

legally armed citizens and  
**situational  
awareness**



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**Legally armed citizens, as any other person, may be presented with a variety of potential dangers or threats, such as criminal activity, terrorism, and man-made & natural disasters, during their lifetime.**

In this brief we will define what situational awareness is, and discuss the 5-step CUES<sup>SM</sup> for Legally Armed Citizens<sup>SM</sup> model which provides you with a systemic method of assessing the environment you and your loved ones are in for potential threats.

## **What is Situational Awareness?**

A common statement from self-defense trainers to students is “maintain situational awareness.” However, there is rarely any specific information given on how to accomplish the task.

So, specifically, what is situational awareness? “Situation awareness is the attention to, and perception of environmental elements and current states, and the comprehension through inference of their meaning, in order to make a decision and take action.” (Floyd, 2010)

Situation awareness, a mental state, can only be achieved by taking ongoing coordinated action. Therefore *Situation awareness* is the overall “state of knowledge” which is achieved through the continuous “process” of *situation assessment*.

Situation assessment therefore, is the process in which you are constantly asking

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and answering three specific questions:

1. Who/what is where?
2. What are/is they/it doing now?
3. What will they/it do in the future?  
(as based on Hone's 3-Q model)

## The CUES<sup>SM</sup> A-P-C-D-A Approach

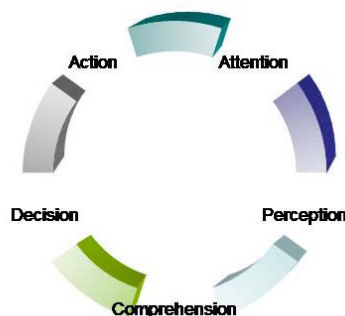
The Cognitive Use of Environmental Signals<sup>SM</sup> (CUES<sup>SM</sup>) approach is based upon a simple concept: that the environment we find ourselves in provides signals which can be discerned by those who are attentive and who can comprehend their meaning. Some environments offer signals that they are safe, while others provide signals of potential danger. However, most people are not attuned to these signals due to the amount of information overload presented to their senses. Therefore, learning to separate significant signals (anomalies) from background noise (baseline) is a primary objective of the CUES<sup>SM</sup> program of instruction.

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CUES<sup>SM</sup> utilizes a 5-step model to assess the environment around you:

1. Attention
2. Perception
3. Comprehension
4. Decision
5. Action



## Attention

Your senses are bombarded by an overwhelming amount of incoming data. To maintain sanity, your brain must filter out what it feels is non-essential information. For example, have you ever purchased a vehicle and then you suddenly begin to notice how many of the same vehicles of the same color are on the road that you never noticed before? This is because your vehicle is now of importance to notice, so you now pay attention to all vehicles that look like yours. It is the same with knowing what to look for during a situational assessment. Until your brain knows it's important, it may filter those signals out of your conscious awareness. Attention is essential, but there are 5 types of attention, and at least 3 of them can get you into trouble fast in threatening situations.

## Perception

As previously discussed, attention is vitally important, but just because you pay attention to something does not mean that you perceive what is truly happening. For example, people in active shooter incidents often hear noises but do not perceive them to be gunshots. Some models also focus only on observation (such as Col. Boyd's OODA Loop), but utilizing all of our senses to perceive your environment is essential in a potentially threatening situation. By understanding your perceptual limitations you can avoid falling victim to them.

## Comprehension

Comprehension is based upon your mental model of the world. You can only comprehend what your brain can make sense of. For example, unless you know

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what certain signals – jewelry, body language, approach techniques, etc. – can mean, you won't comprehend that they are signals of potential danger. During the terrorist attacks on 9/11 a number of people in the World Trade Center could not comprehend that someone would deliberately fly planes into the towers and thus their lack of comprehension impacted their ability to make a correct decision and take correct action.

## Decision

Time is your enemy. Once you comprehend that the environment may not be safe, you have little time to waste. For example, you have less than 1.5 minutes to escape from an aircraft fire before the toxic gases will kill you. People greatly underestimate how quickly a fire in a home or other building grows (fires double in size roughly every 90 seconds) and make the decision too late to evacuate and save their lives!

## Action

When confronted with danger your brain chooses among three options:

1. Freeze
2. Flight
3. Fight

In life threatening situations, some people survive, and some people die. Taking action is typically what determines your outcome. Many of the people in the World Trade Center who took quick action were able to evacuate. Most who did not perished. While fear and complacency were almost certainly present in some people who died, many could not take action because they were hypnotized. This has been found to frequently occur during

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commercial aircraft incidents and flight crews are now taught how to break the trance that causes some people to stay in their seats and die.

## You Can Take Action Now!

Maintaining situational awareness is no longer an abstract idea. CUES<sup>SM</sup> for Legally Armed Citizens<sup>SM</sup> provides you the knowledge and skills to understand environmental signals in order to protect yourself – and those you love. Carrying a firearm may not save you if your assailant attacks and you are caught totally unaware. Your firearm cannot save you from fires or natural disasters. Only your training and abilities can. A small investment of time and money now can pay huge dividends later.

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is the Forensic Criminologist and Director of Training for Dignitary Protection Group, LLC, based in Terre Haute, Indiana. Possessing an extensive background in public safety, and having completed graduate coursework in Forensic Psychology, Criminal Mind & Behavior and Criminal Profiling, he created the family of CUES<sup>SM</sup> courses to share his knowledge and expertise in how to recognize and respond to threats in today's changing world.

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