



DenverDA

Mitchell R. Morrissey, District Attorney - Second Judicial District
201 W. Colfax Avenue, Dept. 801, Denver, CO 80202

Bus. Phone: 720-913-9000
Fax: 720-913-9035

August 26, 2010

Gerald Whitman
Chief of Police
Denver Police Department
1331 Cherokee Street
Denver, CO 80204

RE: Investigation of the shooting death of Alfred Raymond Vigil, dob 07-01-48, in which Officer Dustin Duff, #06120, Officer Sean Cronin, #05099, Officer Rick Guzman, #05008, and Officer Ryan Taylor, #06016, fired shots on August 1, 2010, at 4950 Morrison, Denver, Colorado.

Dear Chief Whitman:

The investigation and legal analysis of the shooting death of Alfred Raymond Vigil ("Vigil") in which shots were fired by Officers Dustin Duff, Sean Cronin, Rick Guzman, and Ryan Taylor, have been completed. I conclude that under applicable Colorado law no criminal charges are fileable against any of the involved officers. My decision, based on criminal-law standards, does not limit administrative action by the Denver Police Department where non-criminal issues can be reviewed or civil actions where less-stringent laws, rules and legal levels of proof apply. A description of the procedure used in the investigation of this officer-involved shooting and the applicable Colorado law is attached to this letter.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

On August 1, 2010, at approximately 2:46 p.m., a Denver Police call-taker received a call from an individual later identified as Alfred Raymond Vigil. After several minutes on the phone with Vigil, the call-taker was able to get sufficient information to identify his location. Denver officers were dispatched to the Trump Plaza Apartments, 4950 Morrison Road, on a suicidal person armed with a handgun. Among other suicide statements during the conversation with the call-taker, Alfred Vigil said he was going to commit "suicide by cop." The responding officers were advised of these statements.

At approximately 3:02 p.m., Officers Dustin Duff, Rick Guzman and Ryan Taylor arrived at the location in separate marked Denver Police cars dressed in full police uniform. They saw Vigil standing in front of his apartment number 2 holding a handgun

to his head. Officer's Duff, Taylor and Guzman took positions behind the cover of two vehicles in the parking area.¹ Based on radio-room tapes, approximately eight minutes later, at 3:10 p.m., Officer Cronin arrived at the scene. He aired that Vigil had a gun pointed at his head and requested a less lethal Forty (40)mm Launcher in the event it could be used.²

The first three arriving officers had already been communicating with Vigil for approximately eight minutes in an effort to dissuade him from committing suicide and to put the gun down. Among the numerous statements made to Vigil, Officer Duff attempted to calm him by telling him, "You don't have to do this." Vigil was pacing back and forth with the gun to his head. Among other comments, Vigil stated to the officers, "Why don't you just fucking shoot me?" During the verbal exchange with the officers, Vigil held the handgun in various positions, as well as to his head. He had not moved the barrel of the handgun in the direction of the officers. After a lengthy standoff, in which Vigil did not comply with any of the officer's requests or commands, Vigil suddenly brought the gun up in a sweeping motion in the direction of the officers. His actions support a conclusion that he clearly intended to draw their fire. The four officers fired simultaneously and immediately stopped firing when Vigil fell to the pavement.

The Denver Police dispatcher was notified of the officer-involved shooting and that emergency medical personnel were needed—CODE 10. It was 3:14 p.m., approximately 12 minutes after the first officers arrived and began communicating with Vigil. Vigil was taken to Denver Health Medical Center. At 3:40 p.m. he was pronounced dead by Dr. Aaron Eberhart. On August 2, 2010, an autopsy was performed on the body of Alfred Vigil by Dr. Joe White. The cause of death was determined to be the result of multiple gunshot wounds.

Officer Duff was armed with his 9mm Glock, Model 17, semi-automatic pistol. The weapon was being carried with 17 rounds in the magazine and one additional round in the chamber—a total of 18 rounds. The Denver Police Department Crime Laboratory personnel processed the weapon and magazines after the shooting and there were a total of 13 rounds in the weapon. This is consistent with Officer Duff firing 5 rounds. The weapon was loaded with departmental issue 9mm Speer cartridges.

Officer Cronin was armed with his 9 mm Glock, Model 17, semi-automatic pistol. The weapon was being carried with 17 rounds in the magazine and one additional round in the chamber—a total of 18 rounds. The Denver Police Department Crime Laboratory personnel processed the weapon and magazines after the shooting and there were a total of 17 rounds in the weapon. This is consistent with Officer Cronin firing a 1 round. The weapon was loaded with departmental issue 9mm Speer cartridges.

1 See attached diagram and photographs of the scene.

2 Officer Cronin was aware that this less lethal weapon option is not designed for use in confrontations with individuals armed with firearms. Nevertheless, he sought to have it present in the event the circumstances of the confrontation changed. This reflects the intent and efforts of the officers to resolve the confrontation without injury to anyone.

Officer Guzman was armed with his 9mm Springfield, Model XP9, semi-automatic pistol. The weapon was being carried with 15 rounds in the magazine and one additional round in the chamber—a total of 16 rounds. The Denver Police Department Crime Laboratory personnel processed the weapon and magazines after the shooting and there were a total of 13 rounds in the weapon. This is consistent with Officer Guzman firing 3 rounds. The weapon was loaded with departmental issue 9mm Speer cartridges.

Officer Taylor was armed with his .45 caliber Glock, Model 21, semi-automatic pistol. The weapon was being carried with 13 rounds in the magazine and one additional round in the chamber—a total of 14 rounds. The Denver Police Department Crime Laboratory personnel processed the weapon and magazines after the shooting and there were a total of 11 rounds in the weapon. This is consistent with Officer Taylor firing 3 rounds. The weapon was loaded with departmental issue .45 caliber Speer cartridges.

Vigil was armed with a Slavia, Model ZVP, pellet gun.³ It is a replica of a firearm. The weapon fires pellet projectiles.⁴ Although the weapon is not a “firearm”, as defined by Colorado law, it is capable of being a “deadly weapon” under Colorado law because in the manner in which it is used or intended to be used it is capable of producing serious bodily injury or death. If the pellet projectile strikes a vulnerable area of the body, such as the eyes, it is capable of causing serious bodily injury or death. Weapons of this kind are not harmless *toy* guns.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Criminal liability is established in Colorado only if it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that someone has committed all of the elements of an offense defined by Colorado statute, and it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the offense was committed without any statutorily-recognized justification or excuse. While knowingly or intentionally shooting another human being is generally prohibited as assault or homicide in Colorado, the Criminal Code specifies certain circumstances in which the use of physical force or deadly physical force by a peace officer is justified. As the evidence establishes that Vigil’s death was caused by shots fired by the officers, the determination of whether their conduct was criminal is primarily a question of legal justification.

C.R.S. 18-1-707 defines the circumstances under which a peace officer can use physical force and deadly physical force in Colorado. In pertinent part, the statute reads as follows:

- (1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, a peace officer is justified in using reasonable and appropriate **physical force** upon another person when and to the extent that **he reasonably believes it necessary**:
 - (a) To effect an arrest or to prevent the escape from custody of an arrested person unless he knows that the arrest is unauthorized; or

³ See attached article from 9News.com entitled, “Replica guns a growing problem for police officers.”

⁴ See attached photographs of the pellet projectiles fired by this weapon.

- (b) To defend himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of physical force while effecting or attempting to affect such an arrest or while preventing or attempting to prevent such an escape.

(2) A peace officer is justified in using **deadly physical force** upon another person ... only when **he reasonably believes that it is necessary**:

- (a) **To defend himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of deadly physical force;**
or
- (b) To effect the arrest or to prevent the escape from custody of a person whom he reasonably believes:
 1. Has committed or attempted to commit a felony involving the use or threatened use of a deadly weapon;
or
 2. Is attempting to escape by the use of a deadly weapon;
or
 3. Otherwise indicates, except through a motor vehicle violation, that he is likely to endanger human life or to inflict serious bodily injury to another unless apprehended without delay.

Section 18-1-901(2)(e) of the Colorado Revised Statutes defines the terms “Deadly weapon” and “Deadly physical force” as follows:

“Deadly Weapon” means any of the following which in the manner it is used or intended to be used is capable of producing death or serious bodily injury: (I) A firearm, whether loaded or unloaded; (II) A knife; (III) A bludgeon; or (IV) Any other weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, whether animate or inanimate.

“Deadly physical force” as force the intended, natural, and probable consequences of which is to produce death, and **which does, in fact, produce death.**

Officers are entitled to rely on the doctrine of “apparent necessity” so long as the conditions and circumstances are such that a person would reasonably believe, erroneously or not, that action was necessary. See, *People v. La Voie*, 155 Colo. 551, 395 P.2d 1001 (1964), *People v. Silva*, 987 p.2d 909 (Colo. App. 1999). It is immaterial whether the suspect was actually trying to injure the officers or another, so long as a reasonable person, under like conditions and circumstances, would believe the appearances were sufficient to require the action taken.

It is fundamental that the law of self-defense, which is emphatically a law of necessity, involves the question of one’s right to act upon appearances, even though such appearances may prove to have been

deceptive; also the question of whether the Danger is actual or only apparent, and as well the fact that Danger is not necessary, in order to justify one in acting in self-defense. Apparent necessity, if well grounded and of such a character as to appeal to a reasonable person, under like conditions and circumstances, as being sufficient to require action, justifies the application of the doctrine of self-defense to the same extent as actual or real necessity. *Young v. People*, 107 P.274, (Colo. 1910).

The test for justifiable self defense or defense of others requires that, given the totality of the circumstances, a person reasonably believed that he or another person was being subjected to the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force or deadly physical force and that he used a degree of force that he reasonably believed to be necessary to protect himself or another person.

Therefore, the question presented in this case is whether, at the instant the officers fired the shots, each of them reasonably believed that Vigil was directing or was about to direct deadly physical force against any of them or another person. In order to establish criminal responsibility for an officer knowingly or intentionally causing the death of another, the state must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the officer or officers doing the shooting either did not really believe in the existence of these requisite circumstances, or, if they did hold such belief, that belief was, in light of all available facts, unreasonable.

CONCLUSION

An individual armed with a handgun threatening suicide in an *outdoor* setting presents a clear and present danger to the responding officers and any citizens within gunshot range. The officers have a public safety responsibility to contain the individual. They cannot permit him to enter structures or open areas where citizens may become victims. This limits their response options. As in this case, the officers can attempt to dissuade the individual from his suicidal intent through conversation, but they have no control over his ultimate decisions and actions.

When the individual is unarmed or armed with a weapon other than a firearm, the officers can create protective separation from the individual while still safely containing and conversing with him. This is not possible when firearms are involved. The officers cannot distance themselves far enough from harm's way while still maintaining contact, control and safety. In these circumstances, the individual's actions can turn from an armed threat to a deadly attack in the blink-of-an-eye. The individual does not have to close distance to harm the officers or others—the firearm projectile does that instantly. In these encounters, the individual knows what he is going to do—the officers do not know. The individual's handgun can move from off target to dead-on target faster than an officer can process the movement, determine the required response and take the defensive action. They cannot wait for the barrel to be pointed directly at them— it is too late at that point. Officers are forced to make life and death decisions in these often fast moving, intense, armed confrontations, with their life hanging in the balance. When an

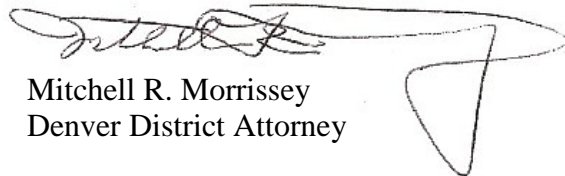
individual has stated a specific intent to commit “suicide by cop,” as is the case here, he can force that result. Even the best efforts of these officers to dissuade him could not overcome his will to die. It is an unfortunate reality that individuals place law enforcement officers in this position.

Based on a review of the totality of facts developed in this investigation, we could not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it was unreasonable for the officers to fire the shots that caused Vigil’s death. The fact that the handgun turned out to be a Slavia, Model ZVP, pellet gun, and not a more powerful “firearm” it appeared to be, is of no significance in finding the officers’ conduct to be justifiable. Therefore, no criminal charges are fileable against any of the involved officers for their conduct in this incident. They were clearly legally justified under Colorado law.

The attached document entitled Officer-Involved Shooting Protocol 2010 is incorporated by this reference. The following pertinent statement is in that document: “In most officer-involved shootings the filing decision and release of the brief decision letter will occur within two to three weeks of the incident, unless circumstances of a case require more time. This more compressed time frame will allow the Denver Police Department administrative investigation to move forward more quickly.” In accordance with the protocol, the administrative and tactical aspects of the event will be addressed by the Manager of Safety and Chief of Police in their review and administrative decision letter.

Because there will be no criminal prosecutions related to this shooting incident, we will open our file related to this Officer-Involved Shooting for *in-person review at our office* 60 days from the date of this letter. The Denver Police Department is the custodian of records related to this case. All matters concerning the release of documents related to administrative or civil actions are controlled by the Civil Liability Division of the Denver Police Department. As in every case we handle, any interested party may seek judicial review of our decision under C.R.S. 16-5-209.

Very truly yours,



Mitchell R. Morrissey
Denver District Attorney

cc: Officer Sean Cronin; Officer Dustin Duff; Officer Rick Guzman; Officer Ryan Taylor; David Bruno, Attorney at Law; Doug Jewell, Attorney at Law; John W. Hickenlooper, Mayor; All City Council Members; Mary Malatesta, Acting Manager of Safety; Mel Thompson, Deputy Manager of Safety; David Fine, Denver City Attorney; John Lamb, Deputy Chief; Michael Battista, Deputy Chief; Dave Fisher, Division Chief; David Quinones, Division Chief; Mary Beth Klee, Division Chief; Tracie Keese; Gregory LaBerge, Crime Lab Commander; Joe Montoya, District 4 Commander; Ron Saunier, Captain; Jon Priest, Lieutenant, Homicide; Kathleen Bancroft, Lieutenant; Sergeant James Kukuris, Homicide; John Coppedge, Sergeant, Homicide; Detective Lou Estrada, Homicide; Detective Mike Martinez, Homicide; John Burbach, Commander, Civil Liability Bureau; Chuck Lepley, First Assistant District Attorney; Lamar Sims, Chief Deputy District Attorney; Doug Jackson, Chief Deputy District Attorney; Henry R. Reeve, General Counsel, Chief Deputy District Attorney; Richard Rosenthal, Office of the Independent Monitor.



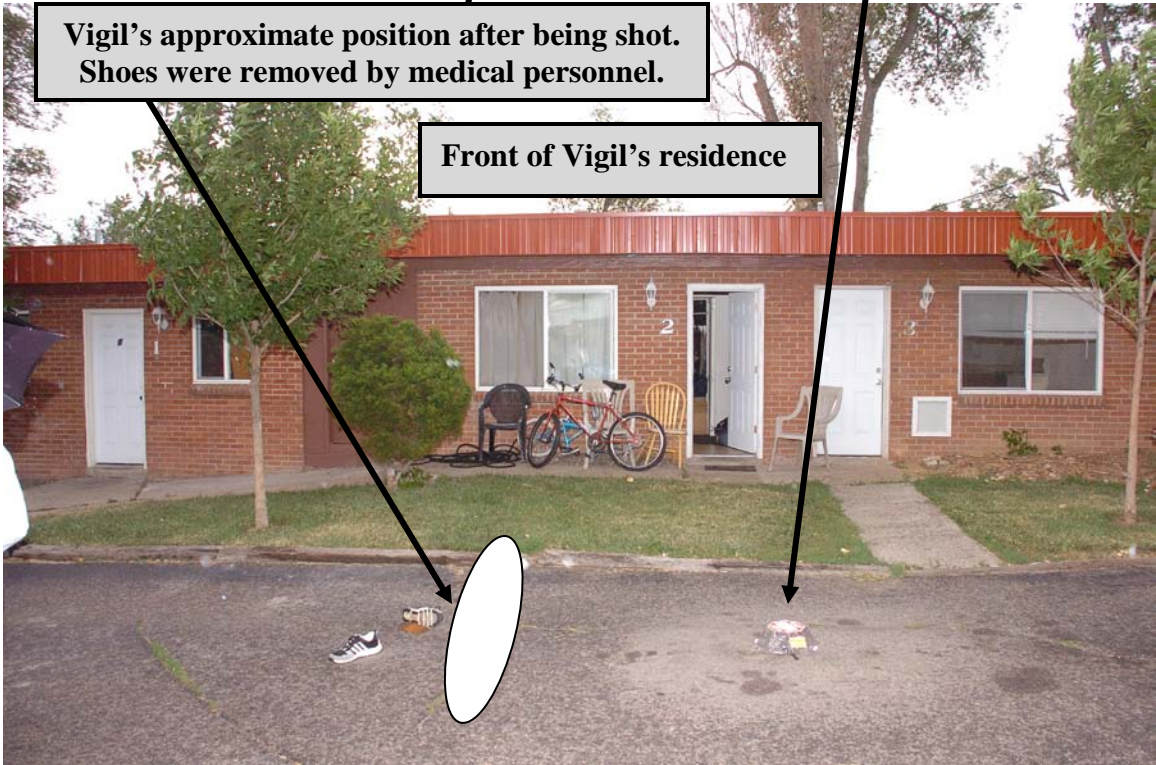
**4950 Morrison Road
Location of Shooting**





**4950 Morrison Road
Location of Shooting**

Location of Vigil's weapon after shooting ... Crime Lab personnel covering it to protect it from rain.



**Vigil's approximate position after being shot.
Shoes were removed by medical personnel.**

Front of Vigil's residence

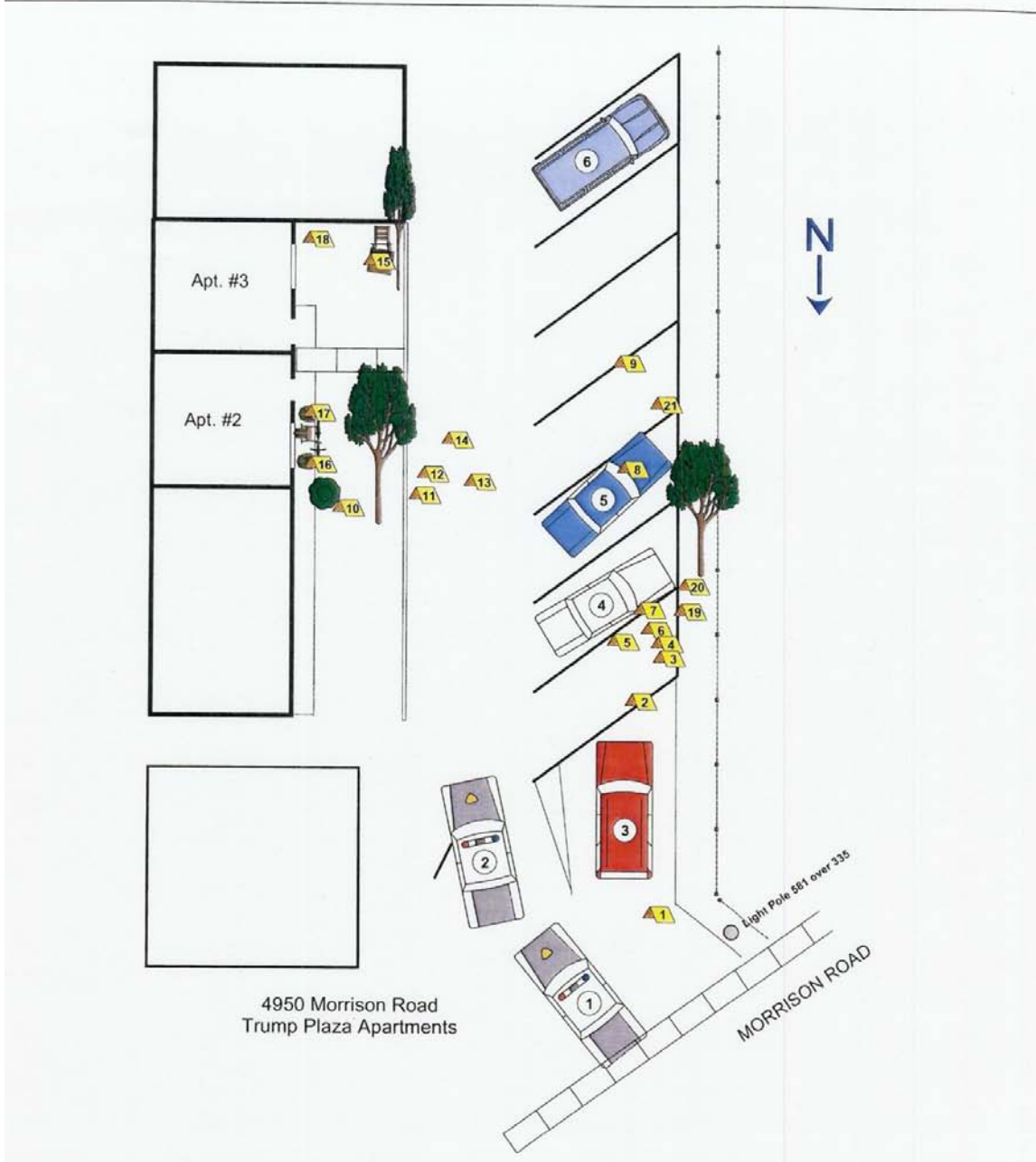
Case Number: 2010-383868

Date: 08/01/10

Location: 4950 MORRISON ROAD / TRUMP PLAZA APARTMENTS / DIAGRAM ONLY SHOWS THE NORTH END OF APTS AND ALLEY

Description:

CRIME SCENE DIAGRAM SHOWING MARKERS / NOT DRAWN TO SCALE / DETECTIVE M. MARTINEZ, 82029



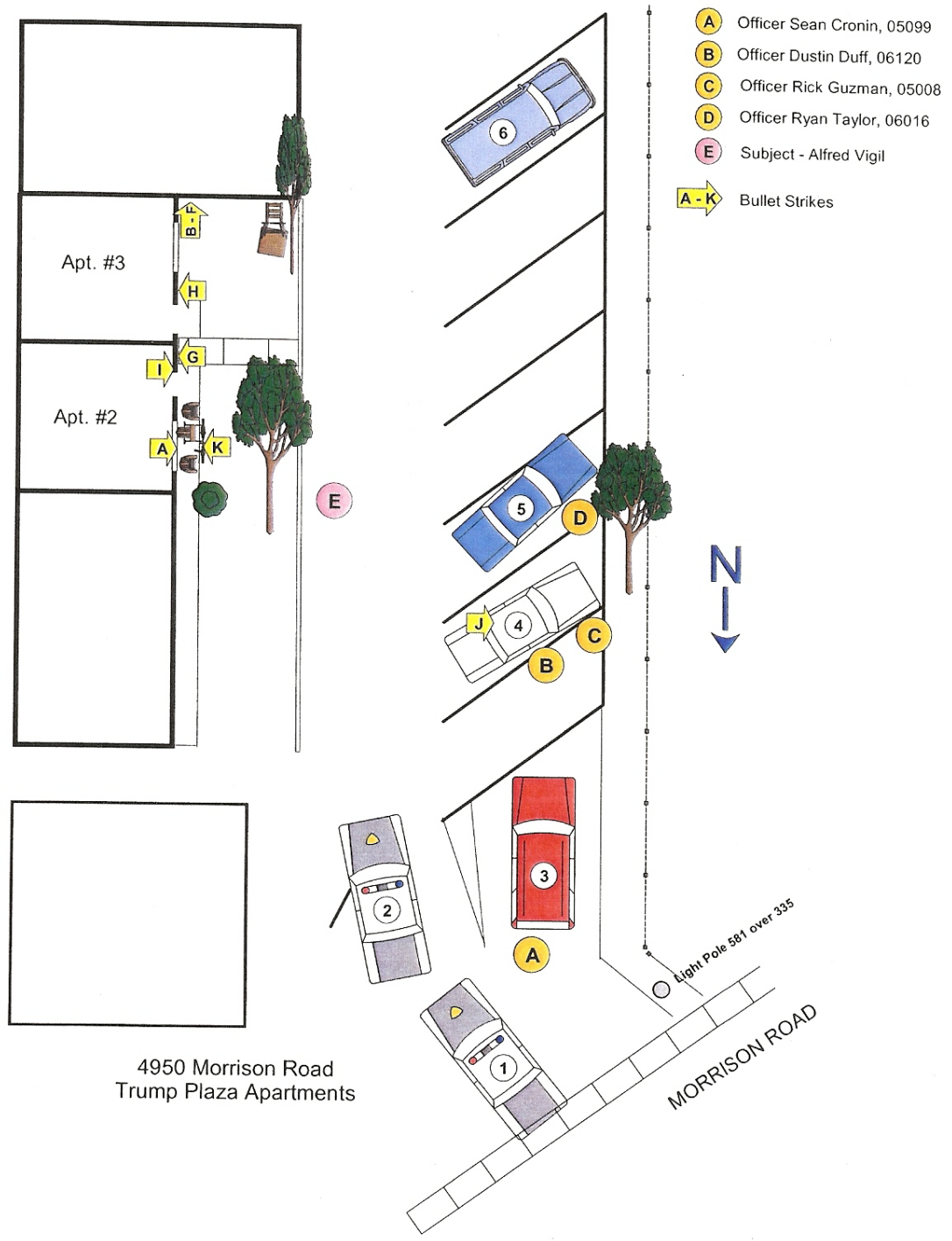
Case Number: 2010-383868

Date: 08/01/10

Location: 4950 MORRISON ROAD / TRUMP PLAZA APARTMENTS / DIAGRAM ONLY SHOWS THE NORTH END OF APTS AND ALLEY

Narrative:

- Marker 1 - 9mm casing
306' - 6" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave / 40' - 4" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 2 - 9mm casing
265' - 2" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 41' - 7" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 3 - 9mm casing
257' - 3" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 42' - 9" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 4 - 9mm casing
256' - 11" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 42' - 5" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 5 - 9mm casing
256' - 0" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 39' - 3" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 6 - 9mm casing
256' - 0" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 41' - 8" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 7 - 9mm casing
252' - 3" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 40' - 11" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 8 - .45 caliber casing
234' - 4" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 38' - 5" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 9 - .45 caliber casing
224' - 0" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 36' - 3" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 10 - Knife
239' - 0" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 11' - 0" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 11 - Bullet fragment
234' - 1" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 17' - 5" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 12 - Blood
32' - 0" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 18' - 2" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 13 - Shoes / pliers / wallet
32' - 1" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 21' - 9" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 14 - Pellet gun
45' - 6" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 21' - 3" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 15 - TV tray / cell phone / pellets
12' - 9" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 9' - 1" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 16 - Bullet fragment
34' - 1" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 2' - 8" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 17 - Bullet fragment
28' - 11" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 2' - 3" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 18 - Bullet fragments (numerous)
8' - 3" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 1' - 0" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 19 - 9mm casing
53' - 1" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 44' - 2" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 20 - 9mm casing
51' - 6" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 44' - 5" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd
- Marker 21 - .45 caliber casing
26' - 5" north of north curblineline of Tennessee Ave. / 45' - 1" west of west side of 4950 Morrison Rd



Case Number: 2010-383868

Date: 08/01/10

Location: 4950 MORRISON ROAD / TRUMP PLAZA APARTMENTS / THIS DIAGRAM ONLY SHOWS THE NORTH HALF OF THE APARTMENTS AND ALLEY

Narrative:

BULLET STRIKES:

- A. A bullet fragment struck the double pane window, only penetrating the outer pane. The fragment was between the two panes of glass.
- B. Bullet struck the brick wall and fragmented.
- C. Bullet struck the brick wall and fragmented.
- D. Bullet struck the brick wall and fragmented.
- E. Bullet struck the brick wall and fragmented.
- F. Bullet struck the brick wall and fragmented.
- G. Bullet struck the brick wall, between the doors of apartment #2 and #3 and fragmented.
- H. Bullet struck the brick wall to the south of the door of apartment #3.
- I. Bullet struck the wood door frame of apartment #3, on the south side of the frame. A bullet impression was made, but no bullet was recovered.
- J. Bullet skimmed across the top to vehicle #4, the white Grand Am, and put a gouge in the roof.
- K. Bullet struck the metal frame and gear shifter to a bicycle leaning up against a chair, that was in front of the window to apartment #2. This is the same window that sustained bullet strike A.

THIS DIAGRAM IS NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

DETECTIVE MICHAEL MARTINEZ, 82029

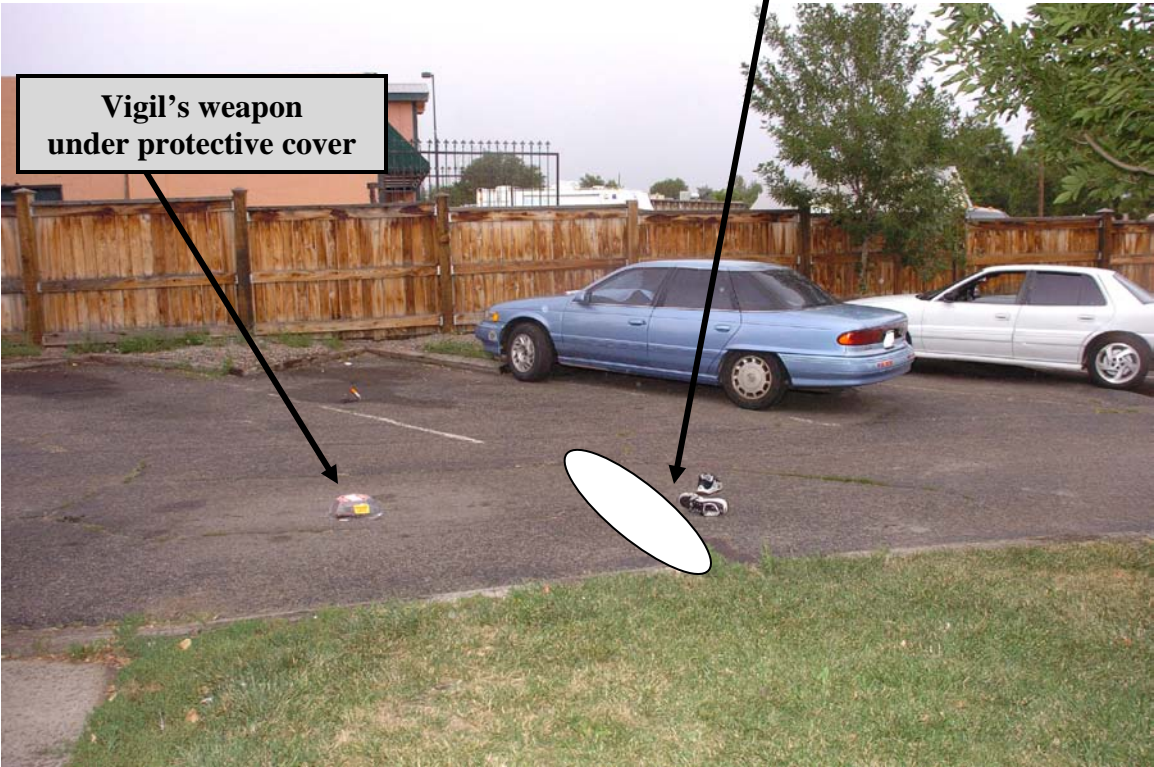
This is the entry off of Morrison Road



**Vigil's weapon ...
protective cover**

**4950 Morrison Road
Location of Shooting**

**Vigil's approximate position after being shot.
Shoes were removed by medical personnel.**



**Vigil's weapon
under protective cover**



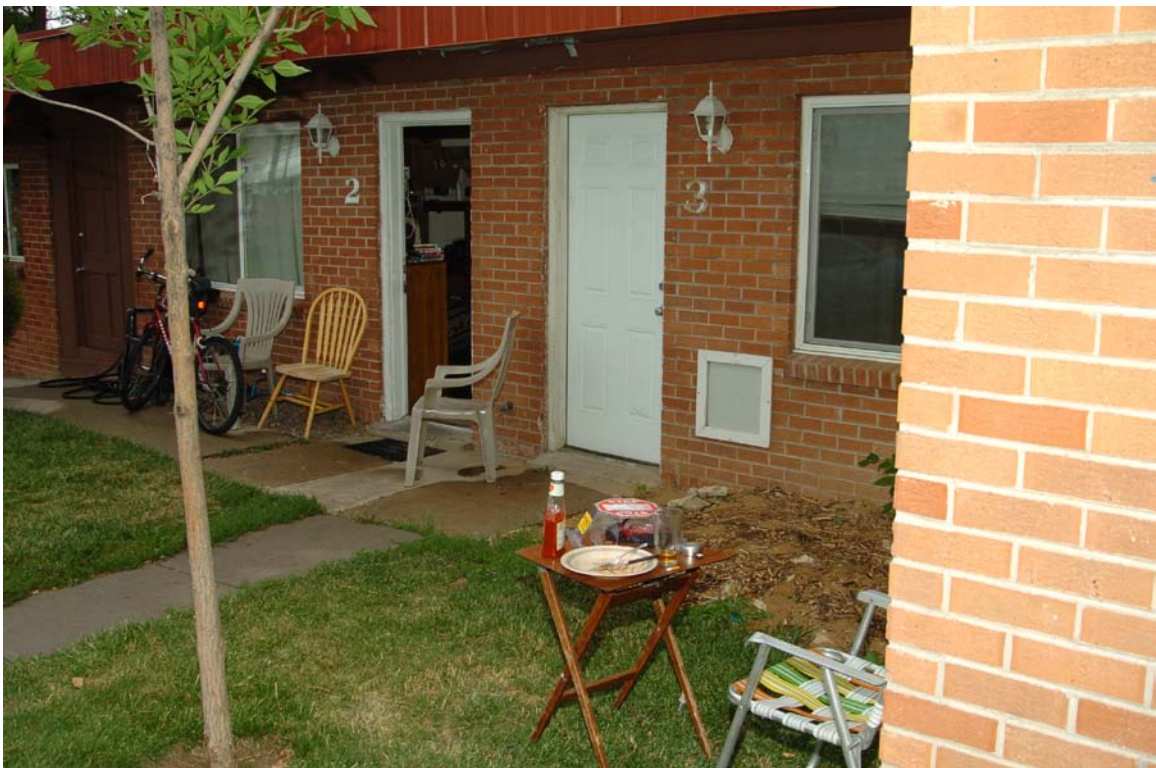








Front of Vigil's residence





Pellets for Vigil's weapon







Replica guns a growing problem for police officers

written by: Jeffrey Wolf written by Jamie Kim 1 day ago

DENVER - Police say a man who was shot and killed in an officer-involved shooting on Sunday afternoon had an air gun that looked like a real gun, and officers say they are encountering an increasing number of replicas.

Denver Police say Alfred Vigil had been threatening to commit suicide when he pointed the air gun at four officers on Morrison Road near South Yates Street. When he refused to drop the air gun, officers shot him.

Police say officers did not know the gun was not real.

He died just after 4 p.m. after being taken to Denver Health Medical Center.

Sunday's shooting was the fifth involving a Denver Police officer this year.

Denver Police spokesperson Lt. Matthew Murray says officers are being confronted with more gun replicas on the streets.

He says since 2007, there have been four deadly officer-involved shootings in Denver which involved gun replicas.

"It's extremely troubling, it's extremely difficult. It puts officers in a really bad position and it's a public danger," Murray said.

On Monday, he demonstrated to 9NEWS how far air gun manufacturers go to make their products look like real firearms.

He displayed five guns, only two of which were real firearms. Even with several minutes to inspect them, our 9NEWS crew had difficulty telling which guns were real and which were air guns.

Murray says that is because the weight, the dimensions and even the feel of the air guns mimic an actual firearm. Manufacturers like Airsoft, Powerline and Viper have created products that look like real guns, down to the grip, barrel, trigger, and even the feel and sound of cocking the gun.

One of the models 9NEWS looked at on Monday even had metal components.

"If someone were to wave one of these guns at you, I think most people would immediately feel threatened, and would have extreme difficulty determining if it was a real gun or not," Murray said. "This is not a super soaker that's lime green and orange, this looks like a gun."

He says the air guns are also dangerous weapons that deliver more power than a BB or pellet gun. He says they can kill a small animal, and injure a person to the extent of requiring medical treatment.

"We're extremely concerned about safety. We're extreme about our officers' safety as well as the public's safety. We want people to realize what it is we're facing and how dangerous this is, and how dangerous it is for people they love to have guns like this and to be carrying those around. Truly, this one decision could be the difference between life or death - carrying what some people might consider a toy," Murray said.

He also says these air guns can be bought at many sporting goods stores, and since it is not a firearm, background checks are not required and there are

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no restrictions for purchasing them.

While carrying a gun replica in Denver is legal, threatening someone with it is a felony. Murray hopes that fact will serve as a warning to parents to not buy air guns for their children.

"It's a felony in Colorado for me to scare you or frighten you that you may be in risk of serious danger or death. So if I am a kid, and I'm playing around, and I think it's funny to stick this in a pizza delivery guy's face, even though it's a replica weapon, that's a felony," Murray said.

He says the officer-involved shooting Sunday night is a tragic reminder of the dangers these gun replicas pose, especially when they are used in a threatening manner.

"Officers attempted to get this party to comply with their demands, and he did not. And then the officers were threatened and took action to stop that threat," Murray said. "People don't come on this job because they want to shoot somebody. Four officers made that decision in unison last night, it wasn't like one person thought this was real and everybody else didn't."

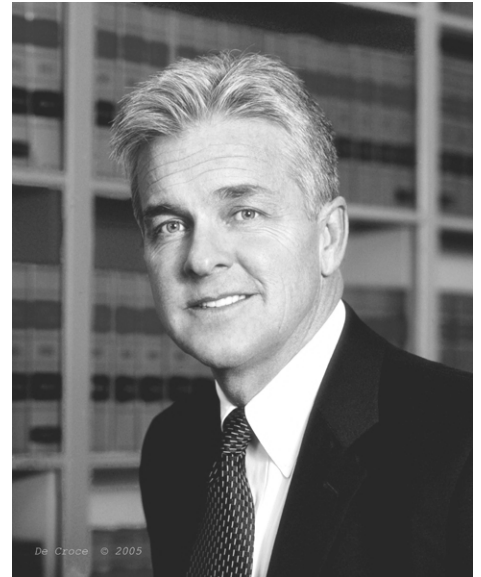
9NEWS spoke with Vigil's family on Monday. They acknowledge that he had an air gun in his hand when he was shot by police. However, the family plans to meet with an attorney Tuesday morning to discuss the issue.

(KUSA-TV © 2010 Multimedia Holdings Corporation)

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OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTING PROTOCOL 2010



Mitchell R. Morrissey
Denver District Attorney

The Denver District Attorney is a State official and the Denver District Attorney's Office is a State agency. As such, although the funding for the operations of the Denver District Attorney's Office is provided by the City and County of Denver, the Office is independent of City government. The District Attorney is the chief law enforcement official of the Second Judicial District, the boundaries of which are the same as the City and County of Denver. By Colorado statutory mandate, the District Attorney is responsible for the prosecution of violations of Colorado criminal laws. Hence, the District Attorney has the authority and responsibility to make criminal charging decisions in peace officer involved shootings.

The Denver Police Department was created by the Charter of the City and County of Denver. Under the Charter, the police department is overseen by the Office of the Denver Manager of Safety. The Manager of Safety and the Chief of Police are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Mayor of Denver. The District Attorney has no administrative authority or control over the personnel of the Denver Police Department. That authority and control resides with City government.

When a peace officer shoots and wounds or kills a person in Denver, Colorado, a very specific protocol is followed to investigate and review the case. Officer-involved shootings are not just another case. Confrontations between the police and citizens where physical force or deadly physical force is used are among the most important events with which we deal. They deserve special attention and handling at all levels. They have potential criminal, administrative, and civil consequences. They can also have a significant impact on the relationship between law enforcement officers and the community they serve. It is important that a formal protocol be in place in advance for handling these cases. The following will assist you in understanding the Denver protocol, the law, and other issues related to the investigation and review of officer-involved shootings.

For more than a quarter century, Denver has had the most open officer-involved shooting protocol in the country. The protocol is designed to insure that a professional, thorough, impartial, and verifiable investigation is conducted and that it can be independently confirmed by later review. The fact that the investigative file is open to the public for in-person review at the conclusion of the investigation and review

process, permits not only formal legal reviews to occur, but also allows for any citizen to review the case. This, perhaps more than any other single factor, helps to insure that the best possible investigation is conducted by all involved parties.

When an officer-involved shooting occurs, it is immediately reported to the Denver police dispatcher, who then notifies all persons on the call-out list. This includes the Division Chief of Investigations, First Assistant District Attorney and Chief Deputy District Attorney, Division Chief of Patrol, Captain of Crimes Against Persons Bureau, Homicide Unit personnel, Director of the Crime Lab, Crime Lab Technicians, and others. These individuals respond first to the scene and then to DPD headquarters to take statements and conduct other follow-up investigation. The Denver District Attorney, Manager of Safety, and Chief of Police are notified of the shooting and may respond.

The criminal investigation is conducted under a specific investigative protocol with direct participation of Denver Police Department and Denver District Attorney personnel. The primary investigative personnel are assigned to the Homicide Unit where the best resources reside for this type of investigation. The scope of the investigation is broad and the focus is on all involved parties. This includes the conduct of the involved officer(s) and the conduct of the person who is shot. Standard investigative procedures are used at all stages of the investigation, and there are additional specific procedures in the Denver Police Department's Operations Manual for officer-involved shootings to further insure the integrity of the investigation. For example, the protocol requires the immediate separation and sequestration of all key witnesses and all involved officers. Involved officers are separated at the scene, transported separately by a supervisor to police headquarters, and sequestered with restricted visitation until a formal voluntary statement is taken. Generally the officers speak with their attorney prior to making their voluntary statement. A log is kept to document who has contact with the officer. This is done to insure totally independent statements and to avoid even the appearance of collusion.

In most cases, the bulk of the criminal phase of the investigation is concluded in the first twelve to twenty-four hours. Among other

investigative activities, this includes a thorough processing of the crime scene; a neighborhood canvass to identify all possible witnesses; the taking of written statements from all witnesses, and video-taped statements from all key witnesses and the involved officer(s). The involved officer(s), like any citizen, have a Constitutional Fifth Amendment right not to make a statement. In spite of this fact, Denver officers have given voluntary sworn statements in every case, without exception, since 1979. Since November of 1983, when the videotape-interview room was first used, each of these statements has been recorded on videotape. ***No other major city police department in the nation can make this statement.***

Officers are trained to properly secure their firearm after an officer-involved shooting. The protocol provides for the firearm to be taken from the officer by crime lab personnel for appropriate testing. The officer is provided a replacement weapon to use pending the completion of the testing. The protocol also allows for any officer to voluntarily submit to intoxicant testing if they chose. The most common circumstance under which an officer might elect to do so would be in a shooting while working at an establishment that serves alcohol beverages. Compelled intoxicant testing can be conducted if there are indications of possible intoxication and legal standards are met.

The Denver Chief of Police and Denver District Attorney commit significant resources to the investigation and review process in an effort to complete the investigation as quickly as practicable. There are certain aspects of the investigation that take more time to complete. For example, the testing of physical evidence by the crime lab—firearm examination, gunshot residue or pattern testing, blood analyses, and other testing commonly associated with these cases. In addition, where a death occurs, the autopsy and autopsy report take more time and this can be extended substantially if it is necessary to send lab work out for very specialized toxicology or other testing. In addition to conducting the investigation, the entire investigation must be thoroughly and accurately documented.

Officer-involved shooting cases are handled by the District Attorney, First Assistant District Attorney, and Chief Deputies District Attorney specifically trained for these cases. At least two of these district attorneys respond to each officer-involved shooting. They are notified at

the same time as others on the officer-involved shooting call-out list and respond to the scene of the shooting and then to police headquarters to participate in taking statements. They are directly involved in providing legal advice to the investigators and in taking video-taped statements from citizens and officer witnesses, and from the involved officer(s). They continue to be involved throughout the follow-up investigation.

The Denver District Attorney is immediately informed when an officer-involved shooting occurs, and if he does not directly participate, his involved personnel advise him throughout the investigative process. It is not unusual for the District Attorney to personally respond and participate in the investigation. At the conclusion of the criminal investigation the District Attorney personally makes the filing decision.

If criminal charges are not filed, a brief decision letter describing the shooting is sent to the Chief of Police by the District Attorney, with copies to the involved officer(s), the Mayor, City Council members, other appropriate persons, and the media. The letter is intentionally brief to avoid in any way impacting the integrity and validity of the Denver Police Department administrative investigation and review, which follows the criminal investigation and review. This represents a 2005 change from the very thorough decision letters that have previously been written by the District Attorney in these cases.

This change has been made because the Denver Manager of Safety now writes an exhaustive letter at the conclusion of the administrative review of the shooting. The Manager of Safety's letter can include additional facts, if any, developed during the administrative investigation. Therefore, the Manager of Safety's letter can provide the most comprehensive account of the shooting. In contrast to the criminal investigation phase, the administrative process addresses different issues, is controlled by less stringent rules and legal levels of proof, and can include the use of investigative techniques that are not permissible in a criminal investigation. For example, the department can, under administrative rules, order officers to make statements. This is not permissible during the criminal investigation phase and evidence generated from such a

statement would not be admissible in a criminal prosecution.

The Manager of Safety has taken a more active role in officer-involved shooting cases and has put in place a more thorough administrative process for investigating, reviewing, and responding to these cases. The critical importance of the administrative review has been discussed in our decision letters and enclosures for many years.⁵ As a result of the positive changes the Manager of Safety has now instituted and his personal involvement in the process, we will not open the criminal investigative file at the time our brief decision letter is released. Again, we are doing this to avoid in any way impacting the integrity and validity of the Manager of Safety and Denver Police Department ongoing administrative investigation and review. After the Manager of Safety has released his letter, we will make our file open for in-person review at our office by any person, if the City fails to open its criminal-case file for in-person review. The District Attorney copy of the criminal-case file will not, of course, contain any of the information developed during the administrative process. The City is the Official Custodian of Records of the original criminal-case file and administrative-case file, not the Denver District Attorney.

THE DECISION

By operation of law, the Denver District Attorney is responsible for making the criminal filing decision in all officer-involved shootings in Denver. In most officer-involved shootings the filing decision and release of the brief decision letter will occur within two-to-three weeks of the incident, unless circumstances of a case require more time. This more compressed time frame will allow the Denver Police Department administrative investigation to move forward more quickly.

The same standard that is used in all criminal cases in Denver is applied to the review of officer-involved shootings. The filing decision analysis involves reviewing the totality of the facts developed in the criminal investigation and applying the pertinent Colorado law to those facts. The facts and the law are then analyzed in

⁵ See the "Conclusion" statement in the "Decision Letter" in the December 31, 1997, shooting of Antonio Reyes-Rojas, where we first pointed out issues related to the importance of the Administrative review of officer-involved shootings. Subsequent letters continued to address this issue.

relation to the criminal case filing standard. For criminal charges to be filed, the District Attorney must find that there is a reasonable likelihood that all of the elements of the crime charged can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, unanimously, to twelve jurors, at trial, after considering reasonable defenses. If this standard is met, criminal charges will be filed.

One exception to the Denver District Attorney making the filing decision is if it is necessary to use the Denver Statutory Grand Jury. The District Attorney will consider it appropriate to refer the investigation to a grand jury when it is necessary for the successful completion of the investigation. It may be necessary in order to acquire access to essential witnesses or tangible evidence through the grand jury's subpoena power, or to take testimony from witnesses who will not voluntarily cooperate with investigators or who claim a privilege against self-incrimination, but whom the district attorney is willing to immunize from prosecution on the basis of their testimony. The grand jury could also be used if the investigation produced significant conflicts in the statements and evidence that could best be resolved by grand jurors. If the grand jury is used, the grand jury could issue an indictment charging the officer(s) criminally. To do so, at least nine of the twelve grand jurors must find probable cause that the Fresquez committed the charged crime. In order to return a "no true bill," at least nine grand jurors must vote that the probable cause proof standard has not been met. In Colorado, the grand jury can now issue a report of their findings when they return a no true bill or do not reach a decision—do not have nine votes either way. The report of the grand jury is a public document.

A second exception to the Denver District Attorney making the filing decision is when it is necessary to have a special prosecutor appointed. The most common situation is where a conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety is present. As an example, if an officer involved in the shooting is related to an employee of the Denver District Attorney's Office, or an employee of the Denver District Attorney's Office is involved in the shooting. Under these circumstances, there would exist at a minimum an appearance of impropriety if the Denver District Attorney's Office handled the case.

THE COLORADO LAW

Criminal liability is established in Colorado only if it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that someone has committed all of the elements of an offense defined by Colorado statute, and it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the offense was committed without any statutorily-recognized justification or excuse. While knowingly or intentionally shooting and causing injury or death to another human being is generally prohibited as assault or murder in Colorado, the Criminal Code specifies certain circumstances in which the use of physical force or deadly physical force is justified. As there is generally no dispute that the officer intended to shoot at the person who is wounded or killed, the determination of whether the conduct was criminal is primarily a question of legal justification.

Section 18-1-707 of the Colorado Revised Statutes provides that while effecting or attempting to effect an arrest, a peace officer is justified in using deadly physical force upon another person . . . when he reasonably believes that it is necessary to defend himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of deadly physical force. Therefore, the question presented in most officer-involved shooting cases is whether, at the instant the officer fired the shot that wounded or killed the person, the officer reasonably believed, and in fact believed, that he or another person, was in imminent Danger of great bodily injury or death from the actions of the person who is shot. In order to establish criminal responsibility for knowingly or intentionally shooting another, the state must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the person doing the shooting either did not really believe he or another was in imminent danger, or, if he did hold such belief, that belief was, in light of the circumstances, unreasonable.

The statute also provides that a peace officer is justified in using deadly physical force upon another person . . . when he reasonably believes that it is necessary to effect an arrest . . . of a person whom he reasonably believes has committed or attempted to commit a felony involving the use or threatened use of a deadly weapon; or is attempting to escape by the use of a deadly weapon; or otherwise indicates, except through motor-vehicle violation, that he is likely to endanger human life or to inflict serious bodily injury to another unless apprehended without delay.

In Colorado, deadly physical force means force the intended, natural, or probable consequence of which is to produce death and which does in fact produce death. Therefore, if the person shot does not die, by definition, only physical force has been used under Colorado law.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The following statement concerns issues that are pertinent to all officer-involved shootings.

The great majority of officer-involved shootings in Denver, and throughout the country, ultimately result from what is commonly called the split-second decision to shoot. It is often the culmination of a string of decisions by the officer and the citizen that ultimately creates the need for a split-second decision to shoot. The split-second decision is generally made to stop a real or perceived threat or aggressive behavior by the citizen. It is this split-second time frame which typically defines the focus of the criminal-review decision, not the string of decisions along the way that placed the participants in the life-or-death final frame.

When a police-citizen encounter reaches this split-second window, and the citizen is armed with a deadly weapon, the circumstances generally make the shooting justified, or at the least, difficult to prove criminal responsibility under the criminal laws and required legal levels of proof that apply. The fact that no criminal charges are fileable in a given case is not necessarily synonymous with an affirmative finding of justification, or a belief that the matter was in all respects handled appropriately from an administrative viewpoint. It is simply a determination that there is not a reasonable likelihood of proving criminal charges beyond a reasonable doubt, unanimously, to a jury. This is the limit of the District Attorney's statutory authority in these matters. For these reasons, the fact that a shooting may be "controversial" does not mean it has a criminal remedy. The fact that the District Attorney may feel the shooting was avoidable or "does not like" aspects of the shooting, does not make it criminal. In these circumstances, remedies, if any are appropriate, may be in the administrative or civil arenas. The District Attorney has no administrative or civil authority in these matters. Those remedies are primarily the purview of the City government, the Denver Police Department, and private civil attorneys.

Research related to officer-involved shootings indicates that criminal charges are filed in approximately one in five hundred (1-in-500) shootings. And, jury convictions are rare in the filed cases. In the context of officer-involved shootings in Denver (approximately 8 per year), this ratio (1-in-500) would result in one criminal filing in 60 years. With District Attorneys now limited to two 4-year terms, this statistic would mean there would be one criminal filing during the combined terms of 8 or more District Attorneys.

In Denver, there have been three criminal filings in officer-involved shootings in the past 40 years, spanning seven District Attorneys. Two of the Denver officer-involved shootings were the result of on-duty, work related shootings. One case was in the 1970s and the other in the 1990s. Both of these shootings were fatal. The cases resulted in grand jury indictments. The officers were tried and found not guilty by Denver juries. The third criminal filing involved an off-duty, not in uniform shooting in the early 1980s in which one person was wounded. The officer was intoxicated at the time of the shooting. The officer pled guilty to felony assault. This case is mentioned here, but it was not in the line of duty and had no relationship to police work. In 2004, an officer-involved shooting was presented by the District Attorney to the Denver Statutory Grand Jury. The Grand Jury did not indict. A brief report was issued by the Grand Jury.

Based on the officer-involved shooting national statistics, there is a very high likelihood that individual District Attorneys across the country will not file criminal charges in an officer-involved shooting during their entire tenure. It is not unusual for this to occur. In Denver, only two of the past seven District Attorneys have done so. This, in fact, is statistically more filings than would be expected. There are many factors that combine to cause criminal prosecutions to be rare in officer-involved shootings and convictions to be even rarer. Ultimately, each shooting must be judged based on its unique facts, the applicable law, and the case filing standard.

The American Bar Association's *Prosecution Standards* state in pertinent part: "A prosecutor should not institute, cause to be instituted, or permit the continued pendency of criminal charges in the absence of sufficient admissible evidence to support a conviction. In making the

decision to prosecute, the prosecutor should give no weight to the personal or political advantages or disadvantages which might be involved or to a desire to enhance his or her record of convictions. Among the factors the prosecutor may properly consider in exercising his or her discretion is the prosecutor's reasonable doubt that the accused is in fact guilty." The National District Attorneys Association's *National Prosecution Standards* states in pertinent part: "The prosecutor should file only those charges which he reasonably believes can be substantiated by admissible evidence at trial. The prosecutor should not attempt to utilize the charging decision only as a leverage device in obtaining guilty pleas to lesser charges." The standards also indicate that "factors which should **not** be considered in the charging decision include the prosecutor's rate of conviction; personal advantages which prosecution may bring to the prosecutor; political advantages which prosecution may bring to the prosecutor; factors of the accused legally recognized to be deemed invidious discrimination insofar as those factors are not pertinent to the elements of the crime."

Because of the difference between the criminal, administrative, and civil standards, the same facts can fairly and appropriately lead to a different analysis and different results in these three uniquely different arenas. While criminal charges may not be fileable in a case, administrative action may be very appropriate. The legal levels of proof and rules of evidence that apply in the criminal-law arena are imprecise tools for examining and responding to the broader range of issues presented by officer-involved shootings. Issues related to the tactical and strategic decisions made by the officer leading up to the split-second decision to shoot are most effectively addressed by the Denver Police Department through the Use of Force Review Board and the Tactics Review Board process and administrative review of the shooting.

The administrative-review process, which is controlled by less stringent legal levels of proof and rules than the criminal-review process, provides both positive remedial options and punitive sanctions. This process also provides significantly broader latitude in accessing and using information concerning the background, history, and job performance of the involved

officer. This type of information may have limited or no applicability to the criminal review, but may be very important in making administrative decisions. This could include information concerning prior officer-involved shootings, firearm discharges, use of non-lethal force, and other conduct, both positive and negative.

The Denver Police Department's administrative review of officer-involved shootings improves police training and performance, helps protect citizens and officers, and builds public confidence in the department. Where better approaches are identified, administrative action may be the only way to effect remedial change. The administrative review process provides the greatest opportunity to bring officer conduct in compliance with the expectations of the department and the community it serves. Clearly, the department and the community expect more of their officers than that they simply conduct themselves in a manner that avoids criminal prosecution.

There are a variety of actions that can be taken administratively in response to the department's review of the shooting. The review may reveal that no action is required. Frankly, this is the case in most officer-involved shootings. However, the department may determine that additional training is appropriate for all officers on the force, or only for the involved officer(s). The review may reveal the need for changes in departmental policies, procedures or rules. In some instances, the review may indicate the need for changing the assignment of the involved officer, temporarily or permanently. Depending on the circumstances, this could be done for the benefit of the officer, the community or both. And, where departmental rules are violated, formal discipline may be appropriate. The department's police training and standards expertise makes it best suited to make these decisions.

The Denver Police Department's Use of Force Review Board and the Tactics Review Board's after-incident, objective analysis of the tactical and strategic string of decisions made by the officer that lead to the necessity to make the split-second decision to shoot is an important review process. It is clearly not always possible to do so because of the conduct of the suspect, but to the extent through appropriate tactical and strategic decisions officers can de-escalate, rather than intensify these encounters, the need

for split-second decisions will be reduced. Once the split-second decision time frame is reached, the risk of a shooting is high.

It is clear not every officer will handle similar situations in similar ways. This is to be expected. Some officers will be better than others at defusing potentially-violent encounters. This is also to be expected. To the degree officers possess skills that enhance their ability to protect themselves and our citizens, while averting unnecessary shootings, Denver will continue to have a minimal number of officer-involved shootings. Denver officers face life-threatening confrontations hundreds of times every year. Nevertheless, over the last 20 years officer-involved shootings have averaged less than eight annually in Denver. These numbers are sharply down from the 1970s and early 1980s when there were 12-to-14 shootings each year.

Skill in the use of tactics short of deadly force is an important ingredient in keeping officer-involved shootings to a minimum. Training Denver officers receive in guiding them in making judgments about the best tactics to use in various situations, beyond just possessing good firearms proficiency, is one of the key ingredients in minimizing unnecessary and preventable shootings. Denver police officers handle well over a million calls for service each year and unfortunately in responding to these calls they face hundreds of life-threatening encounters in the process. In the overwhelming majority of these situations, they successfully resolve the matter without injury to anyone. Clearly, not all potentially-violent confrontations with citizens can be de-escalated, but officers do have the ability to impact the direction and outcome of many of the situations they handle, based on the critical decisions they make leading up to the deadly-force decision. It should be a part of the review of every officer-involved shooting, not just to look for what may have been done differently, but also to see what occurred that was appropriate, with the ultimate goal of improving police response.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Officer-involved shootings are matters of significant and legitimate public concern. Every effort must be made to complete the investigation and make the decision as quickly as practicable. The Denver Protocol has been designed to be as open as legal and ethical standards will permit and to avoid negatively

impacting the criminal, administrative, or civil procedures. “Fair Trial—Free Press” standards and “The Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct” limit the information that can be released prior to the conclusion of the investigation.

Officer-involved shooting cases always present the difficult issue of balancing the rights of the involved parties and the integrity of the investigation with the public’s right to know and the media’s need to report the news. The criminal investigation and administrative investigation that follows can never keep pace with the speed of media reporting. This creates an inherent and unavoidable dilemma. Because we are severely restricted in releasing facts before the investigation is concluded, there is the risk that information will come from sources who may provide inaccurate accounts, speculative theories, misinformation or disinformation that is disseminated to the public while the investigation is progressing. This is an unfortunate byproduct of these conflicted responsibilities. This can cause irreparable damage to individual and agency reputations.

It is our desire to have the public know the full and true facts of these cases at the earliest opportunity, but we are require by law, ethics, and the need to insure the integrity of the investigation to only do so at the appropriate time.

CONCLUSION

The protocol that is used in Denver to investigate and review officer-involved shootings was reviewed and strengthened by the Erickson Commission in 1997, under the leadership of William Erickson, former Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court. The report released after the 15-month-long Erickson Commission review found it to be one of the best systems in the country for handling officer-involved shootings. We recognize there is no “perfect” method for handling officer-involved shooting cases. We continue to evaluate the protocol and seek ways to strengthen it.

Mitchell R. Morrissey

Denver District Attorney

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION

Chuck Lepley, First Assistant District Attorney, Denver District Attorney’s Office, 201 West

Colfax Avenue, Dept. 801, Denver, CO 80202

720-913-9018