

Video shows Arizona officer ramming police car into man

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Police in the Arizona town of Marana, located about 25 miles northwest of Tucson, released footage April 14 showing a police car slamming at high speed into a man from behind.

The video, taken from a police car that was following 36-year-old Mario Valencia about a half a block behind, shows him walking along a road near a business park in Marana. Suddenly, another police car swerves around from behind the tailing car, speeds up and hits Valencia. He flies into the air and the car hits a short cinder block wall, spraying debris throughout the area. Police then converge on the scene, pointing their weapons at Valencia, who is lying on the ground.

Valencia, who survived the strike, was taken to the hospital and is now in jail awaiting trial on a number of charges. The officer who drove the cruiser, Michael Rapiejko, was cleared of any wrongdoing and was back on duty after a three-day leave. The local district attorney said the car would not be charged with criminal wrongdoing.

The incident occurred on February 19 and was the culmination of a chain of events that began at 6:45 am, when Valencia was alleged to have robbed a Tucson convenience store, holding an unspecified metal object. Police said that he was dressed only in his underwear at the time.

Shortly after that, he set a fire at a church and stole a car, which he drove to a Walmart. Valencia allegedly stole a .30-30 rifle and some ammunition and fled, pursued by Walmart employees. One of the videos shows him holding a gun to his head.

Valencia's attorney, Michelle Cohen-Metzger, told reporters, "In watching the video, I think it was clear that it was not the appropriate action and that my client was not threatening to anybody except for himself." She added, "Everything in the video points to an

obvious excessive use of force."

"My client's back was turned and the officer drove right into him. It isn't that much dissimilar to a police officer shooting a fleeing suspect in the back."

The Marana police chief, Terry Rozema, was quick to defend Rapiejko's action, saying that events "warranted deadly force given all of the circumstances" and that he "would have been completely justified in shooting this individual... What happens when this guy gets past us? We're looking at a possible hostage situation."

Another Marana officer, Sgt. Chris Warren, claimed that Rapiejko was "thinking outside the box and made a good tactical decision." Warren further claimed, "It very well could have been a mass casualty kind of thing." Warren also asserted that Rapiejko had no disciplinary or use of force history in Marana.

However, Rapiejko, who supposedly refers to himself as "Robocop," was the subject of a 2005 civil lawsuit in Manhattan while an officer with the New York Police Department. According to a KVOA report, the lawsuit accused Rapiejko of approaching a parked car occupied by a family of five, pointing his gun at the father and ordering him out of the car. He then threatened to shoot the man, handcuffed him and choked him as his family watched in horror. The city settled the case in 2008, by which time Rapiejko had gotten a job with the Tucson police.

The day after the release of the Marana videos, Houston, Texas police shot and killed Frank "Trey" Shephard, a 41-year-old barber and father of three, after a car chase. After colliding with two cars, Shephard eventually stopped and got out of his car.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office claimed that he then appeared to be reaching into his vehicle. Two police officers opened fire, discharging from 10 to 12

rounds. Shephard died at the scene. A search of Shephard and his bullet-riddled car failed to turn up any weapons.

Police violence continues to escalate across the US, sparking protests nationwide, most recently on April 14, when demonstrations against police violence were held in over twenty cities. According to killedbypolice.net, at least 337 people have been slain by police since the beginning of 2015.



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