

FIELD MANUAL

Rothco Thumbcuffs

Steel, Nickel Plated — Standard Operating Procedure

Authorized Personnel Only

Law enforcement, security & corrections

Secondary Restraint

Backup when primary cuffs are unavailable

Temporary Control Only

Must transition to primary restraints

SECTION 1

Mission Brief & Intended Use

The Rothco Thumbcuffs are specialized, temporary restraint devices intended for use by **trained law enforcement, security, and corrections personnel only**. Their primary mission is to serve as a **secondary or backup restraint** in situations where standard handcuffs are impractical, unavailable, or have been compromised.

Due to their compact size, they are suitable for **deep concealment** in undercover operations or as a component of an escape and evasion kit.

 **Critical Scope Limitation**

Thumbcuffs are **NOT** a direct replacement for standard, full-size handcuffs. They are a tool for **temporary control and subject immobilization** only — to be used until the subject can be transitioned to a primary restraint system.

Their use must be consistent with operator training, agency policy, and governing laws regarding use of force.



Authorized Use Cases

- Backup when primary cuffs are unavailable or compromised
- Undercover / non-permissive environments requiring discretion
- Escape and evasion kit component



Not Authorized For

- Prisoner transport
- High-risk subject management
- Extended confinement
- Primary restraint replacement

SECTION 2

Equipment & Component Familiarization

Components are grouped by operational purpose for rapid identification and recall in the field.

A — Restraint Mechanism

- **Cuff Body (×2):** Main steel housing for each thumb. Contains the locking mechanism and ratchet teeth.
- **Ratchet Arm / Pawl (×2):** Hinged, single-strand arm with teeth that swings through the cuff body to encircle the thumb and lock into the body's internal mechanism.
- **Connecting Chain:** Short steel chain linking the two cuff bodies. Designed to keep thumbs in close proximity, severely restricting hand and arm movement.

B — Locking & Safety System

- **Keyhole:** Standard access point for the key to disengage the ratchet arm. Positioned on the cuff body.
- **Double Lock Mechanism:** Secondary locking system engaged via a small pinhole. Freezes the ratchet in place — prevents further tightening, mitigates nerve/circulatory injury risk, and resists manipulation.
- **Double Lock Pin:** Small pointed pin on the back of the standard cuff key. Used to engage the double lock by depressing the internal pin through its access hole.

C — Unlocking & Control


- **Standard Cuff Keys (×2):** Dual-function tool. Main barrel releases the primary ratchet lock; pin on the back engages the double lock.
- **Key Redundancy Protocol:** One key carried on the operator's person. Backup key stored separately and securely (duty bag, vehicle, or with a partner).

SECTION 3

Standard Operating Procedure: Deployment

Operational Scenario

An undercover officer must detain a subject in a non-permissive environment where displaying standard handcuffs would compromise the operation and create undue alarm. Immediate, discreet physical control is required to prevent flight or destruction of evidence while awaiting uniformed backup.

01	02	03
<hr/> Establish Positional Control Gain physical control of the subject. Bring the subject's hands behind their back, forcing the thumbs into close proximity.	<hr/> Prepare the Device Hold thumbcuffs in your dominant hand. Ensure both ratchet arms are swung fully open and clear of the cuff bodies before approach.	<hr/> Application Secure one cuff around the base of the first thumb. Push the ratchet arm through until snug. Repeat immediately on the second thumb. Do not use excessive force. Cuffs must prevent slipping over the joint without immediately restricting blood flow.
04	05	06
<hr/> Check for Tightness The standard "index finger" test is not applicable. Visually inspect for skin blanching or immediate pain complaints. Goal is immobilization — not injury.	<hr/>  Engage the Double Lock — MANDATORY Use the key pin to depress the double lock plunger on both cuffs. Confirm a faint click on each. If partners are present, verbally confirm: <i>"Double lock is set."</i>	<hr/> Conduct Search Once restrained and double lock is confirmed, conduct a thorough search for weapons or contraband per agency policy.
07		
<hr/> Transition to Primary Restraints As soon as uniformed officers or a secure environment is available, transition the subject to standard handcuffs. Remove thumbcuffs only after primary restraints are securely in place.		

SECTION 4

Critical Warnings, Limits & Safety

● Scope of Practice Warning

These are professional restraint devices restricted to **trained and authorized personnel**. Improper use can result in permanent nerve damage, soft tissue injury, and circulatory compromise. Misuse may result in **criminal and civil liability**.

● Not a Primary Restraint

These cuffs have a **lower tensile strength** than standard handcuffs and are more susceptible to defeat by a strong, determined, or trained subject. They must not be used for transport, high-risk management, or extended confinement.

● Double Lock is Mandatory

Failure to engage the double lock is a **critical operational failure**. It exposes the subject to injury from over-tightening and makes the cuffs easier for the subject to manipulate or defeat.

● Medical Considerations

Monitor the subject continuously. Complaints of numbness, tingling, or loss of circulation must be assessed. If neurovascular compromise is present, cuffs may need to be adjusted or removed as the tactical situation allows. Be aware that certain medical conditions can be exacerbated by restraints.

● Use of Force Doctrine

Application of any restraint device is a **use of force**. It must be objectively reasonable and fall within the policies of your agency and all applicable laws.

SECTION 5

Readiness, Inspection & Sustainment

A. Pre-Carry Inspection

1 Visual Inspection

Examine for cracking, bending, or excessive corrosion. Check chain integrity and swivel points.

2 Functional Test — Ratchet

Swing the ratchet arm through the cuff body. Confirm free movement and smooth tooth engagement on both cuffs. Repeat several times.

3 Functional Test — Locking System

Test primary lock and double lock on both cuffs with the key. Key must turn without binding. Double lock pin must engage and disengage cleanly. Confirm one key operates both cuffs.

B. Maintenance & Storage

→ Cleaning

After use or moisture exposure, clean with a dry cloth. If contaminated, use a mild disinfectant that will not degrade the nickel finish. Ensure completely dry before storage.

→ Lubrication

Periodically apply a very small amount of light instrument oil (e.g., gun oil) into the keyhole and along ratchet teeth. Work the mechanism to distribute, then wipe off excess. **Do not over-lubricate.**

→ Key Management

Carry one key on your person, **separate from the thumbcuffs**. Store the backup key in a secure location — duty bag, vehicle, or with a partner.

→ Storage

Store in a dry environment to prevent corrosion. For deep concealment, a small pouch or coin pocket is acceptable — ensure device will not be damaged by adjacent items.