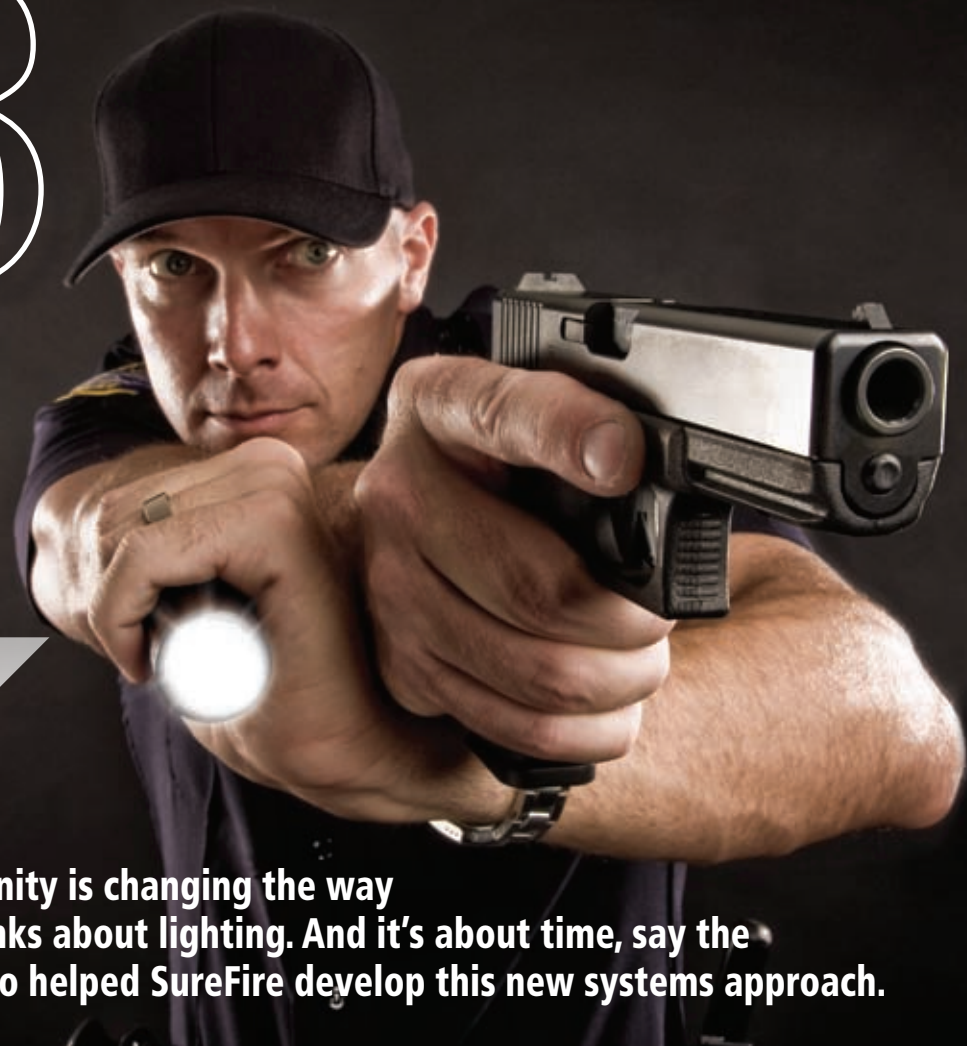


T3



SureFire's Tactical Trinity is changing the way law enforcement thinks about lighting. And it's about time, say the two veteran cops who helped SureFire develop this new systems approach.

“ONE IS NONE, TWO IS ONE— BUT THREE IS KEY,” reads the header in SureFire’s well-designed new Law Enforcement Tactical Trinity guide. The line alludes to the fact that, in the high-stress, unpredictable world of law enforcement, where things can go from bad to worse in the blink of an eye, if you’ve only got one illumination tool on you, the situation can very quickly deteriorate into having no source of illumination.

What happens if the light gets lost during a chase or scuffle? What if it gets dropped and breaks? (If this happens, clearly it was not a SureFire.) What happens if your batteries suddenly go dead, which can and does happen to even the best flashlights?

To quote an overused but still pertinent phrase: Those who fail to prepare, prepare to fail. And in the high-stakes world of law enforcement, where “failure” can mean the loss of innocent life—including your own

—failure’s simply not an option. Which is why SureFire, with the help of two seasoned cops with over 36 years of law enforcement experience between them, developed a systems approach to law enforcement lighting known as the Tactical Trinity, or T3, for short.

“It’s a combat system for lighting,” says Kevin Skehan, who along with partner Luis Araujo, helped develop the T3 system. “The key being a systems approach.”

“A system to combat the darkness,” adds the soft-spoken Luis, who seems content to let his partner do most of the talking.

The duo’s inspiration stemmed from a lack of a systematic approach to lighting that satisfied the needs of law enforcement. Both fans (and users) of SureFire products, they pitched Dr. John Matthews, SureFire’s CEO and founder, on the idea of an approach to lighting for law enforcement professionals that emphasized

a complete system over simply recommending a specific flashlight or WeaponLight.

“The systems approach is a primary light, a WeaponLight, and a backup light,” Kevin explains. He equates a cop asking which flashlight he should use to asking which bullet he should carry. “Well, you should carry a .45— but, oh, do you want the gun, too? Just identifying the one component, the flashlight, is useless. You want the system. That’s the right answer.”

Kevin and Luis began working directly with Dr. Matthews in their spare time (they’re both fulltime cops for a major metropolitan police department) to develop the Tactical Trinity. Their goal was simple: create a lighting system that would provide law enforcement professionals with an edge in an environment where over 85 percent of all officer-involved shootings occur in low light.

“All we’re trying to do is give him the edge, give him a little bit more information so that whatever decision he does make, he’s making it with the most amount of reliable data he can get,” Kevin elaborates. “That’s the system with the Tactical Trinity. You’ve got a good primary light, you’ve got a backup light, because if the primary light fails, you lose it, whatever, you need to have the backup, and then a WeaponLight. Those are the three components.”

A Powerful Primary

A quality primary light that generates tactical-level lighting (enough to temporarily overwhelm a suspect’s night-adapted vision) is, according to these two experts, second only to a pistol in order of importance on a patrol officer’s duty belt.

“You have to have a good primary light— that’s first and foremost,” Kevin insists. “And the primary light has to be immediately accessible, it

A good backup light needs to be small enough for everyday carry yet ergonomic enough to be used with a handgun in various techniques, including the neck index method shown here.



needs to be in a position where you can rapidly deploy it, it needs to be immediately re-holsterable, and it needs to be in a tactically, ergonomically correct place.”

Given that the primary light is frequently paired with a pistol, ergonomics play a particularly important role in choosing the right flashlight. It needs to be lightweight yet powerful, compact but easily manipulated, and it has to have foolproof tactical switching, because, when seconds count, an officer doesn’t have time to fumble around for the switching on the barrel of his flashlight.

Selecting the right holster to carry the light is equally important because not only must it hold the light securely in place so that an officer doesn’t lose it in a pursuit or scuffle, it also must be ergonomic enough to allow the officer to deploy the light quickly.

According to Kevin and Luis, the amount of time it takes to draw a weapon, engage a target, and fire typically goes up by as much as a factor of four when drawing a flash-

light and pairing it with a weapon is added to the equation. “That’s not acceptable,” says Kevin, “because we’re making split-second decisions that are now taking us four or five seconds because of the mechanics of using the tools. That doesn’t work.”

To help minimize the time between deciding and acting, the pair developed the G3™ LED Holster Kit, which features a SureFire G3 LED flashlight in a lightweight polymer holster designed for rapid deployment of the light. Kevin claims that, with the holster kit, they’re able to draw their weapon and the G3, pair the two, engage and identify a target (at five yards), and fire in under a second and a half— only a bit over half a second longer than it typically takes them to do the same drill without a flashlight. “We’ve cut the time way, way down to the point that it’s usable,” Kevin says with pride.

The G3 LED Holster Kit was also designed to be a patrol light alternative to much heavier, much bulkier rechargeable flashlights. The flashlight produces nearly six hours of tactical-level light on a set of batteries, and the holster holds three spare batteries in an integrated battery well, giving a patrol officer enough battery power for over 18 hours of light in the field—far more than a rechargeable. As for the argument that rechargeables tend to save users money in battery costs, Kevin argues that’s not necessarily



By Sean P. Egen ★ Photos by John Doukas



The SureFire Z2 LED Holster Kit possesses all of the qualities an officer should look for in a primary light and holster—and it's a great alternative to a heavier, more cumbersome rechargeable. Below, the adjustable, ergonomic angle of the G3 LED Holster Kit allows an officer to deploy and pair the light with a handgun quicker, saving valuable time in high-stress tactical situations.

the case anymore.

"Agencies are starting to realize that the rechargeable thing is a bad idea," he explains. "Because you get a year out of a rechargeable stick, and then it costs you a hundred dollars to get a new rechargeable stick. With the 123s, we've found you can go a whole year on an average patrol shift for less than that. And, if your rechargeable dies in the field, you don't have any light. If your 123-powered light dies in the field, change the batteries. In fact, the new holster has the batteries built right in."

A quick-deploy holster kit with a SureFire Z2 LED flashlight is also available for officers who prefer a more compact light with a Combat-Grip™, a tapered body with a rubber grip ring that allows the light to be easily operated "syringe style" when paired with a handgun. For officers who already have a favorite primary light, the speed holster can also be purchased separately—it accommodates any SureFire flashlight with a 1.25-inch-diameter bezel.

Luis is particularly excited about SureFire's new AZ2 CombatLight®, which he and Kevin helped develop. It features a bright primary LED sur-



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A CombatGrip, like the one found on the SureFire Z2 LED, allows the flashlight to be easily paired with a handgun and operated syringe style.

rounded by secondary lower-output LEDs and a CombatGrip body. “It’s an actual spot-to-flood light, and it’s all electronic,” he explains. “There’s no moving parts, and it puts out 120 lumens. It’s an absolutely phenom-

enal patrol light.”

No matter which patrol light an officer selects, Luis and Kevin both emphasize the importance in making sure that it, and every other piece of equipment an officer needs to do

the job, is on his or her person at all times. “Once you leave the car, what you’ve got on you is what you’ve got on you,” Luis says emphatically. “You’re not going back to the car.”

Which is precisely why the second part of the Tactical Trinity—the backup light—is of utmost importance.

A Beneficial Backup

“Having one flashlight is like having one gun,” argues Kevin Skehan. Yet it’s been his observation that, while most officers will carry a backup gun, very few of them bother to carry a backup flashlight. “Our experience has taught us that having one flashlight is a formula for disaster. We’ve both worked together for a long time, and we’ve both had flashlights go dead on us in the field, we’ve both lost our flashlights, we’ve dropped them, we’ve left them in the car, everything and anything that every cop out there’s done.”

So, what should an officer look

for in a backup flashlight? “You’re going to pick something smaller and concealable but can still do the job,” says Luis. By doing the job, he means capable of doing the same things your primary light can, specifically, produce tactical-level lighting and be paired with a handgun.

And when it comes to being powerful, concealable, and incredibly versatile in the field for both plainclothes and uniformed officers, the guys make no bones about their number-one pick for the job: the SureFire E1B Backup®. Of course, the fact that they both played a big part in designing this sexy little backup light might have something to do with their pick.

“The Backup is a fantastic multi-task light,” says Kevin. “You always want to have it so that, when the light comes on, you’ve got that high-intensity—that 80 lumens of blinding light.” He’s referring specifically to the Backup’s two-stage tailcap programming, which always



An ergonomic, well-designed primary or backup light can be used with a handgun in multiple methods, including the modified FBI technique shown here.

defaults to the maximum output (80 lumens), so when an officer deploys the light and presses the tailcap, he knows he’s going to get the maximum output every time.

The Backup also puts out an

extremely useful five lumens of light at its lower setting, which is achieved by clicking the light on, then off and on again within two seconds. The five lumens is perfect for navigation, searching an automobile, writing

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a citation— any activity where 80 lumens of light is overkill.

“Five lumens is quite a lot of light, actually,” adds Luis. “And you also save battery life.” (At its low setting, the Backup’s super-efficient LED generates 37 hours of light on a single lithium 123A battery!)

Regardless of the backup light selected by an officer, Luis and Kevin make the point that the light should always be on the officer’s person—even when off-duty.

“When you’re off-duty, most cops don’t carry a flashlight,” Kevin explains. “Most cops will carry an off-duty gun and a badge but no flashlight.”

This makes no sense to him, especially given that, if a cop is off-duty and bothering to carry a gun, what’s he supposed to do if he needs to use that gun in the dark? Remember, 85 percent of all officer-involved shootings take place in low-light conditions. And an officer’s responsibility to exercise proper threat identification and target isolation before firing his weapon doesn’t go away just because he’s off-duty.

A Worthy WeaponLight

The third component of the Tactical Trinity, a handgun-mounted light, is something Kevin admits is not going to be possible for every law enforcement professional out there. “Ideally, you should have a WeaponLight,” he argues, but he acknowledges that many cops won’t ever use one because of personal preferences, departmental regulations, holster issues, and weapon specifics. Still, both he and Luis believe a quality WeaponLight on a handgun is an invaluable tool in the field and highly recommend the use of one—the SureFire X300®— in particular.

The X300 produces 110 lumens of tactical-level light, over twice the amount of light needed to temporarily blind and disorient a suspect. But its biggest selling point is its versatile beam with plenty of reach and enough surround beam to accommodate one’s peripheral vision. This extremely useful beam makes it an

ideal choice for close- to medium-range engagements, the range of most law enforcement applications. It also features ergonomic tactical switching, allowing an officer to easily operate the light while maintaining a fundamentally sound grip on his weapon. Pressure-activated grip switches are also available for many popular weapons, for even greater fingertip control.

While recommended, the guys make it clear that a WeaponLight is

not a substitute for a primary light. “Even if you have a light on your pistol, you’ve still got to have a primary light,” Kevin insists. Along with it being tactically advantageous to sometimes hold a light away from your body mass (bad guys may fire directly at the light), there’s one other obvious reason. “If you go up on a car stop, you can’t be pointing your pistol at John Q. Citizen,” Kevin elaborates.

But, when it comes to using long

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guns in law enforcement, Luis and Kevin insist that a good Weapon-Light mounted to the gun is a must.

"You're an idiot if you carry a long gun without a light," Kevin says emphatically. "Because manipulation of a flashlight with a long gun is damn near impossible. If you're carrying a shotgun or a rifle with a flashlight, you're asking for trouble."


"There are techniques," Luis interjects, "but you don't have a good stable platform to shoot from, for one. And a pump shotgun—forget it. There's no manipulating a flashlight and a pump shotgun."

The guys are adamant that, if an officer chooses to use a Weapon-Light, the light remain on the weapon at all times, not just be attached for low-light or nighttime applications. Adding or removing the light for special circumstances, they believe, is impractical, unsafe, and asking for trouble in the law enforcement world, where consistent, prudent behavior can mean the difference between life and death.

Boiled Down to Basics

It was important to Kevin Skehan and Luis Araujo that the Tactical Trinity for law enforcement not be loaded down with dozens of choices that might only serve to confuse law enforcement professionals in selecting the right illumination tools. Their goals were to 1) emphasize the importance of the three components of the T3 system and 2) distill the selection process down to basic choices that give cops the best chance of surviving situations they never really counted on.

"Because you're never going to have as bad a day as the day you get thrown into something that you're not prepared for," says Kevin.

It's their belief, and SureFire's too, that cops who follow the principles of the Tactical Trinity won't ever have to experience that "bad" day—at least not when it comes to their illumination needs. 

To learn more about the SureFire Tactical Trinity, visit surefire.com/T3.

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