

Notes on police violence in America

Nineteen-year-old Indiana man dies while in police custody

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A young man in Greenwood, a suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana, died while in police custody on Monday, May 11. The Greenwood Police Department states that Kyle Myers, 19, had called the police shortly after midnight, saying that people were trying to get into his house. When officers arrived, they found nobody except Myers and his girlfriend. However, they reportedly found drug paraphernalia used in the ingestion of K2—commonly known as Spice, a synthetic chemical with effects similar to, but stronger than those of THC, the psychoactive component in marijuana.

The police arrested Myers and took him to the Johnson County jail, where he was booked at approximately 5:40 a.m. for possession of paraphernalia and disorderly conduct. Myers reportedly “became increasingly agitated with other inmates and displayed unusual behavior” and was evaluated by a jail nurse, who requested that he be transferred to the Johnson Memorial Hospital, which is across the street from the jail.

A little after noon, according to police, Myers walked unassisted to the van and was secured with hand, belt and leg restraints in the back of the vehicle. The Johnson County Sheriff’s office claims that he rode alone, in accordance with department policy. When the van arrived at the hospital three minutes later, Myers was “unresponsive” and “was rushed into the emergency room where life saving measures were attempted and were unsuccessful.”

On Tuesday, May 12, Indiana State Police Captain Bursten told reporters that a coroner’s report was inconclusive but found “no signs of trauma” on Myers’ body. He asserted that “there is nothing that indicates any wrongdoing by members of the Greenwood Police Department and ... the Johnson County Sheriff’s Department,” and that “there is nothing that we’ve determined was nefarious” in Myers’ treatment or transport.” He added that the cause of death would not be known until toxicology tests were completed, a process that could take up to six weeks.

Bursten’s defense of the police followed a swipe at

“people from outside the community” who are “quick to leap to a decision to say, ‘it’s a transport of a prisoner who dies while being transported’ and people immediately want to make an association to what’s happened in other parts of the country.”

Lawrenceville, Georgia

On Thursday, May 7, two Gwinnett County police officers in Lawrenceville, Georgia opened fire on a 72-year-old man who purportedly charged at them inside his home, killing him. The man, Joseph Roy, had been diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing regular chemotherapy treatments. A neighbor stated that when she first heard about Roy’s death she assumed it had been due to natural causes.

Gwinnett police reported that they received an emergency 911 call that morning from another neighbor stating that Roy was suicidal. When officers arrived, they found Roy barricaded in his bathroom. They claim that Roy then opened the door, yelled threats at the officers, and then charged them with a steak knife. The officers immediately fired two lethal shots upon seeing the knife.

Enfield, Virginia

On Sunday, May 10, an Enfield police officer used a Taser on a 55-year-old man, killing him. Officials have stated that the officer was responding to a report of a break-in at a commercial business when he encountered Michael Tyrone Gallagher. For reasons that have yet to be made clear, the officer got into a physical confrontation with Gallagher

before firing his Taser and handcuffing him. Authorities say that he was unresponsive when emergency crews arrived on the scene. He was taken to a medical center where he was pronounced dead.

Spokane, Washington

On Wednesday, May 13, a Spokane County jail inmate died shortly after he was arrested by Spokane police for violating a domestic violence order. The man was arrested after police responded to a report of a man and a woman arguing before 6:00 a.m. They reported that the man appeared to be high and attempted to take him to the police station. Once in the police car, the man reportedly began kicking the back of the patrol car and continued to be uncooperative while he was booked. As a restraint chair was being prepared for him, he reportedly had a medical emergency.

According to an official briefing, the man went into cardiac arrest during processing, and correction officers began resuscitation immediately before transporting him to a hospital where he was pronounced dead. This was the second inmate at the Spokane County jail in less than two weeks.

On May 4, John Everitt was found hanging by a sheet in his cell. Spokane County Commissioner Todd Meike reports that Everitt had a substance abuse problem and had been trying to get jail staff to take him to the hospital so he could receive a narcotic. Jail staff purportedly found no issue, so the inmate tried to make himself pass out to prompt a hospital trip. The medical examiner ruled his death a suicide.

Jacksonville, Florida

On Monday, May 11, St. Johns County deputies shot and killed 28-year-old Justin Edward Way, who was reportedly threatening suicide in his condo. Deputies were called by a woman who shared the condo with Way. When they arrived they reported that the man was holding a large knife and “something happened” that prompted them to open fire and kill him. Both deputies have been placed on administrative leave while the case is being investigated.

Fayetteville, North Carolina

New details emerged this week in a police killing that took place on January 24, 2013, when Officer Aaron Hunt shot a 22-year-old Nijza Lamar Hagans after he purportedly ran a red light and made “furtive driving maneuvers such as darting onto a neighborhood street and into a driveway.”

Hunt claimed at the time that when he peered into the SUV Hagans was driving he saw the young man “reach aggressively” for a gun in his pants pocket and therefore fired his weapon as Hagans exited the vehicle and turned to face him. Cumberland County’s district attorney, Billy West, wrote at the time that Hunt’s response was “lawful and measured.”

However, West’s report failed to mention the existence of video from a dashboard camera in Hunt’s police car, which tells a very different story. This footage was withheld from public release for more than two years and has only surfaced now because it has been anonymously leaked to the media.

The video shows that Hunt actually fired shots at Hagans only as he began opening his car door—meaning he had yet to exit his vehicle. The video then shows Hagans running away from Officer Hunt, who instead of pursuing, fired two shots at the young man as he was fleeing. It was only then that Hagans stumbled to the ground and died.

The report also omitted another key finding that is corroborated by the video footage—two of the four bullets that hit Hagans entered through his back and rear shoulder. These bullets pierced Hagans’ lungs, and one of them went on to rupture his aorta. West had only reported “multiple gunshot wounds to the chest” from the medical examiner’s report to explain the cause of death. Lawyers for Hagans’ family have filed suit against Hunt and the city.



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