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St. Paul / K-9 bites wrong man at bus stop

Dog escapes car during downtown call, clamps onto bystander's leg

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Pioneer Press

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A St. Paul police dog bit the wrong man as officers responded to a weapons call early Thursday in downtown St. Paul.

Antonio Johnson, 19, was bitten on his lower leg, police said. He was taken to Regions Hospital.

According to an incident report:

About 12:40 a.m., police responded to a call about a fight near Sixth and Wabasha streets. The caller told police eight males were chasing him and one tried to hit him.

Minutes later, Metro Transit police said two of the males might be armed and several of them were running from the area in different directions.

Officer Isaac Rinehart and his K-9 partner Sarik drove after a large crowd as they fled onto a Metro Transit bus and into a building at Sixth and Cedar streets.

Rinehart yelled for the people to get off the bus and come out of the building; about half complied, and one man yelled obscenities as he approached

Rinehart.

Because he was the only officer with "several noncompliant suspects that were acting as if they did not want to be stopped by the police and that they were possibly armed," he went to get Sarik.

But as Rinehart opened the squad-car door, the K-9 slipped from his grasp and bit Johnson.

Rinehart said he immediately removed Sarik from the young man's leg.

At the hospital, officers learned Johnson was neither a suspect nor a victim in the weapons call.

Police spokesman Pete Crum said the incident is under internal review. Rinehart and Sarik remain on duty.

Crum said such bites are rare and recalled only one other incident in which a St. Paul police dog bit someone not under police pursuit. That happened five years ago, he said.

Ramsey County sheriff's dogs have bitten nonsuspects twice in recent years: A 14-year-old girl who walked into a chase on St. Paul's East Side in 2003, and a 52-year-old Shoreview teacher who required 200 stitches after a dog bit her leg during a school search in 2004.

Johnson was unavailable for comment Thursday.

John Brewer contributed to this report.

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