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Washington
Office

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Washington, DC 20250

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Subject: Safety Issue-Prohibiting Use of Blackhawk SERPA Holsters

To: Law Enforcement and Investigations Leadership Team

Several law enforcement agencies, including FLETC, have experienced incidents where students and field agents/officers using Blackhawk SERPA holsters have had accidental discharges resulting in personal injury and or property damage.

FLETC recently issued a notice to all Partner Organizations, advising of two recent incidents where students with Blackhawk SERPA holsters have had accidental discharges resulting in personal injury. On April 17, 2012, FLETC held a meeting with Partner Organizations and advised that holsters with an auto locking/finger release, such as the Blackhawk SERPA holster will immediately be banned from use in the training environment. FLETC had recently banned all instructors from using the SERPA Blackhawk holster while on FLETC firearms ranges and while working with students and was expanded to any use of these holsters on the firearms ranges at FLETC. However, DHS OGC is now reviewing the ban and FLETC is awaiting the OGC opinion before making their final determination.

The ‘SERPA Active Retention’ design consists of a plastic L-shaped component which functions as the release button (from the outside of the holster) and as the lock (which engages inside the trigger guard when the weapon is holstered).

While Blackhawk may have intended for the end-user to apply inboard pressure with the pad of the index finger, under stress and given time constraints, users tend to push the button with the tip of their finger disengaging the retention device with direct inward pressure of the finger-tip. When the finger-tip pushes in on the release button and the user initiates the upward motion of the draw removing the weapon from the holster, the finger-tip tends to stay engaged in the same position used to disengage the retention device and can enter the trigger guard, making contact with the trigger, causing an unintentional discharge.

The Blackhawk SERPA release button can result in an unintended continuation of the movement of the trigger finger toward the trigger due to the “push button” motion required to complete the weapon draw. This unintended movement of the trigger finger has been observed during training with students and field agents when placed in some form of elevated stress situations.

In addition, there have been several reports from law enforcement and the military of debris (such as a pin head size pebble) getting lodged behind the release button inside the holster, making the withdrawal of the weapon from the holster impossible. Exterior examination of the holster is unable to detect whether debris has entered the internal working mechanism of the retention device within the holster. Thus, realization by the user that the holster has become



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inoperable due to debris will only be realized when the user unsuccessfully tries to draw the firearm from the holster and is denied access to the weapon.

The Air Force, Office of Special Investigations, (OSI), had incidents where debris has made the holster inoperable, thus making the withdrawal of the weapon impossible. Air Force OSI has banned the use of the Blackhawk holster. Also there are other federal agencies that have discontinued the use of these holsters.

The National Academy does not issue these types of holsters to our new hires, however, it is my understanding that several officers and agents in the field have purchased these types of holsters. The National Academy also does not currently issue the SERPA Taser holster to new hires. We issued the holster for a short time and discovered when there was significant stress on the holster, such as the officer engaged in ground fighting, the holster would release retention and the Taser would fall from the holster.

With the above in mind, due to safety concerns regarding the SERPA Firearm holster and SERPA Taser holster, the use of these types of holsters and any other holsters with the same type of auto locking/finger release is no longer authorized. Please ensure that any of your personnel who utilize these types of holsters discontinue their use until further notice.

/s/David L. Ferrell
DAVID L. FERRELL
Director, Law Enforcement and Investigations

cc: James Alford, Dan Harrell