

Pierce County

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PROSECUTOR FINDS OFFICERS' USE OF DEADLY FORCE LAWFUL

Independent and concurrent investigations by the Pierce County Medical Examiner's Office, the Pierce County Prosecutor's Office, and the Lakewood Police Department regarding the shooting death of Carolyn Moran-Hernandez have been completed. Moran-Hernandez died from gunshot wounds to the torso inflicted by Lakewood Police Department Sgt. Michael Noel and Officers Matthew Brown and Darrin Latimer. The incident occurred in front of a residence located on the 3200 block of 83rd Street South in Lakewood, WA on February 14, 2011 at approximately 9:35 a.m.

Pierce County Prosecutor Mark Lindquist concluded the death was justifiable homicide under state law. Noel, Brown and Latimer reasonably believed that Moran-Hernandez posed an immediate threat of death or serious physical harm to them and other officers. Moran-Hernandez came out of her residence and pointed what appeared to be a semi-automatic handgun at Officer Brown.

"All three officers who fired their weapons acted reasonably and professionally, shooting only when it appeared absolutely necessary for their own safety and the safety of the neighborhood," Prosecutor Lindquist said. "This appears to be a case where the deceased committed 'suicide-by-cop.' She forced the officers to shoot by pointing a gun at one of the officers."

At approximately 9:20 a.m., Lakewood Police officers responded to a 911 call involving a domestic violence incident at the residence located at 3213 83rd Street South. Upon arrival, the officers contacted the reporting female who had fled the residence but remained in the area to contact the police. Officers learned that the female had been physically assaulted by Moran-Hernandez, who was still at the residence and was armed with a knife. The officers had probable cause to arrest Moran-Hernandez.

Due to the nature of the incident, several Lakewood Police officers responded to the scene and began setting up a perimeter around the residence. As Noel, Brown, and Latimer were taking positions across the street from the residence, they saw Moran-Hernandez standing on the front porch. They verbally commanded her to step away from the residence. Moran-Hernandez yelled obscenities at the officers and told them to go ahead and shoot her. She refused to comply with their orders and went back into her residence after stating she was going to get something.

Moran-Hernandez came back outside a short time later and walked towards the officers. As she approached, Noel, Brown, and Latimer saw that she had a black semi-automatic handgun in her right hand, which she was holding down at her side. The officers ordered Moran-Hernandez to drop the gun. She refused their orders and continued to yell obscenities at them. When she reached the end of her driveway, she stopped and pointed the handgun directly at Brown. All three officers fired their weapons at Moran-Hernandez, striking her several times. She fell to the ground and the officers removed the handgun from her possession.

Medical aid was summoned for Moran-Hernandez, who was pronounced dead at the scene. After the shooting, officers learned that the gun Moran-Hernandez had pointed at them was actually a BB gun designed to look like a real handgun. Below is a photo of the gun.

According to the Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Clark, Moran-Hernandez died from multiple gunshot wounds.

For additional information, contact Rebecca Stover at (253) 798-4910 or restover@co.pierce.wa.us



Photo of BB gun brandished by Carolyn Moran-Hernandez