

Common Mistakes in Self-Defense and Use-of-Force Incidents

In moments of danger, people must make rapid decisions under intense stress. Unfortunately, these decisions can sometimes lead to serious legal or safety consequences if force is applied incorrectly. Through our *Force Analysis Consulting* services, Horizon Protection & Training identifies the most common mistakes individuals make in self-defense or use-of-force situations — and how to avoid them.

1. Using Excessive Force

The most frequent mistake is applying more force than necessary to stop a threat. Canadian courts evaluate whether the response was proportionate under Section 34 of the Criminal Code. Excessive responses — such as continuing to strike an opponent after they are subdued — often result in criminal liability, even if the initial defense was justified.

2. Failure to Disengage

A critical error is failing to stop once the threat has been neutralized. Self-defense is not about retaliation but about creating the opportunity to escape to safety. Courts expect individuals to disengage as soon as it is reasonably safe to do so.

3. Not Considering Legal Restrictions

Many people are unaware of restrictions in the Criminal Code regarding prohibited weapons such as pepper spray, batons, or Tasers. Using or carrying these tools may create additional charges, even if they were employed defensively. This lack of knowledge can worsen outcomes for defendants who acted with genuine fear for their safety.

4. Escalating the Situation

Aggressive behavior, threats, or posturing before an incident can undermine a self-defense claim. Courts examine whether the defender contributed to the escalation of conflict. If the individual is seen as a willing participant in the fight, their self-defense justification may be weakened or lost entirely.

5. Failure to Call Authorities

Another common mistake is failing to report the incident immediately to authorities. Delays in contacting law enforcement can appear suspicious and raise questions about credibility. Proper reporting demonstrates accountability and helps document the defensive nature of the actions taken.

Conclusion

Understanding the most common mistakes in self-defense and use-of-force scenarios helps individuals avoid legal pitfalls and strengthens their ability to act responsibly. By learning how to apply reasonable force, disengage appropriately, respect legal boundaries, and report incidents correctly, people can protect themselves both physically and legally. At Horizon Protection & Training, our *Force Analysis Consulting* ensures that incidents are reviewed with expert clarity, offering guidance that promotes both safety and accountability.