4.21 Civil Disorder

Civil disorder is a term that generally refers to groups of people purposely choosing not to observe a law, regulation or rule, usually in order to bring attention to their cause, concern or agenda. In Missouri, state statutes define civil disorder as “any public disturbance involving acts of violence by assemblages of three or more persons, which cause an immediate danger of or results in damage or injury to the property or person of any other individual.” Civil disorder can take the form of small gatherings or large groups blocking or impeding access to a building or disrupting normal activities by generating noise and intimidating people. It can range from a peaceful sit-in to a full-scale riot in which a mob burns or otherwise destroys property and terrorizes individuals. Even in its more passive forms, a group that blocks roadways, sidewalks or buildings interferes with public order. Throughout this country’s history, incidents that disrupted the public peace have figured prominently. Typical examples of such conflicting ideology include the protest movements for civil rights in the late 1960s and the Vietnam War protest demonstrations in the early 1970s.

Laws have evolved that govern civil disorder and peacefully resolve conflict. In the United States, gathering in a crowd is constitutionally protected under “the right of the people to peacefully assemble.” However, assemblies that are not peaceable are not protected, and this is generally the dividing line between crowds and mobs. The laws that deal with disruptive conduct are generally grouped into offenses that disturb the public peace. They range from misdemeanors, such as blocking sidewalks or challenging another to fight, to felonies, such as looting and rioting. Missouri law makes “promoting civil disorder in the first degree” a class C felony, according to Section 574.070 of the Revised Missouri Statutes. As stated in one provision of the law, “whoever teaches or demonstrates to any other person the use, application, or construction of any firearm, explosive, or incendiary device capable of causing injury or death to any person, knowing or intending that such firearm, explosive or incendiary device be used in furtherance of a civil disorder, is guilty of promoting civil disorder in the first degree.”

Types of Crowds

“A crowd may be defined as a casual, temporary collection of people without a strong, cohesive relationship. Crowds can be classified into four general categories:

**Casual Crowd** — A casual crowd is merely a group of people who happen to be in the same place at the same time. Examples of this type include shoppers and sightseers. The likelihood of violent conduct is all but nonexistent.

**Cohesive Crowd** — A cohesive crowd consists of members who are involved in some type of unified behavior. Members of this group are involved in some type of common activity, such as worshiping, dancing, or watching a sporting event. Although they may have intense internal discipline (e.g., rooting for a team), they require substantial provocation to arouse to action.

**Expressive Crowd** — An expressive crowd is one held together by a common commitment or purpose. Although they may not be formally organized, they are assembled as an expression of common
sentiment or frustration. Members wish to be seen as a formidable influence. One of the best examples of this type is a group assembled to protest something.

**Aggressive Crowd** — An aggressive crowd is made up of individuals who have assembled for a specific purpose. This crowd often has leaders who attempt to arouse the members or motivate them to action. Members are noisy and threatening and will taunt authorities. They tend to be impulsive and highly emotional and require only minimal stimulation to arouse them to violence. Examples of this type of crowd include demonstrations and striking workers.

**Types of Mobs**

“A mob can be defined as a large disorderly crowd or throng. Mobs are usually emotional, loud, tumultuous, violent and lawless. Like crowds, mobs have different levels of commitment and can be classified into four categories:

**Aggressive Mob** — An aggressive mob is one that attacks, riots and terrorizes. The object of violence may be a person, property or both. An aggressive mob is distinguished from an aggressive crowd only by lawless activity. Examples of aggressive mobs are inmate mobs in prisons and jails, mobs that act out their frustrations after political defeat, or violent mobs at political protests or rallies.

**Escape Mob** — An escape mob is attempting to flee from something such as a fire, bomb, flood or other catastrophe. Members of escape mobs have lost their capacity to reason and are generally impossible to control. They are characterized by unreasonable terror.

**Acquisitive Mob** — An acquisitive mob is one motivated by a desire to acquire something. Riots caused by other factors often turn into looting sprees. This mob exploits a lack of control by authorities in safeguarding property. Examples of acquisitive mobs would include the looting in South Central Los Angeles in 1992, or food riots in other countries.

**Expressive Mob** — An expressive mob is one that expresses fervor or revelry following some sporting event, religious activity or celebration. Members experience a release of pent up emotions in highly charged situations. Examples of this type of mob include the June 1994 riots in Canada following the Stanley Cup professional hockey championship, European soccer riots, and those occurring after other sporting events in many countries, including the United States. Although members of mobs have differing levels of commitment, as a group they are far more committed than members of a crowd. As such, a “mob mentality” sets in, which creates a cohesiveness and sense of purpose that is lacking in crowds. Thus, any strategy that causes individual members to contemplate their personal actions will tend to be more effective than treating an entire mob as a single entity.

**Flash Mob** — “A flash mob has been defined as ‘a large group of people who gather in some predetermined location, perform some brief action, and then quickly disperse.’ The organizers of the first flash mobs intended the events to be coordinated group actions that were “inexplicable” and lacked an ‘apparent agenda’. The brief actions performed as part of a flash mob have included activities such as participants freezing in place, singing a predetermined song, or performing a choreographed dance. The parameters of a flash mob (time, location and performed action) are communicated to participants via new and mobile communication technologies such as e-mail, texting, and social media. While the original flash mobs were intended to be ‘good-natured spectacles’, in the early 2010s, large groups of
youth “flash mobs” in Boston, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, New York, Kansas City, Missouri, Orange, New Jersey, and elsewhere in the United States have resulted in violence, vandalism, injuries, and arrests.”

4.21.1 Historical Occurrences

Kansas City Riots of 1968
In April 1968, Kansas City was one of 37 cities in the United States to experience rioting after the assassination Martin Luther King Jr. Unlike other cities, the rioting in Kansas City did not erupt on April 4, the date of the assassination, but rather on April 9. The first sign of disorder in the streets of Kansas City was a student march in response to the government failing to close schools across the city on April 9, the day of King’s funeral. This was seen as an apparent lack of respect for King by the students. The riot was sparked when Kansas City police officers used tear gas to quell the student protesters when they staged their performance outside City Hall. The deployment of tear gas dispersed the protesters from the area, but other citizens of the city began to riot as a result of the police action. The riot resulted in the arrest of over 100 adults, and left five dead and at least 20 admitted to hospitals.

Country Club Plaza Flash Mob April 10, 2010 – Kansas City, Mo.
Stampedes, fights and a general melee occurred in the Country Club Plaza District on Saturday, April 10, 2010. Police estimated that as many as 1,000 teenagers, and some even younger, rampaged through the Plaza. It took multiple canisters of pepper spray and arrests to disperse the ‘flash mob’ that brought young people together through Twitter and Facebook communiques. Punches were thrown, a girl in a prom dress was shoved into a fountain, one woman was attacked and her purse stolen. The melee happened before the midnight curfew for minors. Other events occurred throughout the summer, though not to the same degree.

Country Club Plaza Flash Mob August 15, 2011 – Kansas City, Mo.
In a continuation of events in the spring and summer of 2010, Kansas City experienced several episodes of youth group “flash mob” violence at the Country Club Plaza and other locations. The most serious of these flash mobs occurred on August 15, 2011, when large groups of youth assembled at the Plaza and three youth (ages 14, 15 and 16) were shot. In response to these events, Kansas City implemented a new summertime curfew.

Civil Unrest August – November 2014, Ferguson, Mo.
“Law enforcement officials in the Kansas City region were at a heightened state of alert after civil unrest across the state in Ferguson, Missouri. An ongoing series of protests and civil disorder began the day after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson. As the details of the shooting emerged, police established curfews and deployed riot squads to maintain order. Along with peaceful protests, there was looting and violent unrest in the vicinity of the original shooting. The unrest continued on November 24, 2014, after a grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who shot Michael Brown. A dozen buildings were burned down; there was gunfire, looting, vandalism, and destruction of two St. Louis County Police patrol cars, as well as burning of various non-police cars. Police in Ferguson deployed tear gas and ordered protesters in the street to disperse. There were 61 people arrested in Ferguson on charges including burglary and trespassing. In one case, firefighters evacuated the scene of a fire due to gunshots being heard, and for the same reason could not respond to other fires.
On November 25, CNN reported that thousands of people rallied to protest the grand jury’s decision in more than 170 U.S. cities from Boston to Los Angeles, and that National Guard forces were reinforced in Ferguson to prevent the situation from escalating. At least 90 people were arrested for arson, looting, and vandalism in Oakland, California. Protests also took place internationally, with demonstrations held in several major cities in Canada and in London. Calls by protesters to boycott the Black Friday shopping day, which took place the Friday after the grand jury decision, were heeded in the St. Louis region, with hundreds of demonstrators disrupting shopping activity at the Saint Louis Galleria and other area shopping centers.

On November 25, 2014, within the Kansas City metro, about 100 protesters took to the streets and marched through the Country Club Plaza and to Westport to protest the Ferguson grand jury decision. Several protesters were arrested but no injuries or damages occurred.

**4.21.2 Probable Locations**

Civil disorder can arise from a number of causes for a variety of reasons. Circumstances may be spontaneous or resultant from escalating tensions, as was demonstrated in Ferguson, MO and other recent national examples. Civil disorder can erupt anywhere, but the most likely locations are those areas with large population groupings or gatherings. Sites that are attractive for political or other rallies should be considered as probable locations for the epicenter of civil disorder events. Civil disorder can also occur in proximity to locations where a “trigger event” occurred, as was the case in Ferguson.

**4.21.3 Extent, Severity, Magnitude**

- **Severity**: Low – High
- **Magnitude**: 1

The ultimate severity of any civil disorder event will depend on the magnitude of that event and its location. The more widespread an event is, the greater the likelihood of excessive injury, loss of life and property damage. Additional factors, such as the ability of law enforcement to contain the event, are also critical in minimizing damages.

**4.21.4 Probability of Future Occurrence: Low**

Across the nation, police reports reflect a fairly steady rate of theft, mugging, arson and homicide incidents. But these criminal acts do not amount to riots; a large crowd itself is not an incipient riot merely because it assembles a great many people. “Starting signals” must occur for civil disorder to erupt; these starting signals include certain kinds of high profile events. Nationwide, riots are apt to be a recurrent, if unpredictable, feature of social life. Without question, the Kansas City area will continue to experience future episodes of marches, protests, demonstrations and gatherings in various cities and communities that could lead to some type of disruptive civil disorder. However, based on the region’s general history of civil disturbance, the probability that such incidents will develop into full-scale riots is considered low.

**4.21.5 Vulnerability Assessment and Potential Loss Estimates**

*Data limitation: As discussed in the 2010 Plan, civil disorder can occur in any number of locations for any number of reasons. The severity of the event is determined by several variables including group size, the
cause of the incident, tactics used to de-escalate the incident and police presence. Each of these can significantly alter the severity of an event. For these reasons, use of the statistical risk assessment methodology to calculate loss potential is not appropriate. Therefore, only a general statement of loss potential can be made for civil disorder events.

In the Kansas City region, because of the generally confined nature of civil disorder and a lack of past historical examples of damage, potential loss is best characterized as low.

4.21.6 Problem Statements

- Wide scale civil disorder can quickly overwhelm the law enforcement resources of any single jurisdiction.
- The rise of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) can magnify the speed and onset of mass gatherings of people that can lead to civil disorder. cccv
- In follow-up case studies of the Plaza “flash mobs,” boredom was cited by teens as a leading cause of their participating in the flash mobs. Jurisdictions with inadequate social opportunities for young people may continue to face similar challenges. cccv