



# Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

Beyond the Watchful Eye:  
Effective Tactics for Surveillance Detection  
By

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Have you ever wondered if you were being followed? How would you know if you were? Have you ever had the uneasy feeling that you are being watched? How would you know if you are? In an era where personal safety is of paramount concern, it is reasonable to know how to determine if you are being followed or watched using a technique called “surveillance detection routes” (SDRs). Ensuring personal security has become increasingly important for many individuals. Understanding how to create and use surveillance detection routes (SDRs) can enhance self-protection. Surveillance detection is not just for law enforcement or professionals in the security field; it’s a valuable asset for anyone looking to protect themselves and their loved ones. This article explores how you can use SDRs while driving, walking, or jogging.

## **SURVEILLANCE DETECTION ROUTES (SDRs)**

### *Introduction*

I served as an active-duty Army Special Forces “Green Beret” and graduated from the Army Ranger School. I am also a certified executive protection specialist through a program called the “Executive Protection Institute.” In my military and executive protection training, I learned about the importance of varying the routes we take to know if you are being followed or watched and why it is so very important to practice informed situational awareness while on those routes.

I practice these skills daily. I regularly take different routes home or take different routes going places. I pay attention to events or people that stand out as being out of the

ordinary. I taught my wife and son to do that too.

### *Understanding the Basics*

A SDR is a planned route designed to recognize if you are being surveilled. Surveillance detection is essentially about being aware of your surroundings and recognizing patterns or activities that might indicate you're being followed or watched. You should know that the goal isn't only to spot potential threats but also to evade those who might be keeping a watchful eye on you.

### *Planning Your Routes*

Planning is the first step in creating an effective SDR. Carefully consider the routes you normally take in your daily activities. Assess these routes for variability and complexity—two elements that will help

you detect if someone is following you. An effective SDR includes multiple potential routes with different entry and exit points, diverse environments, and predictable choke-points or dead-ends.

It is very important to avoid becoming “predictable.” If you take the same route to work every day, if you go to the same restaurant on Friday nights, if you walk along the same pathways in the neighborhood, you become predictable. Predictability can get you killed or severely injured. Here’s a true story to make that point.

*A Green Beret veteran friend of mine was blown up in Afghanistan. He survived with serious injuries. I asked him what happened.*

*He replied, “I was a medic. I treated local people on the same day at the same time every week. I became*

*predictable. The Taliban paid attention and planted an IED close to where I was treating children. The IED exploded. I received serious injuries and a couple of the kids were killed."*

Of course, you likely won't get blown up by an improvised explosive device, but your predictability can make you a victim of a carjacking, assault, home invasion, or rape.

So, imagine going from home to work. Instead of taking the straight-forward path every day, map out three or four alternate routes. Become unpredictable by varying the routes you use.

#### *Integrating Your Skills and Tools*

Surveillance detection requires a set of integrated skill sets, such as observational and analytical skills. You might consider supplementing your observation skills with smartphone apps that can map-out routes and provide live traffic updates. Using GPS programs that can log your movements for later analysis can be useful if you suspect someone is watching you.

Another useful app is Life360 ([Life360 | Family-Proof Your Family | Location Sharing & Safety App](#)).

Friends and family can install the app on their smartphones to know where you are located. The app quickly identifies your location, which would be very important if you are feeling threatened by people following or watching you.

#### *Implementing the Detection Routes*

Implement your SDR subtly without announcing your intentions to everyone; for example, casually incorporate an unannounced stop at a coffee shop or a quick stop at a grocery market as part of your route. These stops should appear as normal daily routines to anyone observing you.

Pay attention to specific details as you move along your SDR—cars that seem to follow you through traffic lights, pedestrians appearing at multiple points during your walk or jog, or individuals with an unusual interest in what you are doing. Use these observations to adapt on the spot; for example, if you notice something that doesn't seem normal during your drive, take an unexpected turn.

#### *Analyzing and Adapting*

As you move along your SDR take time to analyze your experience. Reflect on what felt wrong or identify patterns of movement that seemed strange. It's essential to develop an instinct for what's normal in your movements, which helps in quickly spotting anomalies (discussed below).

Consider changing your routines every few weeks—different departure times, new destinations for errands, or diverse transportation modes. Remember, a primary goal for your safety is to become unpredictable.

### **SDRS WON'T WORK WITHOUT INFORMED SITUATIONAL AWARENESS**

Varying your habitual travel routes is an important principle to live by. It can save your life when it is combined with paying attention to what you see and hear while traveling those routes.

Learning how to pay attention to what's happening around you is an even more important life-saving skill. One of our Green Beret veteran friends, Bart Byrant, once said, "More lives are saved from situational awareness than from using a firearm." That's a pretty profound and true statement. We teach that to our wear and carry customers.

However, there is a huge problem with the admonishment to "pay attention." There is too much to pay attention to in your daily interactions. So, to what should you pay attention?

Van Horn and Riley (2014) in their book titled "Left of Bang" explain in detail how to practice *informed situational awareness*. Informed situational awareness means paying attention to specific behaviors or odd situations that don't fit your perception of what's normal. They refer to "what's normal" as a baseline; for example, when you show up for work in the morning, what's the normal situation? Are there security guards? Are there many people in the offices?

Van Horn and Riley then talk about anomalies. An anomaly is any event, person, or behavior that

stands out in conflict with the baseline. You can have an anomaly that is below the baseline (something that has been removed) or above the baseline (something has been added); for example, the baseline for arriving at work is to pass through a security check, but there are no security guards. That's an anomaly "below the baseline." Another example. You are driving to work and you notice a green car following you. You make three left and that car makes the same three turns. That's not normal. That anomaly is "above the baseline."

Determining whether someone is following you in a car can be challenging, but there are several tactics you can use.

*Frequent Sightings:* If you notice the same vehicle appearing multiple times along different parts of your route, this could be a sign of surveillance.

*Mirror Monitoring:* Regularly check your rearview and side mirrors to observe if a particular vehicle remains behind you for an extended period, especially after making several turns and stopping points.

*Unusual Behavior:* A car that mimics your lane changes, speed adjustments, or turns, particularly at non-obvious times or places, could be following you.

*Route Variations:* Make a sudden or unexpected change in direction or route. For example, turn onto a side street or make a loop around a block. If the vehicle follows your

lead, the driver might be tailing you.

*Multiple Street Turns:* Turn right or left three times in a row to see if the vehicle continues to follow. This maneuver will either confirm or alleviate your suspicions.

*Making Unplanned Stops:* Temporarily drive to a different location – one you wouldn't typically go to like entering a parking lot of a public place. If the car follows, it raises the likelihood of surveillance.

*Cross Traffic Opportunities:* When at a traffic light, observe whether the vehicle consistently follows you through the intersection.

*Note Details:* If you believe you are being followed, safely take note of the vehicle's make, model, color, and license plate.

*Utilize Public Areas:* Drive to a public place where there are people around, such as a police station, crowded area, or a well-lit, busy location. This might discourage the person following you from continuing.

*Avoid Home as a Destination:* **Do not drive** to your home. Instead, go to a known safe place or call for assistance.

Always prioritize your safety and avoid confronting the suspected follower. If you believe you're being followed and feel threatened, contact authorities for assistance. If you are legally carrying a concealed firearm do not display your handgun to threaten the person

following you because that's a felony in some jurisdictions, including Maryland (see Harris & Cohen, 2024). That handgun is only used when you absolutely must press the trigger to save your life.

### **SURVEILLANCE DETECTION ROUTES WHILE WALKING OR JOGGING**

Using surveillance detection routes while walking involves deploying similar principles to those used in vehicle surveillance detection, but with a focus on pedestrian movements. Here are examples of tactics you can use:

#### *Random Path Selection*

Change your usual walking routes frequently. Instead of taking the same path every day, select on a rotating basis alternatives not normally used.

#### *Maintain Informed Situational Awareness*

Create an imaginary 31-foot protective bubble around yourself (see Spartan Firearms Training Group, 2024). Stay aware of who and what is around you, especially people who come into your protective bubble. Look for unusual patterns of behavior, such as individuals who seem too interested in you or who are frequently close by.

#### *Use Your Physical Presence*

Spartan Firearms Training Group teaches our concealed carry students about the use of force, which is critical information if you want to

use a firearm legally for self-defense. We present a sliding scale in the shape of a triangle that identifies several ways to use force that escalate to the use of deadly force. The second use of force of option is to use physical presence to dissuade people from making you a victim. Walk with head erect, look around, avoid being distracted, and avoid looking weak.

#### *Use Time Variations*

If feasible, adjust the times you go for walks or runs. Walking at different hours can disrupt potential surveillance. Take breaks or stop at various locations (like a shop or café) to break any potential patterns.

#### *Employ Tactical Maneuvers*

If you suspect you are being followed, make a sudden change in direction or loop back on your path to check if someone is trailing you. Instead of moving in a straight line, take unexpected turns to see if the same person is following you.

#### *Look for Multiple Safe Locations*

Familiarize yourself with possible safe places where you can enter or exit, such as public buildings, shops, or well-populated areas.

Walking into crowded spaces can deter anyone following you, as it can make it harder for them to blend in or to easily track your movements.

#### *Watch for Repetition*

Pay attention to individuals or groups that frequently appear in different locations while you're on your walk or run. If you see the same person too often in varying locations, it could indicate surveillance.

#### *Trust Your Instincts*

If you have an uneasy feeling about someone following or watching you, pay attention to that instinct. It is better to be cautious than to be oblivious to your surroundings. Here's a short and true story about listening to your gut.

*My son, our friend Tim, and I were in Salt Lake City, Utah, several years ago to get our Utah Concealed Carry Instructor permits. One day we decided to visit downtown Salt Lake City. Beautiful place.*

*At one point, Paul and Tim wanted to go to a firearms accessory and apparel store. They wanted to walk, in spite of my exhortations to hire a ride.*

*As we walked through the city and outside the downtown area, we found ourselves in a fairly rundown area. I was in the rear. Something told me to turn around. When I did, I saw a bedraggled, bearded, and barefooted guy about 10 feet behind me. As I turned, he said "Don't worry, I won't hurt you."*

*I said to Paul and Tim, "There's a guy following us. Let's cross the street. If he follows us, we will need options."*

The only way I can explain why I turned around is that my intuition was tuned in to a quiet voice telling me to beware.

Pay attention to your quiet voice!

#### *Engage with Your Environment*

Ask for help if you feel uneasy or frightened. Asking someone nearby for assistance or simply engaging in conversation can help diffuse potential threats.

Stay visible by staying in well-lit and populated areas. High visibility increases safety and reduces the likelihood of someone discreetly following you.

#### *ALWAYS Have an Exit Plan*

Have clear ideas about where to go if you need to escape or find safety, such as nearby stores or residences where you can seek assistance.

Keep your smartphone fully charged and readily accessible, and have a list of people to contact if you feel you are in danger or are being followed.

#### *Beware of the Normalcy Bias*

The normalcy bias is a cognitive bias that causes people to underestimate the likelihood of bad things happening to them. This bias can lead to a false sense of security and can have serious consequences if it causes people to ignore potential threats.

We teach our concealed carry students about this bias and warn

them to be aware of it. Don't be naïve. Will you probably become a victim of an attack? Probably not. But is it possible? It sure is!

By incorporating these SDR tactics into your walking and running routines, you can enhance your awareness and potentially negate any persistent surveillance attempts, thereby improving your overall personal safety.

## SCENARIOS

Surveillance detection routes (SDRs) are a crucial tool for individuals seeking to ensure their personal security by identifying and avoiding potential surveillance threats. Here are three scenarios illustrating how ordinary citizens can employ SDR techniques:

### *Scenario #1: Commuting to Work*

Scenario: Jane commutes to work daily via a predictable route. Suspicious of a potential stalker, she decides to implement surveillance detection.

Action: Over a week, Jane varies her route and timing. On Monday, she takes her usual path but adds a detour through a busy shopping district. On Tuesday, she leaves 30 minutes early and uses public transportation instead of driving.

Midweek, she takes different streets to her destination, occasionally stopping at a coffee shop. By keeping a lookout for recurring vehicles or individuals, she is able to determine if any patterns emerge.

Outcome: During her checks, Jane notices a particular car following her on several different routes. She documents the details and reports it to the authorities, thereby enhancing her safety.

### *Scenario #2: Exercise Routine*

Scenario: Tom jogs in his neighborhood every evening. Recently, he noticed a person repeatedly loitering near his usual starting point.

Action: To assess if this person is watching, Tom modifies his exercise routine. Instead of jogging at the same time every day, he alternates between early morning and late evening runs. Some days, he switches to walking or cycling and chooses different routes through the neighborhood or goes to a nearby park.

Outcome: Tom finds that the loiterer is only present during his evening jogs. By changing his pattern and alerting local neighborhood watch groups, he disrupts the loiterer's routine and reduces the potential threat.

### *Scenario #3: Shopping and Errands*

Scenario: Shatasha frequently notices a particular individual in various locations while running errands and feels uneasy.

Action: She starts using an SDR by altering the order and location of her errands. Instead of going directly to the grocery store, she visits a distant supermarket, uses different entrances, or combines errands differently, such as visiting

the post office before rather than after shopping. She also utilizes public transportation routes she wouldn't normally take.

Outcome: By actively scanning her surroundings during these alterations, Shatasha spots the person who has been watching her. She documents these observations and adjusts her schedule.

In each scenario, the key actions involve varying routes, times, and methods of travel while maintaining awareness of one's environment, allowing individuals to identify and potentially avoid any surveillance activity.

## CONCLUSION

Creating and using surveillance detection routes effectively empowers you to take responsibility for your personal safety instead of expecting others to do that for you. With careful planning, observation, and adaptability, you can protect yourself from potential threats while living your life with the freedom and peace of mind you deserve.

Remember, **it's not about living in fear—it's about crafting a lifestyle that incorporates informed awareness and proactive measures.** Stay observant, remain unpredictable, and keep practicing your SDRs to stay beyond the watchful eye to ensure your safety and security.

## REFERENCES

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### About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA).

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to the preservation and advancement of gun owners' rights in Maryland.

He is the co-founder and vice president of the Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be contacted at 443-472-0216 or at [frank@spartanftg.com](mailto:frank@spartanftg.com).

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### ABOUT THE SPARTAN FIREARMS TRAINING GROUP

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC, ([www.spartanftg.com](http://www.spartanftg.com)) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015. At the end of March, 2024, we entered into our 10th year of business and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is found at [SFTG Training Calendar](#).

Scheduling or training questions should be directed to Paul Duffy. He can be contacted at 410-707-2992 or at [Paul@spartanftg.com](mailto:Paul@spartanftg.com).

**YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING; NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!**