

Riverside Police, Chief at Odds Over Officer's Drug Test

■ **Labor:** Detective involved in fatal incident did not submit to exam until a day later. Union wants to block release of results.

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RIVERSIDE—The local police officers union is trying to block disclosure of drug test results for a 25-year veteran who was involved in the apprehension of a suspect who died within minutes of being arrested. The detective consented to the testing the

next day—after drinking himself to intoxication at home in what may have been an attempt to veil the results of the drug test, Riverside Police Chief Ken Fortier said Thursday.

The chief said he was angered by the union's efforts to block the tests because it would compromise public confidence in internal police investigations.

"We have a compelling public interest to ensure open and honest investigations," he said.

The Riverside Police Officers Assn. said collecting blood and urine samples from officers violates their constitutional and statutory rights.

A Riverside judge Thursday granted the union's request for a temporary restraining order, and ordered the test results sealed and turned over to him next month, when he will decide whether the department brass will be given access to them.

The dispute arose from the Jan. 28 death of Hector Martin Islas, 33, after a police foot pursuit that required five officers to apprehend and subdue Islas, police said.

The cause of Islas' death remains under investigation by the coroner. Each of the officers involved in the arrest was ordered to submit to either a blood or urine test to determine if they were under the influence of

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drugs or alcohol.

Fortier said such testing is department policy that has gone unchallenged until now—and even went unchallenged by officers in a more recent incident when a murderer suspect was shot and killed by police.

Det. Vernon Bryant, 44, was one of five officers who assisted in subduing Islas, according to court documents. His only involvement, according to the court papers, was holding down Islas' leg so the suspect would not kick others.

But when all five officers were later asked to give blood or urine samples, Bryant "began to look concerned and asked if the testing would reveal steroids or ephedrine," according to the sworn affidavit of another officer.

Use of steroids, a muscle builder, is prohibited by the department. Ephedrine is a common ingredient in cold medications, but is also used in the manufacture of methamphetamine.

The other officers consented to the tests, but Bryant left the station house without permission—and when he was found at home the next morning, he was intoxicated, Fortier said.

"We found the actions of the officer to be quite suspicious . . . and our worst assumption is that [by drinking] he was trying to affect the results of the test," Fortier said.

The police union "supports the highest professional standards of its members . . . [and] does not condone improper police behavior," said its president, Ronald Wright. "However, the association believes that thorough and proper investigations of the actions of police officers must be undertaken within a framework that protects their legal rights.

Fortier said such testing is commonplace among police departments. "We don't generally negotiate policies and procedures," he said.

Bryant is currently assigned to desk duty, Fortier said.