

Police kill man holding toy gun in California

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Police shot and fatally wounded a man in San Francisco, California, in the parking lot of a police station Sunday night. Details are still emerging about the circumstances of the shooting, and more than 24 hours after the event, the police have still refused to release the name of the victim, although they identified him as 32 years old, white and male.

San Francisco police chief Greg Suhr told reporters that as three officers tried to leave the station parking lot they noticed “the white male suspect” inside the police-only parking lot. Reportedly, because the gate to this lot was open and not locked, it was not unusual for there to be members of the public in the lot, even though the lot was clearly marked for police only. The officers said they told the man to leave.

Suhr said that soon after this first encounter, as the police began to leave the lot, they saw the same 32-year-old man on the driveway. Purportedly, the officer approached him again, and while asking him to leave, the suspect began to walk away and reach into his waistband where there was a butt of a BB gun.

Officer Albie Esparaza told reporters, “The sergeants saw the butt of the weapon as he pulls it out and brandishes it at the sergeants.” Officers say they thought it was a gun but later realized it was an airsoft toy.

The two policemen immediately shot the victim multiple times. At some point later, an ambulance was called and the man was taken to San Francisco General Hospital. Hospital staff attempted surgery on the man before he died from the gun wounds at 7:53 p.m.

A blog, *Mission Local*, cites an eyewitness who said she was 10 feet away from the incident. She heard police saying, “Back up or put your hands up.” According to the police, no plastic pellets were fired from the airsoft gun.

Nearby witnesses spoke to the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the shooting. Joann Kuhl said she was

afraid that the incident would “fuel the fire of a really bad state of affairs between police and their community.”

The Mission District in San Francisco is a formerly poor, working class neighborhood that has increasingly become gentrified over the past few decades. Many people working in the tech industry now reside in refurbished multimillion-dollar homes in parts of the neighborhood. However, there are still many working-class residents who live and work there due to, among other things, rent control.

According to police, earlier in the day, officers had interacted with the deceased man. Police say that while responding to a call, the man came up to them and asked them about their weaponry and ammunition. He also asked if they had personally shot anyone.

This latest police shooting comes in the wake of widespread outrage and protest over police violence in the United States, particularly over the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner and the subsequent grand jury decisions not to prosecute the police in either killing.

The shooting also follows the killing of two New York cops by a disgruntled and mentally unstable man who shot his girlfriend as well, seriously wounding her, and ultimately took his own life. The funerals for the two deceased cops were used as political events to intimidate widespread popular opposition to police brutality and violence.

In Los Angeles, on Sunday, December 28, police officers were placed on high alert after officers were allegedly ambushed by gunmen. The officers claimed that two individuals walked into the road on which they were driving and that a muzzle flash indicated they were being fired upon.

Recently, the statistics were released for the number of police who were killed on-duty in 2013. They show that officer fatalities have fallen to their lowest level in

54 years. Police are primarily killed by traffic accidents, which led to 46 deaths. Excluding dogs, 30 officers were shot in 2013, the lowest level since 1887, according to the National Officer Safety and Wellness Group, an organization within the Department of Justice.

There are no official statistics for those who are shot and killed by the police. Unlike the statistics for police deaths, there is no effort to assemble or compile such data by the federal government, or by any state government.

According to the *Washington Post*, “Criminal justice experts note that while the Federal government and national research groups keep scads of data and statistics—on topics ranging from how many people were victims of unprovoked shark attacks (53 in 2013) to the number of hogs and pigs living on farms in the U.S. (upwards of 64,000,000 according to 2010 numbers)—there is no reliable national data on how many people are shot by police officers each year.”

According to the same article, independent journalists and academics who study criminal justice place the number above 1,000 per year.



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