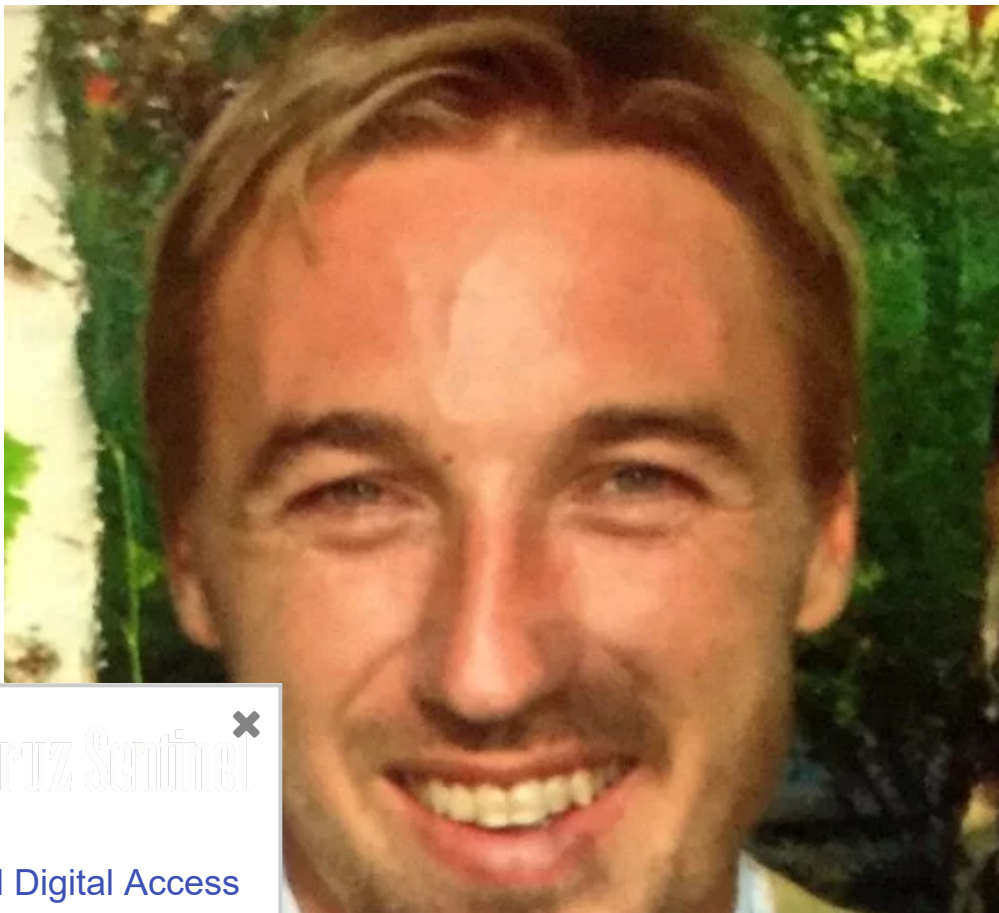


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Entire Sean Arlt investigation report released online

Santa Cruz police change policy regarding use of force



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Sean Arlt

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SANTA CRUZ — Complete investigation reports — eight exhibits and 17 sections with witnesses' names blotched out by black ink — of a deadly police shooting on the Westside in October 2016 appeared publicly on the Santa Cruz Police Department website Thursday to comply with a new state law, Police Chief Andy Mills said.

The reports depict a distraught Sean Arlt, 32, the morning he was killed in the 200 block of Chace Street after a disturbance at the home of an acquaintance. According to the police reports, Arlt was pounding on the doors of the house but was unresponsive to the resident's requests to leave the property. The resident grabbed a frying pan and threatened to hit Arlt if Arlt did not leave, according to police documents.

It was Arlt's second disturbance at the home in five days when he was shot twice by police about 3:30 a.m. Oct. 16, 2016.

"(The resident) explained that he was was scared and knew if Mr. Arlt came into the residence, he would have had to confront him in a physical way as best he could," officers wrote in the police reports. The resident called 911 multiple times and was concerned police had not arrived.

"I'm Jesus Christ Super Star," police reported Arlt telling the resident. "I've killed thousands of people and I'm going to kill everybody in your house. And I don't care if I die."

Four police officers arrived and, according to a police-generated illustration of the scene, Arlt walked toward them. The officers used a Taser initially.

The city of Santa Cruz and Arlt's family reached a [\\$1.6 million settlement](#) last year in a suit challenging the use of deadly force.

Oakland attorney Michael Haddad, who represents the Arlt family, disputed police statements about what happened and said Arlt was not walking directly toward an officer when he was shot.

“The bullet wounds were to his side,” Haddad said. “I think it was impossible for him to be coming directly at the officer.”

The investigation resulted in no criminal charges against the officers.

Disclosure

This year, Senate Bill 1421 was imposed to require public access to documents regarding police misconduct, or use of force cases resulting in injury or death.

Mills said posting the investigation report — even the autopsy report — online is one way to comply with the new law.

“This was a very, very tragic series of events,” Mills said. “But this is a huge shift in public policy in California. I think that transparency is healthy.”

As a result of the settlement in the suit by the Arlt family, the police department altered its policy language in the use of force that used to advise officers to use force in imminent — or potential — danger. Now, officers are advised that force is justified under “immediate” danger, Mills said.

Haddad said he is working on a case that questions whether policies authorizing uses of force amid imminent danger aren’t constitutional.

“Again, the law requires (officers) to consider alternatives,” Haddad said. “All (the officer) had to do was step aside. He didn’t have to shoot this poor mentally ill man with a garden rake.”

Considering victims

Mills said increased training opportunities have helped officers rehearse best practices when responding to escalating scenes daily.

Internal Affairs Sgt. Wes Morey said Santa Cruz police officers manage a constant caseload of disturbances involving alcohol, drugs, mental illness or a combination of each.

“I think the public would be surprised about how often this happens,” Morey said.

The police department lists citizen complaint findings on its website: In 2017, an off-duty officer committed misconduct. An off-duty officer also committed misconduct in 2018, according to police documents. Police did not report findings of misconduct for Investigations in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

There were no shootings by Santa Cruz police last year.

Training likely was part of that result, Morey said.

Mills gave examples of calls requiring police to use force. He said a man who had been arrested hundreds of times threw coffee in an officer's face and, under new initiatives, Mills or an administrative officer has followed each hearing of the case in court to ensure the courts considered the impact to the officer.

"We still bleed," Mills said. "It's a common misconception that our officers can't be victims themselves."

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