



**IN THE MATTER OF THE DEATH OF A MAN
AFTER HIS APPREHENSION BY MEMBERS OF THE RCMP
IN DAWSON CREEK, BRITISH COLUMBIA
ON JUNE 20, 2024**

**DECISION OF THE CHIEF CIVILIAN DIRECTOR
OF THE INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS OFFICE**

Chief Civilian Director:

Jessica Berglund

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of June 20, 2024, an altercation occurred among several individuals on 104 Avenue in Dawson Creek. At the scene, police who attended in response to a 911 call found weapons including knives, bear spray and a CO2-powered rifle designed to fire crossbow bolts. The Affected Person (“AP”) had been involved in the altercation, but had left shortly before police arrival, and was walking away southbound on Highway 2 (8 Street). A passerby pointed him out to police, and officers in a police vehicle intercepted him in the pump area of a gas station about a block away. Other officers then arrived to assist. During the attempted arrest of the AP, there was an extended struggle on the ground, during which the AP bit three of the officers and one officer punched the AP multiple times in the face. Once the AP was fully restrained, he became unresponsive and medical assistance was summoned. The AP was taken to the local hospital and subsequently airlifted for intensive care in Edmonton. He died the next day.

The Independent Investigations Office (“IIO”) was notified and commenced an investigation. The narrative that follows is based on evidence collected and analyzed during the investigation, including the following:

- statements of 21 civilian witnesses, eight paramedics, two other medical witnesses and eight witness police officers;
- police Computer-Aided Dispatch (“CAD”) and Police Records Information Management Environment (“PRIME”) records;
- audio recordings of the 911 line and police radio transmissions;
- video recordings from civilian cell phones, commercial premises, medical facilities and the RCMP detachment;
- forensic scene examination and photographs;
- photographs of injuries of four subject officers;
- RCMP training and policy records; and
- medical records and autopsy report.

The IIO does not require officers whose actions are the subject of an investigation to provide evidence. In this case, four officers were designated by the IIO as subject officers and declined to give an account. Subsequently, one was re-designated as a witness officer and was interviewed.

NARRATIVE

Initial Incident

At about 7:30 a.m. on June 20, 2024, Dawson Creek RCMP received a 911 call from Civilian Witness 1 ("CW1"), reporting an altercation on the street near the intersection of 104 Avenue and 8 Street. CW1 said that people were screaming, fighting and bear-spraying each other. CW1 reported that she had heard someone shout, "I'm going to f**king shoot you!"

CW1 mentioned that one member of the group, dressed in a black hoodie and wearing a black backpack, had been carrying what CW1 described initially as an umbrella, then as a gun and had thrown it down on the ground. CW1 also said, "They all have guns."

Other civilian witnesses later provided statements in which the individuals involved in the altercation were described as running around in the road, screaming angrily and swearing at each other.

Security camera video recordings from nearby commercial premises show five people apparently participating in the incident. They can be seen pushing each other, and at one point one person sprays something in the direction of another. A doorbell camera audio recording obtained by IIO investigators includes a variety of screams and threats.

Police Evidence

Witness Officer 1 ("WO1") told IIO investigators that he understood the incident he was called to deal with had involved an assault with bear spray and the pointing of a firearm. He said that when he arrived at the scene, he observed Subject Officer 1 ("SO1") and Witness Officer 2 ("WO2") taking into custody a man later identified by the IIO as Civilian Witness 2 ("CW2"). Meanwhile, he said, Subject Officer 2 ("SO2") was talking with a woman in the company of a man who was later interviewed by the IIO as Civilian Witness 3 ("CW3").

WO1 said there were various items on the ground or on the hoods of police vehicles, including bear spray cans, knives and a baton. WO1 said that while he was in the process of arresting CW3 and the woman for weapons offences, a passing vehicle slowed and the driver, later identified as Civilian Witness 4 ("CW4") pointed out a figure walking away southbound on 8 Street. The man CW4 was pointing at was the Affected Person ("AP"), who had been involved in the altercation on 104 Avenue but had left just as police were arriving.

In response to CW4's information, SO2 and Witness Officer 3 ("WO3") got into an RCMP marked SUV and drove after the AP.

WO3 was interviewed by the IIO in October 2025, one year and four months after the incident, following his re-designation as a witness officer. WO3 said he responded to the initial 911 call with SO2. Hearing CW4 call out from his passing vehicle, WO3 looked south on 8 Street and saw the AP crossing the street towards a gas station and 7-Eleven store about a block to the south.

SO2 drove south with WO3 as a passenger in a police SUV, and they encountered the AP near the gas pumps in front of the 7-Eleven. WO3 said the AP stopped right in front of the police vehicle as the two officers got out. WO3 said that SO2 told the AP he was being detained for a weapons investigation. WO3 said the AP was not aggressive but was uncooperative, denying involvement in the earlier incident, despite having dried blood around his mouth, and not taking his hands out of his pockets when directed to do so.

SO2 took the AP by his arm and led him over to the police vehicle, his hands behind his back. WO3 said he recalled getting his handcuffs out but said he could not remember whether he was able to get them onto one of the AP's wrists or not. At the sound of the handcuffs' mechanism, he said, the AP became resistant, and SO2 took him to the ground. WO3 said he lost his grip on the AP, who now began "wrestling" with SO2 on the ground. WO3 said he continued to try to handcuff the AP as he rolled around under SO2, sometimes face up and sometimes face down. WO3 radioed for backup.

WO3 said that the AP was screaming and yelling, but WO3 could not remember what words he was shouting. In the struggle, WO3 said, he lost his first set of handcuffs and took out his second set. As he moved to change sides to get better control of the AP, he said, he felt an excruciating pain in his right quadricep and realized that the AP was biting him. After he was able to break free, he noticed that SO2's thumb was gripped between the AP's teeth at the base of the nail, and SO2 was struggling to get his thumb free from the AP's mouth.

WO3 described the separate arrival of SO1 and Subject Officer 3 ("SO3") in the second and third police vehicles at the 7-Eleven. WO3 noted that SO3 initially drew his pistol and was holding it at a "depressed ready." WO3 stated that SO3 said something to the AP, and the AP replied something like "Execute me" or "Kill me now."

SO1 moved into WO3's position, so that WO3 was no longer in contact with the AP. He said he recalled hearing SO1 tell the AP not to bite. WO3 said he did not remember whether he saw SO3 go "hands on" at any point. He said SO2 was lying on top of the AP, and SO1 was on the AP's left side. WO3 said he saw SO1 punch the AP in the face at least twice but could not remember how many times:

I just remember hearing him saying “don’t bite me”, or “you, you’re gonna...” something along the lines of “you’re trying to bite me” and then delivering the blows.

WO3 attempted to control the AP’s legs, which placed him in a position where SO2 was between him and SO1. He said he heard SO1 warn the AP that he would be “tased” but told investigators he did not recall hearing a Conducted Energy Weapon (“CEW” or “Taser”) being activated. Technical evidence collected by the IIO indicated that no CEW was used at any point during the incident.

WO3 said he then heard an officer announce that the handcuffs were on, and tell the others, “Everybody off.” WO3 was sent back along the AP’s route from 104 Avenue to look for any discarded weapons or other evidence. Shortly after this, WO3 heard that the AP had become unresponsive and an ambulance had been summoned. He returned to the 7-Eleven and obtained an AED (automated external defibrillator) from a police vehicle. He and other officers performed rounds of CPR until paramedics arrived and took over.

Subsequently, WO3 said, he discovered that the bite to his right thigh had penetrated his uniform pants and broken the skin.

WO2 described dealing with the civilians at the initial scene and then hearing a radio call from the officers who had followed the AP, asking for an AED. WO2 drove south to the 7-Eleven in a marked RCMP vehicle that was now the fourth at that location. He said he saw SO3 kneeling beside the AP, with SO1 and SO2 standing nearby. WO2 said he observed that SO1 had a bloody nose and a scratch on his face, and the officers’ clothes were dirty, looking as if they had been in a struggle. WO2 recalled that SO2 said he had been bitten and his hand was bleeding. SO3 had blood on his uniform shirt. WO2 said the AP, who was lying on the ground, looked like he had been in a fight and had blood on his face. WO2 said he did what he could to help the AP with an AED and chest compressions, and an ambulance quickly arrived.

Video Evidence of the Arrest

The AP’s arrest was not completely captured on video from commercial locations and from civilian cell phones. As recorded from various angles, the following events/actions are seen:

- The AP appears, walking southbound on 8 Street, and approaches the 7-Eleven entrance, near the gas pumps.
- A fully marked police SUV stops near the AP, its emergency lights flashing.

- The AP takes a step towards the police vehicle, left hand in his pocket and right hand out of view.
- SO2 and WO3 exit the vehicle and the AP steps back, holding his empty hands out and up.
- The two officers go to the AP and take hold of his arms, but WO3 loses his hold of the AP's left arm as SO2 takes the AP over to the police vehicle, pulling him by his right arm.
- At the vehicle, SO2 appears to have hold of both arms of the AP and pushes him forward onto the side of the vehicle's hood.
- WO3 appears to be trying to apply handcuffs to the AP as the AP is pushing himself upright against SO2's hold.
- The struggle escalates and, although the exact mechanism of the move is not clear, SO2 and the AP fall from standing to a position on the ground. It appears that SO2 has applied a hold to the AP's head/neck and then falls, dragging the AP down with him.
- Both officers then position themselves over the AP, holding him down as he struggles against them, his legs kicking vigorously.
- WO3 variously stands or kneels, apparently trying to assist SO2, who is continuously on top of the AP. WO3 can be seen trying to hold the AP's right arm and reaching to the back of his duty belt for a second pair of handcuffs.
- The struggle continues for about two minutes, moving across the ground towards the rear of the police vehicle, with SO2 trying to hold the AP down and WO3 standing or kneeling at one side, apparently still trying to apply handcuffs.
- At one point, the AP lifts himself to his knees despite the efforts of both officers. When he is pressed back down on his back, he can be seen pushing against the side of the police vehicle with his feet, physically moving himself and SO2 across the ground beside the gas pumps.
- SO3 then arrives in a second police vehicle, approaching the struggle with his firearm drawn, and is quickly followed by SO1.
- SO1 crouches beside SO2 and WO3 stands up as the two subject officers continue trying to control the AP.
- Most of the effort to subdue the AP now appears to be exerted by SO1, who straddles the AP. SO1 can be seen to deliver eight or more punches downward towards the area of the face or upper body of the AP, who is on his back, kicking.

- Both SO1 and SO2 are holding the AP down on his back and are then able to roll him over onto his front to complete the handcuffing, though it appears the AP is still offering significant resistance.
- About seven and a half minutes after the start of the struggle, the officers stand up and away from the AP, who is lying on the ground in handcuffs.

Civilian Witnesses

Civilian Witness 5 (“CW5”) observed the AP’s arrest. Interviewed by IIO investigators, she described the AP as strong and aggressive, screaming and fighting with police. She recalled seeing a police officer’s punches but could not say where they landed on the AP. CW5 said that after the AP was subdued, she noticed that two of the officers had scratches on their faces. One, she said, had a red bruise and a deep scratch that was bleeding. She said that one officer noticed the AP was not breathing, and the officers immediately began giving him medical care.

Civilian Witness 6 (“CW6”) told the IIO that he saw “serious pushback” from the AP as the officers tried to place him under arrest. CW6 recalled hearing the AP shout, “Help me” and “I will kill you, f**king pigs.”

Civilian Witness 7 (“CW7”) described the arresting officers as having been aggressive in their handling of the AP and recalled an officer “on top of [the AP] and punching him in the face.” CW7 said he heard the AP say, “You guys aren’t the real cops.” He said he heard an officer threaten to “tase” the AP if he did not stop resisting but did not see that occur.

Civilian Witness 8 (“CW8”) told the IIO that when the AP arrived at the gas station, he appeared angry and was “acting drunk.” CW8 said he heard police tell the AP several times to put his hands behind his back but said that the AP screamed at the officers and was “trying to fight back, for sure.” CW8 said he saw “a couple of punches” from one officer and added that the AP was not in handcuffs at that time.

Civilian Witness 9 (“CW9”) told the IIO that during the struggle, the AP was “screeching ... fighting and punching and just going nuts on them.” The officers, she said, were saying things like “Calm down, quit fighting” and “Stop.” Later, she said, she heard an officer say, “We’ll get your stomach pumped,” and saw police doing chest compressions on the AP.

Autopsy

At autopsy, the AP was noted as having multiple superficial facial injuries as well as a variety of abrasions and bruises on other parts of his body. There was a shallow laceration on the back of his head with no underlying head injury.

The cause of death was said to be “best attributed to methamphetamine and cocaine toxicity in the context of physical exertion, struggle and restraint in a police encounter”:

The blunt injuries seen at autopsy on [the AP] in and of themselves are insufficient to cause death. There may have been a compressional asphyxial component but as mentioned above, the available evidence (videos and statements) does not clearly delineate exactly how [the AP] was restrained and for how long.

Restraint during a struggle can compromise breathing especially if an individual is placed in a prone position with weight compressing the chest. The struggle and restraint, combined with the toxic effects of methamphetamine and cocaine, can lead to cardiovascular collapse.

Individuals on stimulants like methamphetamine and cocaine can get into an agitated state, especially when involved in a confrontation. These illicit drugs activate the sympathetic nervous system and can lead to increased blood pressure, vasoconstriction, spasming of arteries and cardiac arrhythmias, a risk factor of sudden death.

As it is not clear which component played the dominant role in this death, the manner is best classified as undetermined.

ANALYSIS

The Independent Investigations Office of British Columbia is mandated to investigate any incident that occurs in the province in which an Affected Person has died or suffered serious physical harm and there appears to be a connection to the actions (or sometimes inaction) of police. The goal is to provide assurance to the public that when the investigation is complete, they can trust the IIO’s conclusions, because the investigation was conducted by an independent, unbiased, civilian-led agency.

In most cases, those conclusions are presented in a public report such as this one, which completes the IIO’s mandate by explaining to the public what happened in the incident and how the Affected Person came to suffer harm. Such reports are generally intended to enhance public confidence in the police and in the justice system as a whole through a transparent and impartial evaluation of the incident and the police role in it.

In a smaller number of cases, the evidence gathered may give the Chief Civilian Director (“CCD”) reasonable grounds to believe that an officer may have committed an offence in connection with the incident. In such a case, the *Police Act* gives the CCD authority to refer the file to the BC Prosecution Service (“BCPS”) for consideration of charges.

In a case such as this one, involving the use of force by officers, the IIO investigators collect evidence with respect to potential justifications for that use of force. The CCD then analyzes this evidence using legal tests such as necessity, proportionality and reasonableness to reach conclusions as to whether officers' actions were lawful, or whether an officer may have committed the offence of assault.

The arresting officers were acting in the lawful execution of their duty in apprehending the AP. They had reasonable grounds to believe that he had been involved in an incident only minutes earlier in which threats, violence and weapons had been involved.

The evidence, particularly the video evidence, shows that the AP was resistant to police attempts to restrain him and place him in handcuffs, and that his resistance quickly escalated into a violent struggle and assaults on the arresting officers. While punches to the face or head should generally be considered a higher level of force due to the risk of significant harm, it is important to note that blunt injury was not identified as a significant causal factor in the outcome. Rather, the physical exertion during this prolonged and strenuous altercation, in combination with illicit substance toxicity, resulted in the AP's unfortunate death. Given the circumstances faced by the officers, it cannot be said that any of the force applied to the AP by any of the officers throughout this incident was excessive or unjustified.

Accordingly, as Chief Civilian Director of the IIO, I do not consider that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an officer may have committed an offence under any enactment and the matter will not be referred to the BCPS for consideration of charges.

Despite my conclusion, it is important to note concerning and problematic conduct by some RCMP members during the IIO investigation. IIO investigators encountered several instances of failure by officers to comply with their statutory duty under the *Police Act* to cooperate fully with the IIO. Examples include failures to file notes and reports, refusals to meet with IIO investigators as directed, delays in obtaining other material evidence from officers and irregularities in the photographic processing of the involved members. These issues have been addressed with RCMP senior management.



Jessica Berglund
Chief Civilian Director

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