The Joplin Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics Team was formed in 1987 in response to a growing need for a specialized unit to resolve situations dealing with extraordinary activity beyond the scope of normal patrol functions. The Joplin Police Department recognized that the activation of a highly skilled tactical unit substantially reduces the risk of injury to citizens, police officers, and suspects.

The mission of the team is to deploy specialized skills and equipment in support of high risk situations for the Joplin Police Department and surrounding agencies. Some examples of potential deployments include hostage situations, barricaded subjects, high risk warrants, critical incidents, dignitary protection, and natural disasters. The entire SWAT team trains monthly and officers attend various tactical schools throughout the year to maintain their proficiency and update critical skills. The Joplin Police Department SWAT team serves as a member of the State Homeland Security Response Team and responds to any Weapons of Mass Destruction event in the region.

In 2011 the SWAT team was activated 21 times in response to requests for specialized services. The team dealt with high risk warrants and barricaded subjects. Also in 2011, the team conducted its first Basic SWAT and Basic Sniper Schools for existing members. In the future, this training will serve as the basis for entry level SWAT operators and those operators moving to sniper positions within the team. In 2012, the classes will also be open to outside agencies.