

'This is Missouri': Walmart panic unexpected, man says

BY HANNAH KNOWLES
Washington Post

His wife told him it was a bad idea. His sister reminded him of what had happened in El Paso, Texas, less than a week earlier, when a gunman killed 22 people after opening fire at a shopping center and Walmart.

But Dmitry Andreychenko went ahead with his plan for a "social experiment," according to police. The 20-year-old used a cellphone Thursday to film himself entering a Walmart in Springfield, Missouri, wearing body armor and carrying a loaded assault-style rifle. He said he wanted to test whether his Second Amendment rights would be honored in a public area.

The subsequent scenes of panic were frighteningly familiar. In the week since two mass shootings in Texas and Ohio left 31 dead, moments including a backfiring mo-

torcycle in Times Square to a falling sign in a Utah mall have triggered pandemonium. On Tuesday, panicked customers ran from a Louisiana Walmart after men in an argument drew weapons, police said.

Andreychenko claimed he did not anticipate customers' reactions, the Springfield police station says.

"This is Missouri," he told investigators, according to law enforcement. "I understand if we were somewhere else like New York or California, people would freak out."

Prosecutors on Friday charged Andreychenko, of Springfield, with making a terrorist threat, saying he recklessly disregarded the risk of causing a building evacuation by knowingly sowing fear in the wake of the El Paso mass shooting at the same retail chain.

Missouri is an open-carry state. In 2014, state law allowed anyone with a concealed-carry weapon permit to carry a weapon in the open, statewide, overriding local regulations. In 2017, Missouri became a "shall issue" state for concealed weapons, allowing anyone 19 or older to carry a concealed weapon or one in the open without a permit.

"Missouri protects the right of people to open carry a firearm, but that does not allow an individual to act in a reckless and criminal manner endangering other citizens," Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Patterson said in a statement, likening Andreychenko's actions to raising a false fire alarm in a theater.

Andreychenko's second-degree felony charge carries up to four years' imprisonment and a fine of as much as \$10,000. He is be-

ingheld on \$10,000 bond with the stipulation that he may not possess a firearm, according to the prosecutor.

The Washington Post could not immediately reach Andreychenko for comment. It is not clear whether he has a lawyer.

Officers took the man into custody "without incident" after a store patron — identified by The Associated Press as an off-duty firefighter — held Andreychenko at gunpoint outside the building, according to authorities.

While Andreychenko did not fire at anyone, according to police, a Battlefield City officer and another driver "suffered severe injuries" in a crash as the officer rushed to the scene with emergency lights and sirens. Both people were taken to the emergency room.

The debate over where guns are allowed to be carried is long

and complex. Missouri is one of about 30 states that allow people to carry an openly held or concealed firearm without a permit, the AP reported. There have been numerous incidents where advocates of the Second Amendment have displayed weapons in the open. But such efforts have rarely triggered the level of panic seen in Springfield.

Walmart, which did not immediately respond to an inquiry from The Post, said in a statement Friday that Andreychenko would no longer be welcome in the chain's stores, according to the AP.

Springfield Police Lt. Mike Lucas told CNN that Andreychenko "certainly had ... the potential to harm people."

"His intent was not to cause peace or comfort to anybody that was in the business," Lucas said. "In fact, he's lucky to be alive still to be honest."



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