



**IN THE MATTER OF THE DEATH OF A MAN
WHILE IN THE CUSTODY OF THE RCMP IN
MAPLE RIDGE, BRITISH COLUMBIA ON
SEPTEMBER 20, 2024**

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

Chief Civilian Director:

Jessica Berglund

IIO File Number:

2024-222

Date of Release:

July 28, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

On the evening of September 19, 2024, the Affected Person (“AP”) was arrested for impaired driving and was placed in a cell at the Ridge Meadows RCMP detachment. Shortly before midnight, the AP was found unresponsive in his cell. Officers provided first aid and medical assistance was summoned. In the early hours of September 20, lifesaving efforts by firefighters and paramedics were discontinued and the AP was declared deceased.

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 four civilian witnesses, including one civilian jail guard;
- statements of five witness police officers;
- police Computer-Aided Dispatch (“CAD”) and Police Records Information Management Environment (“PRIME”) records;
- audio recordings of a 911 call and police radio transmissions;
- video recordings from the RCMP detachment;
- civilian cell phone video recordings;
- RCMP prisoner documentation;
- RCMP policies;
- scene examination;
- ambulance service records; and
- autopsy and toxicology reports.

The IIO does not require officers whose actions are the subject of an investigation to provide any evidence. In this case, the subject officer has not given an account.

NARRATIVE

Civilian Witness 1 ("CW1") told the IIO that on the afternoon of September 19, 2024, he was visited at his home by the Affected Person ("AP"). CW1 said that the AP drank about half a beer and left at about 6:45 p.m. CW1 said that the AP did not appear to be intoxicated, and that there was nothing concerning about his behaviour.

At 7:11 p.m. the same day, police received a 911 call about a vehicle veering into the oncoming lanes and almost hitting a road sign. Witness Officer 1 ("WO1") responded, and located the suspect vehicle parked on the side of the road with the AP slouched over in the driver's seat, "nodding in and out." WO1 told IIO investigators that he asked the AP if he needed medical assistance, which the AP declined in a slurred voice. WO1 had the AP step out of the vehicle and administered a screening test for alcohol, which registered a "fail."

WO1 said he did not think the AP needed medical attention, but did consider that he was not in a condition to care for himself, so decided to take him to cells to be held until sober. As he was walking the AP back to his police vehicle, WO1 said, the AP suddenly turned and tried to head butt the officer. WO1 said he pushed the AP against the side of the vehicle and told him to stop or he would be arrested for assaulting a police officer. WO1 said that the AP apologized and became cooperative again.

Witness Officer 2 ("WO2"), who attended to assist WO1, gave IIO investigators a similar account of the interactions at roadside. She said that after the AP had been warned not to assault WO1, and apologized, she walked him to her vehicle and placed him without incident into the back seat. She said that during the drive to the detachment, the AP lay on the back seat for part of the time, and that he only gave mumbled responses to her questions.

Video recordings from the RCMP detachment show the AP arriving in the back of WO2's police vehicle. He is able to walk with officers to the booking area but appears to sway when standing still. Officers conduct the standard search and booking-in process, and the AP is placed in a cell, where he sits down on a concrete bench.

Cells reports indicate that the AP was "too intoxicated to sign" documents related to his impaired driving charge. He was described as "heavily intoxicated," apparently by alcohol. Witness Officer 3 ("WO3") told IIO investigators that he was concerned the AP was too drunk to be in cells and described the AP as having trouble standing up unassisted. WO3 said he asked for a supervisor to come and assess the AP.

The Subject Officer ("SO"), who was the senior officer in attendance, came and spoke with the AP. WO3 said the SO judged that the AP only needed to sober up in a cell, and that it was not necessary to seek medical care for him. Accordingly, officers escorted the AP to a cell. WO3 said the AP was belligerent, swearing at officers, but that there were no additional concerns at that time.

Witness Officer 4 ("WO4"), the officer in charge of cells, also described the AP as acting belligerently, and being resistant to instructions given to him by the officers. WO4 said he was aware that the SO had assessed the AP and cleared him for custody, and said he did not receive any information from the arresting officers that raised any extra concerns. As a result, he did not give the civilian guard on duty any special instructions with respect to monitoring of the AP.

The AP was placed into his cell at 8:49 p.m. Video recordings of his stay show him sleeping on a mat on the concrete bench, changing his position from time to time. At 10:08 p.m., WO1 enters the cell and has the AP sign paperwork related to his charges. At 10:29 p.m., the AP is seen to slip awkwardly off the bench into a seated position on the floor, and then to push himself back up onto the bench. He moves around the cell and then lies back down on the bench. He appears to fall asleep, and for a while it is possible to see his abdomen moving, consistent with breathing. After approximately 11:00 p.m., though, it is not possible to see any movement by the AP on the video recording.

The cell log, with entries by the civilian guard ("CG") and the SO, documents observations of the AP as "sleeping" and "snoring" until 10:15 p.m. when the CG notes "puked on the floor informed watch commander." Following that annotation, the AP was reported as sleeping, and at 11:43 p.m., WO4 noted in the log that the AP was "laying down."

Shortly after this, at 11:45 p.m., the CG wrote that the AP's breathing was "very shallow," and notified officers. WO3 later told the IIO that the CG mentioned to him that she could not clearly see the AP breathing, so he went and looked through the window in the cell door. WO3 said that the way the AP was lying, facing the wall, together with the fact that he was a large man, made it difficult to tell whether he was breathing or not. As soon as a second officer was available to assist, WO3 opened the cell and went to check physically on the AP. WO3 said he was not immediately able to locate a pulse, and when a second officer also said he could not detect a pulse, officers began resuscitation attempts and summoned paramedics and firefighters. The AP was subsequently declared deceased.

The autopsy report stated the cause of death as "acute alcohol intoxication," in combination with significant physiological disease involving the AP's heart, liver and

arteries. The AP's blood alcohol concentration was recorded at a level more than three times the legal limit for driving in Canada.

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 aim 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.

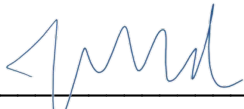
In a smaller number of cases, the evidence gathered may give the Chief Civilian Director ("CCD") reasonable grounds to believe that an officer has committed an offence in connection with the incident. In such a case, the *Police Act* gives the CCD authority to refer the file to Crown counsel for consideration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

The evidence gathered in this investigation is that the AP was heavily intoxicated when taken into custody by the police, and that alcohol consumption in combination with chronic physical conditions caused his death. The evidence does not establish whether the AP's death might have been prevented if he had been taken to hospital, rather than to police cells, upon arrest.

Police are placed in a difficult position in cases like this: without specialized medical training, they are required to judge whether an intoxicated person like the AP can safely be left to "sleep it off" in a jail cell, or whether they should be placed in the care of hospital staff, who would then be required to manage a potentially difficult and confrontational patient — one that police are actually better trained to handle. In this case, the evidence supports that the SO made his best evidence in assessing the condition of the detainee and arriving at a considered decision in good faith.

The IIO does not currently have jurisdiction over civilian jail guards in RCMP facilities, but the role the CG played in this incident was naturally relevant to the investigation into the AP's death. IIO investigators noted several aspects of the CG's monitoring and record-keeping with respect to the AP that appeared to fall short of the expected standard, but none that would likely rise to the level of an offence under any statute.

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 Crown counsel for consideration of charges.



Jessica Berglund
Chief Civilian Director

July 28, 2025

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