



Youngstown police shoot 'aggressive' dog 13 times

By Katie Seminara

Tuesday, April 14, 2009



Video: Dog Shot Multiple Times

A 7 month old dog was shot multiple times by a Youngstown Police Officer.

- [Watch »](#)

Photo by Robert K. Yosay



Curtis Moses of Youngstown said he understands that police officers have a job to do, but he said one Youngstown officer went too far. Moses' 7-month-old dog, Diva, was fatally shot about 13 times during a pursuit of felony suspects. He shows off the spent bullets and marks and holes on the floor left behind in the wake of the shooting on his E Lucius in Youngstown home.

By [Katie Seminara](#)

The dog was killed by a police officer during the search for a suspect on the South Side.

YOUNGSTOWN — Curtis Moses said he understands that police officers have a job to do, but he said one Youngstown officer went too far.

Moses' 7-month-old Akita dog, Diva, was shot 13 times and killed April 5 during police pursuit of juveniles who'd been driving down South Side streets and shooting.

But Youngstown's police chief says the situation called for a quick decision to protect police officers.

The driver of the 1998 Pontiac had fled from police, and pulled into a front yard on Lucius Avenue.

There, officers chased the five suspects on foot, a police report states.

One of the five was followed into the East Lucius Avenue home of Moses and Darcel Gilmore. Officers were met inside the house by the couple's 42-pound dog.

The teenager ran down the basement stairs to hide. When officers opened the basement door from the kitchen, "the dog approached Officer [Ryan] Laatsch in an aggressive manner," the police report states.

There were three officers in the house.

"Officer Laatsch, who already had service weapon drawn due to the circumstances of the situation, shot approximately five to six times striking the dog ... then shot the dog approximately five to six more

times ...then shot the dog one more time directly in the top of his head from only a few inches away," the report stated.

"I know you have to do your job, but they overdid it," said Moses, who has no relationship to the teenager who ran into the house.

One of the other juveniles was Gilmore's son, but does not live at the East Lucius Avenue residence, Moses said.

When the basement door was opened, Diva had been trained to come upstairs to be let outside. The dog never had any problems with the neighbors nor any history of aggressiveness, he said. "She was still a puppy — still playful," Moses said.

"If she was so vicious, why wouldn't she attack the stranger who ran into the basement?" he asked.

Akitas can weigh about 100 pounds when fully grown.

Dave Nelson, Mahoning County deputy dog warden, said they are generally a breed to use caution around. Akitas are generally protective of their family and property, he said.

Police Chief Jimmy Hughes said officers had few options.

"For the most part, the [situation] came about in fast succession, within close quarters and the officers had little place to go," Hughes said.

The kitchen where the dog was shot is about 7 feet by 15 feet, Moses estimated.

"The dog was coming after the officer and he was in fear for his life and the lives of the other officers," Hughes said.

Officers are taught to use force when necessary and Laatsch didn't have much room or time to defend himself, he said.

"It's unfortunate that it was as many rounds as it was, but he fired until the dog ceased to attack," Hughes said.

The suspect hiding in the basement was arrested on obstructing official business charges.

Officers found a box of live ammunition, as well as a scale and a bag of suspected cocaine near the suspect's hiding place, the report states. The items were collected as evidence, but no one is charged in connection with the items.

Moses and Gilmore said their dog and home were innocent bystanders to the episode that left their dog dead and kitchen with seven bullet holes in the floor, as well damage to their walls and refrigerator.

"That was a daughter," Gilmore said of Diva.

"I'm messed up; we raised her since she was 5 weeks old," Moses added.

Officers should have used a different kind of force, such as pepper spray, the couple said.

“It was just a senseless killing,” Moses said.

“I don’t know if restitution is in order at this time” for the dog and house owners, Hughes said.

Taser guns may have been an alternative to shooting the animal, but officers aren’t equipped with that kind of weapon, he said.

“I don’t encourage officers to shoot their guns unless it’s a life-threatening situation,” Hughes said. “In this case, they felt it was life-threatening.”