

On Target:

Commissioned DPS keep their skills sharp

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The smell of gun powder lingered on the Birchwood Public Shooting Range while ping and pop noises blasted every couple seconds as handfuls of Alaska State Troopers set out to re-qualify on all the firearms they carry while on duty. Whenever it is time to qualify, commissioned members of the Department of Public Safety have to shoot regardless of mother nature's mood. They are not cut any breaks even if the mercury dips well into the negatives and the wind causes the most sturdy of men to sway. Troopers were extremely lucky to be out on a sunny, 60-some degree day.

"The idea is we have to shoot proficiently in the environment we work in," said Investigator Steve Kevan, one of the Department's Range Masters. "When I was out in Saint Mary's that meant going out one day when it was 20 below and super windy. I had on my parka and gloves but I was out there for quals shooting. It was nasty."

Quals is the slang term used by law enforcement personnel that have to test twice a year for shotguns and rifles and three times a year for their handguns. Any member of the Department that carries guns as a part of their duties is required to be proficient in the use of those weapons. That means besides regular patrol troopers of both trooper divisions, the Fire Marshals, court services officers and investigators in specialized units such as the financial crimes or cold case units must make multiple trips to the outdoor gun ranges around the state each year.

"It's everyone from the Colonels on down. No exceptions," Kevan said. "One of the Majors is supposed to come out for this round of quals."

If someone doesn't manage to pass the required re-qualification on their first go-around then they must receive remedial training to be brought back into compliance.

"When Troopers are facing a dynamic situation we see them react to it based on how they train. So, we train and train and train." Kevan said. "During quals we do drills to simulate gun malfunctions and jams, reloading and shooting from various distances. It's important to have the muscle memory so we can apply it to dynamic situations where anything can go wrong. Our guys are prepared."



A Trooper Investigator runs through handgun drills.



Range Master Inv. Steve Kevan explains a shotgun drill to Troopers at the Birchwood Range.



Inv. Kevan scores a target after a handgun drill.