

- VEST FIRST RESPONDER -

HELP FOR HEROES

CONNECTICUT

Self-Defense Law Reference Guide

*Duty to Retreat | Castle Doctrine (Home & Workplace) | Self-Defense | First Responder Protections | POST
Chokehold Ban*

CERTIFIED TRAINER SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENT

Intended exclusively for VEST Certified Trainers. Not a substitute for legal counsel.

IMPORTANT: CONNECTICUT HAS A DUTY TO RETREAT IN PUBLIC

Connecticut is NOT a Stand Your Ground state. Outside of the home or workplace, Connecticut law requires retreat before using deadly force when retreat can be accomplished with complete safety. However, Connecticut's Castle Doctrine extends no-retreat protections to both the DWELLING and the PLACE OF WORK - providing first responders attacked at their stations or facilities meaningful protection. VEST trainers must clearly explain this distinction.

Connecticut's self-defense laws are codified in Title 53a (Penal Code) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.). The foundational provision is S. 53a-19. Connecticut does NOT have a Stand Your Ground law - it imposes a duty to retreat in public. However, its Castle Doctrine extends uniquely to both the dwelling and the place of work.

STATUTE	SUBJECT MATTER
C.G.S. S. 53a-19(a)	Use of Physical Force in Defense of Person - Core Standard
C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b)	Duty to Retreat in Public / Castle Doctrine Exceptions
C.G.S. S. 53a-20	Use of Force in Defense of Premises (Castle Doctrine)
C.G.S. S. 53a-22(d)	Peace Officer Chokehold Restriction - Deadly Force Only (Statutory)
C.G.S. S. 53a-167c	Assault of Public Safety/EMS/Firefighter Personnel - Class C Felony
CT POST Use-of-Force Policy	Comprehensive Chokehold & Neck Restraint Prohibition
PA 20-1 (2020 Special Session)	Police Accountability - Codified Neck Restraint Restriction

PART I: THE CONNECTICUT SELF-DEFENSE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

C.G.S. S. 53a-19(a) - Use of Physical Force in Defense of Person

"Except as provided in subsections (b) and (c) of this section, a person is justified in using reasonable physical force upon another person to defend himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of physical force, and he may use such degree of force which he reasonably believes to be necessary for such purpose; except that deadly physical force may not be used unless the actor reasonably believes that such other person is (1) using or about to use deadly physical force, or (2) inflicting or about to inflict great bodily harm." - C.G.S. S. 53a-19(a)

Connecticut applies a subjective-objective test: (1) the actor must SUBJECTIVELY have believed force was necessary, and (2) that belief must be OBJECTIVELY reasonable - what a person of ordinary intelligence in the same situation would have believed. No statutory presumption of reasonable fear exists in Connecticut.

C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b) - Duty to Retreat / Castle Doctrine Exceptions

"...a person is not justified in using deadly physical force upon another person if he or she knows that he or she can avoid the necessity of using such force with complete safety (1) by retreating, except that the actor shall not be required to retreat if he or she is in his or her dwelling, as defined in section 53a-100aa, or place of work and was not the initial aggressor, or if he or she reasonably believes that the other person is about to use physical force against a third person..." - C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b)

In public, Connecticut requires retreat if it can be accomplished with complete safety. Two critical exceptions: (1) dwelling - no retreat required in your home; (2) place of work - no retreat required at your workplace if you were not the initial aggressor.

CONNECTICUT'S UNIQUE WORKPLACE EXCEPTION:

C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b) explicitly extends the no-retreat rule to the 'place of work.' A firefighter in their station or an EMS crew at their base has NO duty to retreat before using deadly force - the same protection as a homeowner. Connecticut shares this workplace Castle Doctrine extension with Nebraska, Alaska, Hawaii, and Delaware. This is a critical legal distinction for VEST trainers delivering Connecticut curriculum.

C.G.S. S. 53a-20 - Use of Force in Defense of Premises

Deadly force against a trespasser is authorized in three situations: (1) circumstances would justify deadly force under S. 53a-19; (2) necessary to prevent arson or a crime of violence; or (3) necessary to prevent or stop unlawful and forcible entry into a dwelling or place of work.

FIRE STATION & EMS BASE AS PROTECTED PREMISES:

C.G.S. S. 53a-20(3) allows deadly force to stop unlawful and forcible entry into a place of work. A fire station or EMS headquarters qualifies as a 'place of work.' Combined with the S. 53a-19(b) no-retreat exception, first responders defending their station have comprehensive protection.

PART II: DUTY TO RETREAT - CONNECTICUT'S NUANCED STANDARD

Connecticut imposes a duty to retreat in public, but only when retreat can be accomplished with COMPLETE SAFETY - identical to Nebraska's and Alaska's standard.

- **PUBLIC SPACES:** Retreat required if it can be done with complete safety. A first responder cornered at a scene has no duty to retreat.
- **DWELLING:** No duty to retreat inside your home.
- **PLACE OF WORK:** No duty to retreat at your workplace - Connecticut's unique extension.
- **DEFENSE OF OTHERS:** When acting to defend a third person from an attack the person reasonably believes they could not safely avoid, the duty-to-retreat may be relaxed.
- **INITIAL AGGRESSOR:** No protection if you started or provoked the confrontation.

PRACTICAL IMPACT FOR FIRST RESPONDERS:

Connecticut EMS providers attacked at their station have no duty to retreat - workplace exception applies. EMS providers attacked in public operate under the complete-safety retreat standard - if retreat is not safely available, force is justified. VEST training emphasis on situational awareness and documenting why retreat was not safely available is especially important.

PART III: FIRST RESPONDER ASSAULT - ENHANCED CRIMINAL PROTECTIONS**C.G.S. S. 53a-167c - Assault of Public Safety and EMS Personnel**

"A person is guilty of assault of public safety, emergency medical, public transit or health care personnel when, with intent to prevent a reasonably identifiable peace officer, firefighter or employee of an emergency medical service organization... from performing their duties, they cause physical injury to such person or another person." - C.G.S. S. 53a-167c(a)

Classification: Class C Felony - carrying 1-10 years imprisonment and fines up to \$10,000. The statute explicitly covers firefighters and employees of emergency medical service organizations (EMTs, paramedics, ambulance drivers). The 'reasonably identifiable' standard means any visible uniform, badge, or marked vehicle satisfies the knowledge element.

- Class C Felony - 1 to 10 years imprisonment, up to \$10,000 fine.
- Covers firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, ambulance drivers, emergency room physicians and nurses, and health care employees.
- Intent to PREVENT the person from performing their duties is the key element.
- 'Reasonably identifiable' - uniform, badge, or marked vehicle satisfies this standard.

PART IV: POLICE USE OF FORCE & NECK RESTRAINT FRAMEWORK**C.G.S. S. 53a-22(d) - Statutory Restriction on Chokehold Use**

"A peace officer... is justified in using a chokehold or other method of restraint applied to the neck area or that otherwise impedes the ability to breathe or restricts blood circulation to the brain of another person... only when he or she reasonably believes such use to be necessary to defend himself or herself from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force." - C.G.S. S. 53a-22(d)

Connecticut's statutory framework restricts neck restraints to self-defense from imminent deadly physical force only. This is codified in the Penal Code itself. Connecticut's POST Council also enacted comprehensive model use-of-force policies that define and prohibit various neck restraints.

Connecticut POST Council Use-of-Force Policy (2020, Revised 2022)

The Connecticut POST Council model policy specifically prohibits as unauthorized neck restraints:

- Arm bar hold applied to the neck area.
- Carotid artery hold.

- Lateral vascular neck restraint.
- Neck restraint or hold with a knee or any other object.

The model policy states: 'The use of a choke hold or neck restraint may only be used when the use of deadly physical force is authorized.' Duty to intervene and duty to report also required.

CONNECTICUT'S TWO-LAYER FRAMEWORK:

- **STATUTORY LAYER (S. 53a-22(d)):** Neck restraints permitted only for self-defense against imminent deadly force. Codified in the Penal Code.
- **POST POLICY LAYER:** Comprehensive prohibition on named techniques (carotid, lateral vascular, arm bar, knee restraint) - all limited to deadly force circumstances.
- **REPORTING REQUIREMENT:** All chokehold/neck restraint use must be reported under C.G.S. S. 7-282e.

FIRST RESPONDERS VS. LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Connecticut's S. 53a-22(d) and POST policies apply ONLY to peace officers. EMS and fire personnel are governed by the civilian S. 53a-19 framework. A Connecticut paramedic defending their life against a violent attack is evaluated under S. 53a-19 only.

PART V: APPLYING VEST PRINCIPLES UNDER CONNECTICUT LAW

1. Situational Awareness Is Your Legal Foundation in Connecticut

Because Connecticut requires retreat in public when safe to do so, VEST Level I situational awareness training is critically important. A provider who recognized the threat early, attempted de-escalation, and only used force when retreat was not safely available has documented why the 'complete safety' retreat standard was not met.

2. Your Station Is a No-Retreat Location

C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b) explicitly extends the no-retreat exception to the place of work. A fire station or EMS base is your workplace - no duty to retreat before using justified force. VEST station security and access control protocols support the factual record for this protection.

3. Forced Entry Into Your Station Justifies Defensive Force

C.G.S. S. 53a-20(3) authorizes deadly force to prevent unlawful and forcible entry into a place of work. VEST training covering station security and entry point management is directly legally relevant in Connecticut.

4. De-Escalation Is Both Legally Required and Professionally Essential

Connecticut's duty-to-retreat standard in public means de-escalation attempts are legally relevant - demonstrating that force became necessary only after alternatives were exhausted. VEST Level I curriculum is the evidentiary foundation for any Connecticut self-defense claim.

5. Partner Defense - Retreat Relaxed When Third Person Cannot Safely Retreat

C.G.S. S. 53a-19(b) relaxes the retreat obligation when acting to defend a third person from an attack the person reasonably believes the third person could not safely avoid. VEST Level III partner defense training is directly supported.

6. Know the Chokehold Framework for Joint Training

Connecticut's two-layer chokehold framework requires careful explanation when VEST delivers joint training with Connecticut law enforcement. Officers face both statutory and POST-level accountability for unauthorized neck restraint use. Civilian first responders are not bound by these restrictions in personal self-defense.

7. Know When Force Ends

Connecticut's force standard requires that force be no more than 'necessary' to address the threat. VEST's continuous threat reassessment curriculum is both operationally and legally essential. Continuing force after neutralization defeats the S. 53a-19 justification.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is produced by VEST First Responder LLC for educational and trainer development purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Connecticut General Statutes Title 53a; C.G.S. S. 7-282e; CT POST Model Policy (2022) statutes are subject to legislative amendment, and individual incidents are always fact-specific. VEST Certified Trainers and their agencies should consult with a licensed attorney, their medical director, and agency legal counsel before developing or delivering formal use-of-force or defensive tactics policies.

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