

Round-table discussions for cop shootings are off

By William Lee

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Chicago police who wound or kill someone in a shooting no longer have to participate in a debriefing in front of police commanders and Cook County prosecutors, officials said Monday.

The debriefings, known as round-table discussions, have been abandoned. They had allowed police brass to quickly hear an officer's version of events and make a preliminary ruling on whether officers acted within guidelines in firing their weapon.

But some have criticized the decades-old system of evaluating shootings as a rush to clear officers of wrongdoing before autopsy reports and other evidence were considered. A 2007 Tribune investigation of more than 200 police shootings found multiple incidences in which shootings were classified as justified, only to have evidence emerge that cast doubt on the officers' stories.

Police said round tables — which lacked sworn testimony, an official record of proceedings and often any forensic evidence — may have outlived their usefulness.

“Given today's advances in technology and science, investigations are more forensically focused and require far more detail

and investigative time than the round table provides,” police spokesman Roderick Drew said in a statement.

In future police shootings, detectives and investigators from the Independent Police Review Authority, which investigates police shootings, will continue to run parallel but separate investigations. Officers who discharge their weapons will give a brief statement to the first supervisor who arrives on the scene but won't be required to make any other statements until a union representative arrives, according to the Fraternal Order of Police, the union representing officers. Officers will have to make statements to the review authority only if ordered to by the on-call commander.

FOP and review authority officials agreed to end round tables but disagreed on one major point: Review authority officials want to take statements from officers immediately after the shooting, while union officials want to give officers a 48-hour “cooling down” period.

The two sides hope an arbitrator will settle the dispute.

A spokesman for State's Attorney Anita Alvarez declined to comment.

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