
New Castle County, Del.		418,000			
St. Louis County, Mo.		407,000			
Tulsa		403,000			
Arlington, Texas		401,000	TIPSHEET		
New Orleans		396,000			
Tampa		393,000			
Wichita		392,000			

About this story

A Washington Post survey of the 65 largest U.S. police departments sought to identify use-of-force policies and practices related to two issues: the use of neck holds and an officer's duty to intervene when excessive force is witnessed. Neck holds were considered prohibited in departments that allowed an exception for situations in which deadly force would be authorized. The Post determined the categorization for each issue from information in publicly available documents, information from Freedom of Information Act requests, interviews and news accounts.

The Post survey was originally published on July 16. Since then, six departments have banned or strengthened restrictions on the use of neck restraints, and six departments have added a duty to intervene to their use-of-force policies.

See something that has changed? [Let us know.](#)

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