

UPDATED: Coos County District Attorney finds - World, The (Coos Bay, OR) - July 3, 2018

July 3, 2018 | World, The (Coos Bay, OR) | Amanda Linares

COQUILLE — Police officers involved in the shooting of a Coos Bay man the morning of June 23, were found justified in their use of deadly force and will not face any criminal charges, it was announced Tuesday at a press conference held by Coos County District Attorney Paul Frasier.

The shooting followed two police pursuits by several police agencies throughout Coos Bay and North Bend. The officers initiated the pursuit after they discovered **Eric Sweet** was driving with a suspended driver's license. Frasier said the pursuing officers were also prepared to arrest Sweet on an additional charge of felony eluding since he fled from officers.

In an investigation conducted by the Coos County District Attorney's Office, it was discovered that officers, upon approaching Sweet's residence at 475 Johnson Avenue in Coos Bay, that he had armed himself with four rifles and ammunition.

According to Frasier, Sweet had taken two rifles outside his home, a Mossberg .22 and a Remington .270, and laid them on the ground near an open box of .30-30 mm-caliber ammunition. Officer Doug Laird, of the Confederated Tribal Police Department, saw Sweet holding a third rifle in which he was in the process of loading.

On a police dashboard camera, Officer Laird can be heard yelling at Sweet to drop his gun. For over three minutes, other officers joined in and demanded Sweet drop his weapon on the ground. In response, Sweet can be heard saying either "he can't" or "he won't." According to Frasier, you could also hear Sweet responding to officers that the gun is loaded. About a few minutes later, Sweet pointed his gun at Officer Laird, who then returned fire at Sweet. Officers from the Coos Bay Police Department and the Oregon State Police also fired at Sweet..

After the initial shooting, Sweet was seen by all three officers involved in the shooting attempting to get back up and reach for his weapon. He was struck by a total of eight bullets, which struck his head, neck, chest and abdomen.

Sweet was pronounced dead at the scene. Preliminary toxicology reports found that Sweet did have methamphetamine in his system. Officers also discovered four vials containing injectable testosterone in his home. It is unknown yet whether he had the added testosterone in his system. A full toxicology report will be completed in about three weeks, according to Frasier.

The involved officers included Oregon State Police Trooper Kurtis Matthews, Officer Dan Henthorn of the Coos Bay Police Department and Officer Doug Laird of the Confederated Tribal Police Department. All three officers cooperated with investigators and were cleared to return back to work, upon the discretion of their agencies.

Under Oregon Law (ORS 161.209), any citizen is entitled to defend themselves against a person who is attacking them or someone else that is present. The use of deadly, physical force is justified in the person reasonable believes that their life is in danger.

"All three officers have indicated that they believe they had no other option than to fire their firearms at Mr. Sweet," said Frasier in a press release. "It is my judgement that any reasonable person faced with the same facts would have taken the same action...no criminal action will be taken against any of the officers."

According to DMV reports, Sweet had his driving privileges suspended a total of 28 times from 1997 to 2015 for a variety of reasons including failure to pay traffic ticket fines, failure to attend hearings for said tickets and driving without insurance. In 1998 and 2008, he was convicted for driving under the influence of intoxicants. In addition, he was also convicted for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest in 1997 and burglary in the second degree in 1990.

The Douglas County Major Crimes Team assisted in the investigation as well as the Coos County Sheriff's Office, the Bandon Police Department and the Myrtle Point Police Department. In addition four evidence technicians from the Eugene Police Department were also on hand to help process and map out the crime scene. Following officer-involved shooting protocol, the Coos Bay Police Department, the Confederated Tribal Police and the Oregon State Police were all recused from the investigation as well as the North Bend Police Department.

Timeline of Shooting:

At 6:19 a.m., Sweet had actually approached officers near the parking lot of the Coos Bay Police Department to ask them if they had been searching for his vehicle. According to Frasier, he was described as being erratic and hard to understand. He then proceeded to explain to officer's that he had heard on television that the police were looking for his vehicle and that is was involved in an accident. Officers there checked out Sweet's car and found no damage, after getting reports for a nearby burglary the two parties separated. In route, Coos Bay Police dispatch informed officers that Sweet had a suspended license and so the pursuit began.

At 6:32 a.m., Sweet was recorded on a lobby camera at the North Bend Police Department walking through the building attempting to open doors that were locked and then shortly exited. He was later tracked down driving southbound on Highway 101 driving recklessly with high speeds up to 90 mph and passing multiple stops signs and red lights. As reported previously, officers did attempt to stop Sweet but ended pursuits due to safety reasons.

At 6:40 a.m., Officer Henthorn, who arrived first on scene, approached Sweet's vehicle and placed stop sticks in front of his tires and shut off the car's engine. Office Kirk, of Coos Bay Police Department, had arrived next and parked his car behind Sweet's Camaro in an attempt to block him in.

It was noted in the press release, that Henthorn and Kirk had actually knocked on the front door of Sweet's residence before locating him. Shortly after, Matthews and Laird appeared on scene. Laird drove pass the residence and turned his vehicle on Fifth Street to face the home. It was then he saw Sweet holding a .30-30 caliber rifle.

At 6:44 a.m., initial shots were fired by Laird, Henthorn and Matthews. Sweet was seen falling to ground and attempting to reach for his rifle once more which resulted in another round of shots. Laird fired a total of five rounds, Henthorn a total of six and Matthews a total of two rounds, each between both volleys. According to the press release by the Coos County District Attorney's office, a total of 13 shots were fired and Sweet was stuck by eight bullets.

Copyright, 2018, Southwestern Oregon Publishing Co., Inc.